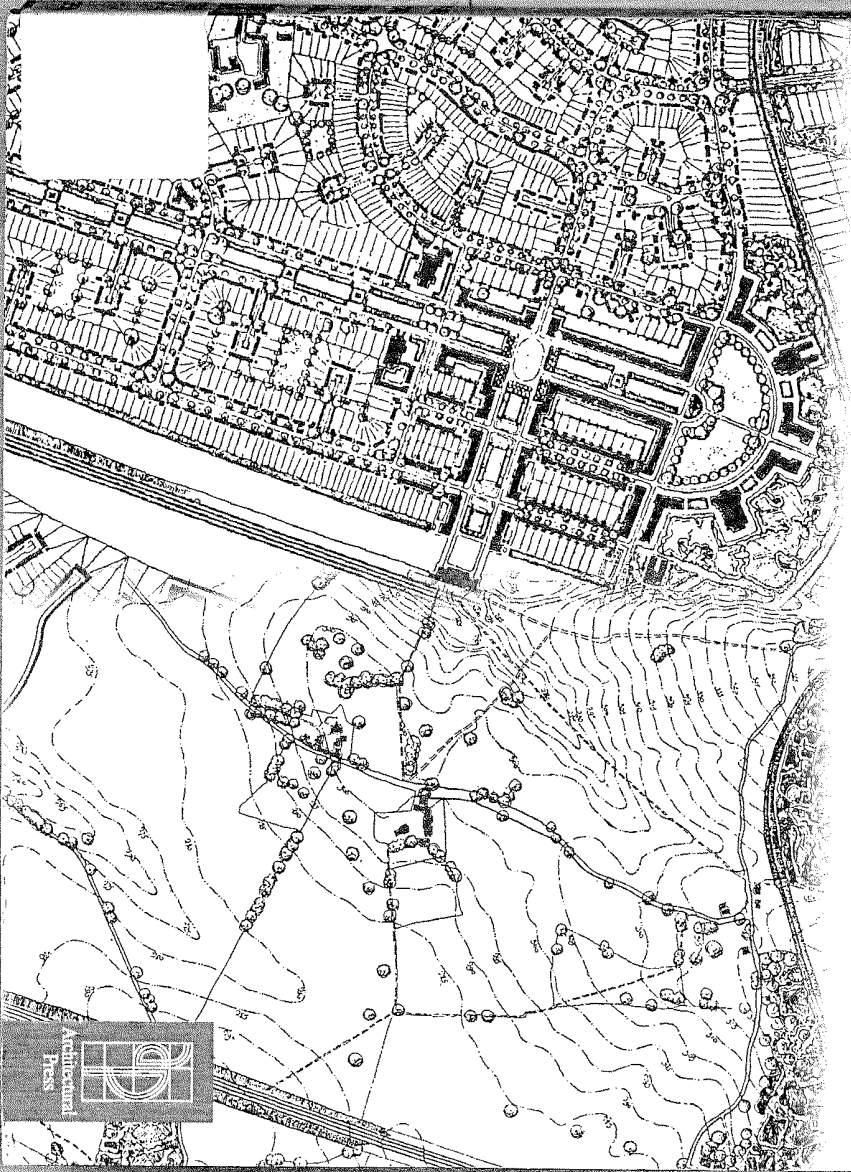


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URBANFORMS

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF THE URBAN BLOCK





CHAPTER 2 LONDON: THE GARDEN CITIES, 1905-25

'The day on which I will be the head of a kingdom, my ambition will be to own a cottage.'

WHY WELWYN AND HAMPSTEAD?

The satellite garden city, as an urbanization process, was invented and tested in England at the beginning of the twentieth century. Whatever the genesis and the context of its production, this process of urbanization first appeared theoretically in 1898 with the publication by Ebenezer Howard of *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. From this date onward, it is easy to set out the history of the evolution of this process according to some specific dates:

1904: Letchworth, the first garden city built according to the economic development model of Howard and the first important realization by Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker;

1909: Hampstead, the first garden suburb built according to the design ideas of Unwin;

1919: Welwyn, the first garden city that combined in the same project the theories of Howard and the practical methods of Unwin;

If we have not chosen to discuss Letchworth, it is because Welwyn showed the same means of production while profiting from the experiences of its older sister.

Hampstead was the experimental city, the attempt to codify an urban design concept. It was an experiment, which would benefit Welwyn, where the tools first used were systematically applied.

THE CONDITIONS OF TOWN PLANNING IN LONDON AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

From 1840 to 1901, London's population doubled while that of Greater London tripled.²⁸ This growth demonstrated the vitality of some of the capital's industries,

28 Greater London until 1963 is only an administrative census definition. For the period taken into consideration one can note the following figures:

	London	Suburbs	Greater London
1840	2,250,000		
1891	4,227,000	1,405,000	5,632,000
1901	4,536,000	2,045,000	6,581,000
1939	4,000,000		8,650,000

especially clothing and leather. At the same time the City had become the financial centre of nineteenth-century capitalism while port traffic had grown. All of this attracted the rural population to the city so that London's growth up to 1870 was essentially the outcome of provincial or foreign immigration of a population that could not find work in the countryside or had been driven out by famine, like the Irish between 1820 and 1850. From 1870, immigration continued, but the increase in population was also due to factors of natural growth.

During the same period, the growth of financial and commercial activities had shifted the resident population of the City to the periphery. Thus, the suburbs became the place of residence of a large population – in 1901, there were 6,581,000 inhabitants in Greater London, of whom 2,045,000 lived in the suburbs. From the middle of the century, the establishment of high-capacity suburban transport networks facilitated the spread of these suburbs. The railways were developed and the underground rapidly evolved beyond a simple interurban service and became the reason for the rapid growth of Hampstead, Golders Green and other suburbs.

In this way, between 1820 and 1914, the radius of the urbanized space of London increased from 5 to 15 km. This growth was partly made possible by the construction of estates, groups of houses built as a single scheme by speculative builders, following a mode of operation already established during the Georgian period.²⁹ This construction was undertaken systematically, with row housing of a defined and codified typology, which facilitated the urbanization of large areas. The open and airy estates of the rich suburbs contrasted with the gloomy estates of the popular districts. The London suburbs grew inexorably, systematically and disastrously.

It was only in 1888 with the setting up the London County Council that London succeeded in intervening more effectively in this process by superimposing a municipal structure over the diverse private, speculative and philanthropic initiatives.³⁰

This administration with a socialist majority threw itself into the construction of large estates. However, in spite of its efforts the LCC could not control the urbanization of the suburbs. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, a passionate debate had taken place in intellectual circles about the problems of large cities in general and London in particular. It also ran through popular literature with Dickens's dramatic descriptions and led to the exaltation of the characteristics and the beauty of the medieval city and drove the efforts of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts

29 'The prototype (of the estates) dates from 1661 with Lord Southampton's Bloomsbury estate.' C. Chalain, *Londres* (Paris: Arman Colin) 1968.

30 Since 1851 a series of laws facilitated municipal intervention. First, due to the Common Lodging House Act, there was the possibility that the municipality would control the sanitary state of old or new housing. Then, the Labouring Class Lodging Houses Act facilitated the financing of housing for the more disadvantaged sections of the population. In 1859 the Metropolitan Board of Works was created, which initiated slum improvements and the construction of social housing. In this way, up to 1890, 30,000 people were displaced and rehoused and 30,000 new homes were built. A parallel agency, the Metropolitan Association, during the same period built 70,000 homes and several charitable and private associations built another 150,000 homes.

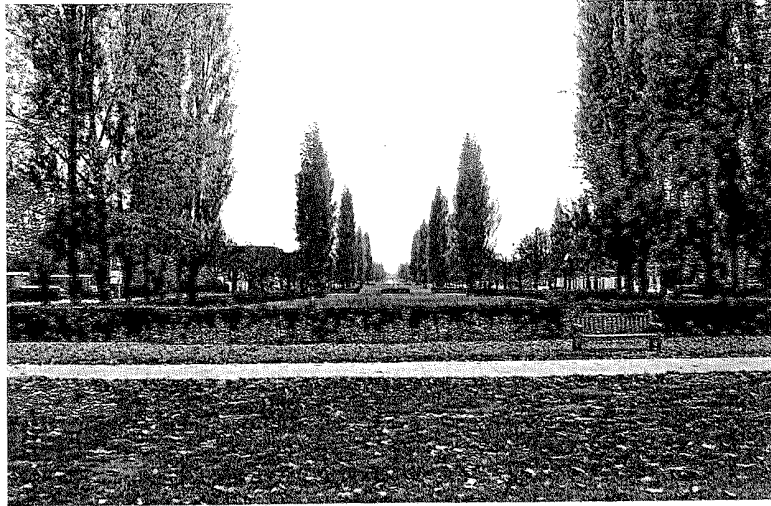


Figure 9

The city as a garden: Welwyn Garden City.

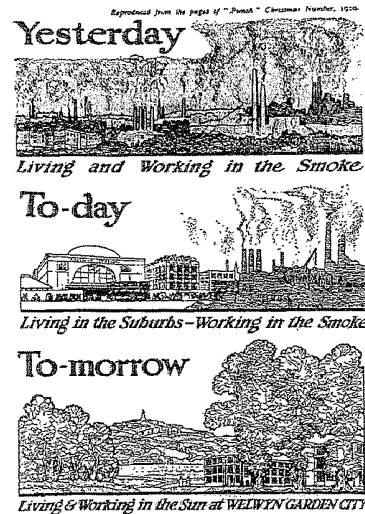
a. The main axis.

The reference to the French garden is present in the theories of the garden city.

Movement towards cottage industry and the reform of industrial work. This ruralist movement derived from a hundred-year-old architectural culture because rural architecture and especially its manifestation through the cottage had been a source of inspiration for architects since around 1780.³¹ The working-class home had benefited from this infatuation with the cottage whose forms had already been codified and while individual examples had been built, including some employers' homes, they still needed to be included as part of a larger-scale urbanization project.

In this way, the idea of the garden city as a solution to the London problem had a

31 See the article by G. Teyssot, 'Cottages et pittoresque: les origines du logement ouvrier en Angleterre 1781-1818', in *Architecture Mouvement Continuité* (Paris), No. 34, 1970.



b. Advertisement published in *Punch* in 1920.

firm base. This context gave Ebenezer Howard the opportunity to publish *To-morrow*,³² a theoretical and personal work, which proposes a particular mode of growth: the satellite city. Howard's proposals are essentially economic in their preoccupations. He examined the problem of municipal management and of financing the construction of cities, and presented the garden city as the most economical and the soundest solution for the growth of a large city.

Howard, convinced of the soundness of his theories, threw himself into the creation of a garden city. With no pretensions of being a town planner, he turned to two young architects, Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, and, in 1904, the works for the setting up of Letchworth began, financed by a joint stock company. Howard's hope to see his example spread was frustrated, but the young architect Unwin used the experience to devise a theory for the planning of cities that he was try out in Hampstead and that would provide the tools for English town planning up to World War Two.

In 1906 the Town Planning Act,³³ which codified the density of plot subdivisions and the standards of housing construction, was passed. This Act was revised on 1909 in order to give municipalities more power over town planning matters. This was the occasion for Unwin to publish *Town Planning in Practice*.³⁴

Because of all this activity, the garden city and the idea of satellite cities was at the heart of the debate of British town planners at the beginning of the century. In addition, there was a climate of research and experimentation. In 1910, there was an international exhibition of city planning in London as well as in Berlin and Düsseldorf. This exhibition with all the meetings associated with it shows the pertinence of Unwin's theories and the topicality of the problems he was dealing with. It also explains the rapidity of the diffusion of these ideas.

Town planning thus had the legislative and conceptual tools for better controlling London's growth. But it was necessary to wait until the end of World War One to see them systematically carried out.

The interwar period was the determining period for suburban growth. The extensive London suburbs, which had to accommodate the massive migration provoked by the economic crisis, were well placed to become convenient and sought-after living areas, which developed their own poles of attraction. During this time the role of the financial and commercial City continued to evolve and London's plans had to take into account this growth as well.

32 In 1899 E. Howard's first version was published, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*; this book was re-edited in 1902 under the title *Garden Cities of To-morrow*.

33 'The "Town Planning Act" made compulsory the control of all plot subdivision projects proposed, either by a city or by a private individual, once they had obtained the approval of the Local Government Board.' G. Benoit-Levy, *La cité-jardin*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Editions des cités-jardins de France), 1911.

34 *Town Planning in Practice. An introduction to the art of designing cities and suburbs* (London: Unwin) 1909.

The transport system again played an important role. First there was the underground, where the extension of some lines far into the suburbs gave rise around each station to a number of growth poles. The origin of these poles in some cases was promoted by the railway company, which even went as far as creating plot subdivisions, which were sold at reduced prices to future residents – this became London's Metroland.

There was a process of cutting through wide arterial roads, which created a linear pattern of growth, which connected old towns and gave the suburbs their characteristic profile of a succession of centres separated by less dense residential zones.

This growth depended on two modes of finance: on the one hand, private capital through such intermediaries as building societies and speculative builders; on the other, public investment through the municipal housing estates.³⁵ The existence of precise rules for construction and the reduction of the houses to a limited range of types give these suburbs a reassuring unity. But beyond these suburbs the idea of satellite cities and of a garden city had not been abandoned.

From 1919 onwards Howard was trying desperately to implement a second garden city. This was to be the conception and realization of Welwyn Garden City.

Welwyn is part of a group of new towns that were eventually to surround London and support its growth. Although they were well connected to the capital by railway, these towns were originally intended to have a degree of economic autonomy.

The interest of Welwyn resides in the fact that in it were superimposed the idea of the satellite city and the principles of Howard's garden city (autonomous management, relationship with the countryside), which were realized through Unwin's ideas about town planning. As was Unwin's intention, this realization was to be undertaken systematically by other architects. In reality, his ideas were only partially carried out because neither the attitudes nor the techniques prevailing at the time were yet ready for them. The 25 garden cities built around London by private enterprise or by municipalities all carry more or less the mark of this compromise. Nevertheless, this experience was to emerge after 1945 in the form of policies for new towns and green belts.

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB

Caught up by the growth of neighbouring suburbs, Hampstead has now become an integral part of London and it is difficult to isolate the Unwin and Parker experimental core from the nearby tissue. However, arriving from central London along Finchley Road after the succession of high-density and commercial centres and resi-

dential areas, one easily recognizes the gate that marks the entrance into Hampstead Garden Suburb. Two symmetrical buildings, looking like a picturesque reconstruction of medieval structures, refer to both the image of a town hall and that of a fortified gate.³⁶

The origins of this garden suburb lie in the work of Henrietta Barnett, who was the rich heiress of a beauty-products company. Married to Canon Barnett, she spent thirty years of her life among the poor in Whitechapel, where her husband set up several charities.

In 1896 the Barnetts came to hear about the extension project of the underground as far as Golders Green and of the location of a station immediately to the north of Hampstead Heath, in the immediate vicinity of their country estate. At the beginning of 1905 Henrietta Barnett bought from Eton College a piece of land (80 acres) to donate to the LCC to be developed as a public green space. Her years spent with her charities had given her the idea that any community should be based on good neighbourliness and on the mixing of all social classes. She dreamed of an ideal community.

Having read several articles by Raymond Unwin, she went to Letchworth in order to discuss her project for a community with him and asked him for some sketches (the plan of February 1905). She then bought two additional pieces of land from Eton College so that it would be possible to build the garden suburb. On 6 March 1906 she set up the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust with the following rules:

- 1 People from all classes of society and of all levels of income should be able to live together and handicapped people would be welcomed.
- 2 Cottages and houses should be built at an average density of eight dwellings per acre (20 dwellings per hectare).
- 3 Streets should be 40 feet (13.2 metres) wide and the façades of houses should be at least 50 feet (16.5 metres) from each other, with gardens in between.
- 4 Plots should not be separated by walls, but with hedges or trees or fences.
- 5 All streets should be lined with trees whose colours should harmonise with those of the hedges.
- 6 Woods and public gardens should be free for all residents independently of the amount of rent they paid.
- 7 Noise should be avoided, even that of church and chapel bells.
- 8 There should be low rents in order to allow weekly paid workers to live in the suburb.
- 9 Houses should be designed in such a way that they should not spoil each other's view or beauty.

³⁵ The housing estates were of two types: the garden city of single family houses in the suburbs and the collective housing blocks in the renovation of central districts (slum clearance).

³⁶ '... we must forget the gateway and the importance of marking in some way the entrances of our towns, our suburbs, and our districts ... it would be fitting to mark the points where main roads cross over boundaries and enter towns, or new districts within the towns.' R. Unwin, op. cit. (p. 171).

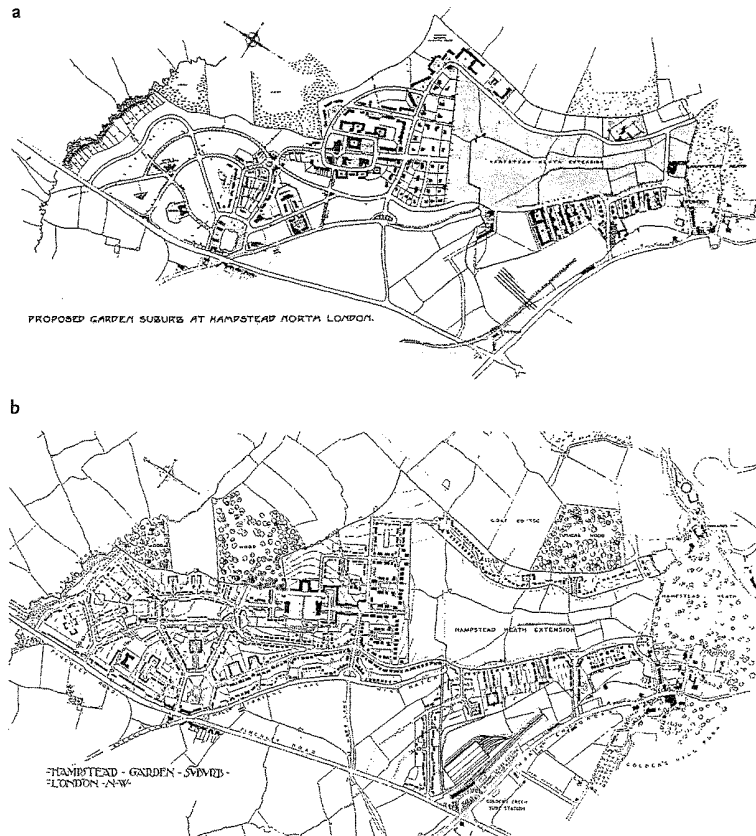


Figure 10

R. Unwin, B. Parker, Hampstead Garden Suburb.

a. Plan of 1905.

b. Plan of 1911.

The intervention of Lutyens in the design of churches organizes the square and its relationships with the park.

Henrietta Barnett appointed Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker as chief architects, with Edwin Lutyens as a consultant.

With Hampstead only eight kilometres from central London, its realization as a garden city was extremely compromised by the then current legislation concerning suburbs. Unwin's previously built projects, such as Letchworth and, previously, New Earswick for the Rowtree family, built in the open countryside, had not encountered

any administrative constraints. Bournville, on the contrary, built for the Cadbury family in the suburbs of Birmingham, had encountered many difficulties. In 1906 Henry Vivian presented to Parliament in the name of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust a proposal for a law that would have allowed some amendments to the legislation. This project was adopted and voted for under the name of the 'Hampstead Garden Suburb Act'. With the participation of Unwin, these principles were later adopted as the basis of the 'Housing and Town Planning Act' of 1909.

Raymond Unwin's sketch of February 1906 took into account the wish expressed by Henrietta Barnett that from everywhere in the suburb one should be able to obtain panoramas or views of the neighbouring countryside. Most of the houses are thus grouped around a park and sited so as to be able to see Hampstead Heath.³⁷ Unwin concentrated the major facilities in a dense centre and created some smaller local district centres. But the sketch remained at the planning stage because of contradictions between Unwin's theories and the wishes of his client.

THE PLAN OF 1909

After various vicissitudes, a new plan was agreed. The whole development was much more structured and Unwin's great themes made their appearance. The overall structure, a dense centre and diversified residential areas, the hierarchy of spaces, the notion of limits: Hampstead Heath, the wall between the park and the city, the marking of entrances. Besides this overall structure, the treatment of details makes more concessions to the picturesque, so that Hampstead resembles a catalogue of picturesque treatments. But the diversity of these treatments and the diversity of the architects who designed them bear witness to Unwin's strong idea: only through a reading at different levels can the urban reality be understood. Starting with an analysis of several European cities, he lays down some precise rules: a clear overall organization, consisting of dense and easily legible centres, some morphologically differentiated districts, a limit and barrier to the city's growth, an axis, a landmark (special building, entrance etc.), then more picturesque local buildings, picking up at this level the ideas of Camillo Sitte.

The plan of 1909 has been carried out in its entirety. But financing problems transformed this social city into a residential city.³⁸ If this shift is not visible from a simple

³⁷ In Letchworth and, more precisely, on the Bird's Hill estate, the close (in the embryonic state) allows for two problems to be solved. It offers views to a maximum number of houses and an economical plan, i.e. one without too much space to be maintained. The 1905 sketch clearly reuses the same solution to answer Henrietta Barnett's wishes. But, even if one finds again in the 1909 plan an identical concern, especially along the park, it is difficult to find the same close in its final state as the evolution of the close of Bird's Hill. If the economic argument (highway maintenance costs) has certainly had an important role to play, one cannot forget the contribution of the idea of neighbourhood and the influence of the rural architectural tradition of the period.

³⁸ The land belonged to Garden Suburb Hampstead Limited, which leased it out for building. The great majority of houses were built by building societies, which financed private builders who used architectural designs from an established range. Out of the total value of construction, the societies had constructed 67%, the Garden Suburb Development Company Ltd had built 25% worth and the Improved Industrial Dwelling Co. (a society for building cheap housing) 1,000,000F - less than 10% by value. The fame of Unwin and Parker, the experimental side of the enterprise and its location in a wealthy district have made it easy for the middle classes to acquire the greater part of the houses.

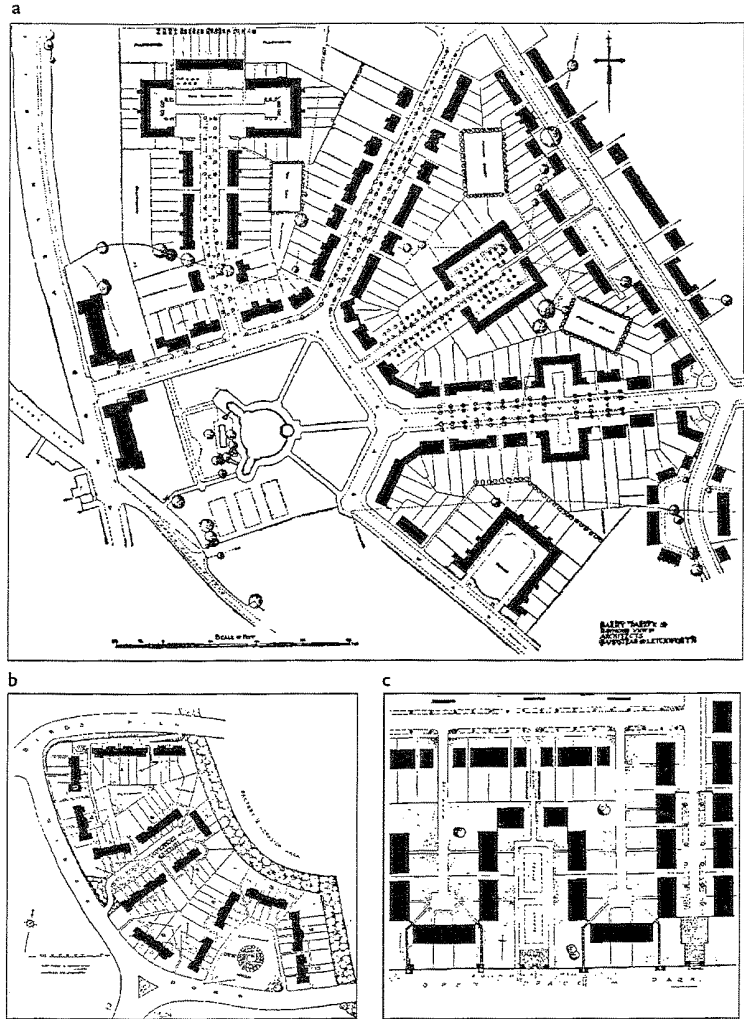


Figure 11
 R. Unwin: the role of views in the design of the close (from *Town Planning in Practice*).
 a. Hampstead Garden Suburb, plan of the access square onto Finchley Road.
 b. Letchworth: Bird's Hill area.
 c. Theoretical plan showing how it is possible to ensure the view towards a green space or a park for a large number of houses, through the layout of the close

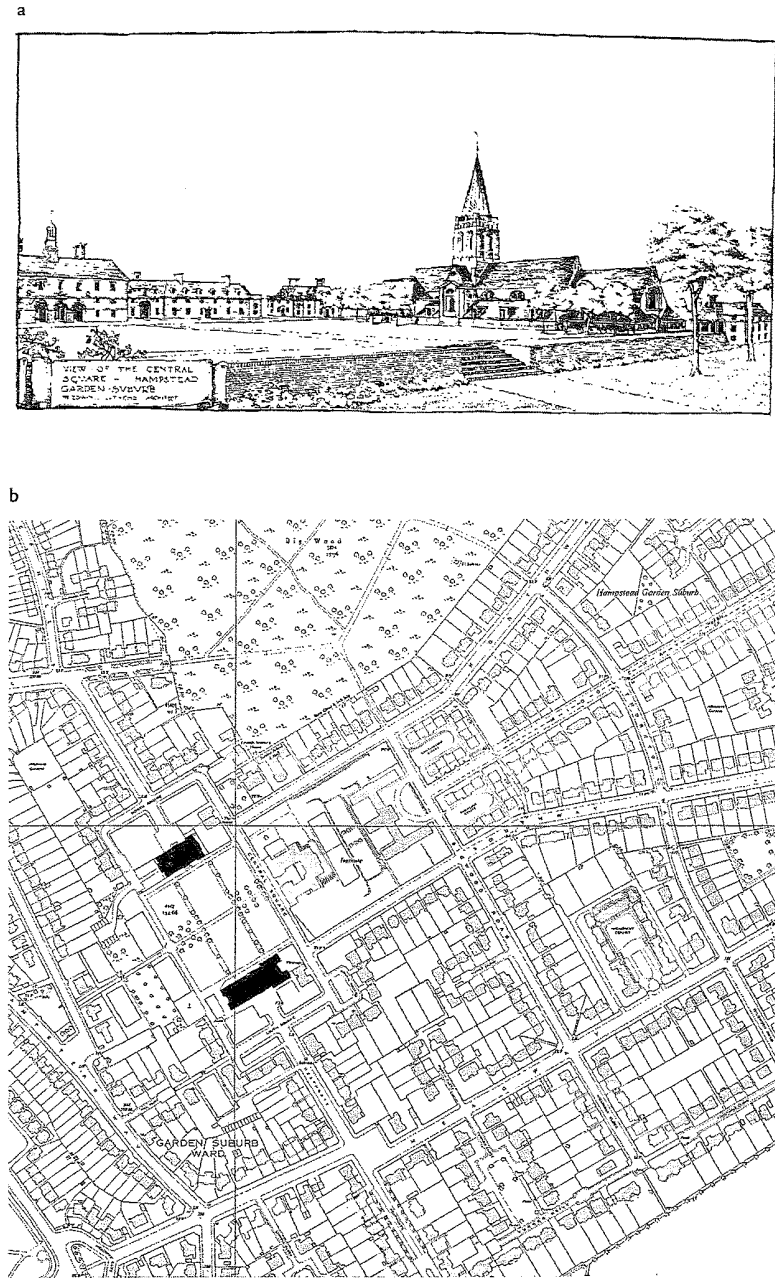


Figure 12
 Hampstead Garden Suburb: central square.
 a. Drawing by E. Lutyens.
 b. Cadastral plan of 1975, showing, beyond the original plan, the layout of radiating streets, which extends the classical composition of the square.

reading of the plan, it is nevertheless very noticeable to the visitor and from the appearance of its inhabitants.

Subsequently, Hampstead Garden Suburbs developed considerably towards the northeast beyond the original plan. In this extension one can observe the systematic use of Unwin's tools: closes, setbacks etc. But there is a considerable reduction of the picturesque treatment, which is what gives the place its character. The inherent classical monumentality of Central Square, designed by Lutyens, produces a majestic composition of radiating streets, which seems out of scale with the small surrounding row houses. This axiality and symmetry of the composition and its clash with the adjoining tissue clearly bears witness to the conceptual differences between Unwin and Lutyens.

HEATHGATE: FROM THE PARK TO THE CENTRE

'Many ancient towns derive exceptional beauty from their enclosure by ramparts or walls. To this enclosure is due in no small measure the careful use of every yard of building space within the wall which has led too much of their picturesque effect. To this is due also the absence of that irregular fringe of half-developed suburb and half spoiled country which forms such a hideous and depressing girdle around modern growing towns.' Raymond Unwin adds, '... we should secure some orderly line up to which the country and town may each extend and stop definitely...' At Hampstead there is a long wall between city and park. Here the city begins and ends. This symbolic replication of a fortification is the allegory in stone of the need for a limit. Here the difference between city and countryside is formalized with clarity. And, if it is but an allegory, it is not the wall that stops the city, but the status of the park. The place sends you to walks in the boulevards or on the fortifications. The message is clear and precise. Along the wall is a path planted with trees, the last infringement of the city on the countryside; in this ambiguous place, where one does not know whether one is inside or outside, the city offers its organization and the countryside its trees.

From the sunken park one has to go through a gate in order to penetrate into the city. After some steps and a square, a setback and a narrowing, one emerges into Heathgate. There is a concern for the path and the sequence of views. Then, from the gate in Central Square, it is all a subtle game of recesses and gaps, with the church of Lutyens to mark the axis.

Heathgate is, therefore, a beautiful demonstration of Unwin's theories: overall thinking at the scale of the city (edge, barrier, gate, axis...) together with a picturesque treatment of the architectural detail. Because centrality has its own morphological rules, towards Central Square the density increases through the use of row houses and continuous façades. A game of making differences through the historical tradition of making the centre distinctive has influenced Lutyens and the treatment of the square

is pure classicism. However, he does not completely escape the medievalist picturesque influence in his church, which is Arts and Crafts romantic. There is a hierarchical application of the rules – those concerned with the overall layout are not the same as those governing the local details.

Beyond the didactic bravura illustrated by Heathgate and Central Square, Hampstead Garden Suburb appears to be like a catalogue of solutions to two problems: the route and the neighbourhood unit with the formal answer being the close. The attempt to systematically answer the first problem takes its inspiration from Camillo Sitte. The layout of streets, squares and crossroads always obeys the laws of the medieval picturesque so that a street must always end with a significant blocking point.

The close is a group of houses around a blind alley or a small cul-de-sac square. This cul-de-sac generally emerges into a street and one can consider the houses, which, on the street, announce or close the cul-de-sac, as part of the close. Once this system is defined, there is an indefinite number of possible variations and Hampstead is an essay in the typology of the system or, at least, of its implementation.

THE SPATIAL PARTICULARITIES OF THE CLOSE

The systematic experimentation carried out by Unwin in Hampstead allows us to have at our disposal a great number of variations on that particular component of the garden city: the close. One goes from the tightly enclosed and unified type at Waterloo Court to the more complex one at the edge of the street and of the cul-de-sac such as Asmunds Place.

Waterloo Court, which is the only important work of the architect Baillie Scott in Hampstead, presents itself like a closed square courtyard made up of houses connected to form a single building. This development at the edge of the courtyard shows buildings derived from the tradition of rural architecture rather than the product of a new approach to a block of houses.

The close on Hampstead Way presents itself as a rectangle enclosed by buildings on three sides. The two houses that end the sides towards the street are turned around 90 degrees, in order to open the close and block the sides. On the other side of the street there is a special grouping of ten houses (three, then a detached one, two on the axis of the close, slightly protruding, then a detached one and then again three) that responds to the courtyard typology. This close works as a courtyard open to the street, a variation on the theme of the farmhouse courtyard taken up again at Waterloo Court.

This variety was taken even further with a close that was never built. It would have been rectangular, closed on three sides; however, the row of houses would not have

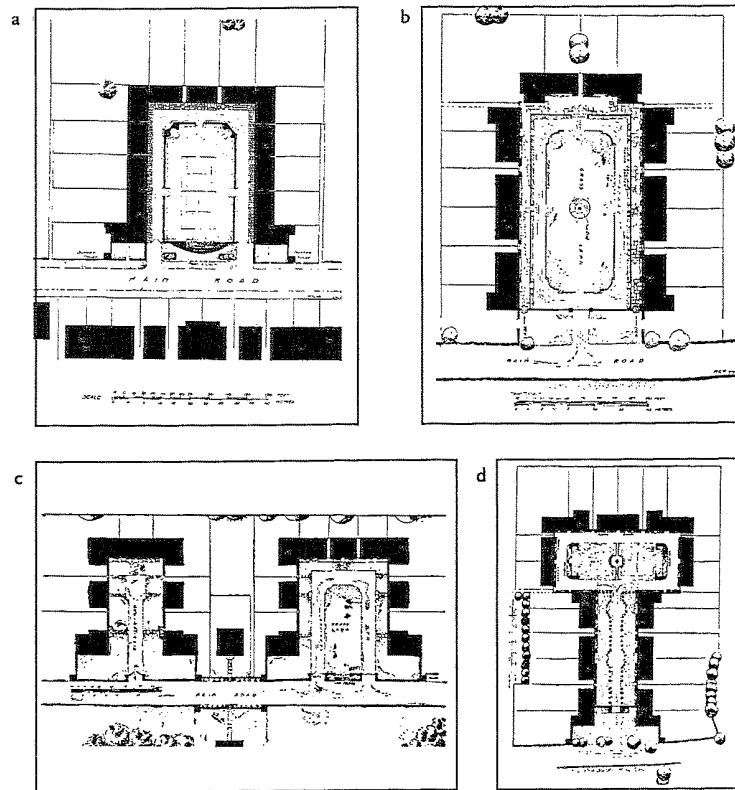


Figure 13
 Unwin: typological variations on the theme of the close, from *Town Planning in Practice*.
 a. Close off Hampstead Way.
 b. Close off Main Road.
 c. Associated closes off Main Road.
 d. Unbuilt T-shaped close, of a type to be used for Asmuns Place.

been continuous, but made up of groups of two semidetached houses. In Morland and Romney Closes, the rectangle begins to be broken up more and more, but a wall between the houses ensures the continuity of the façade on the courtyard, thus preserving the distinction between the back and front spaces and also perhaps preserving, through the image of the courtyard, the original architectural reference.³⁹

39 J. D. Kornwolf, M. H. Baillie Scott and the Arts and Crafts Movement, *Pioneer of Modern Design* (London: Johns Hopkins Press), 1972.

We have another variation on the type that abandons the rectangle in favour of the T shape. There was a similar nonrealized project where, starting from the street, one would find two L-shaped houses, set back from the street alignment, in order to obtain a small entrance square. Six groups of two semidetached houses would then form the street, which would emerge into a rectangular courtyard closed on three sides by semidetached houses. Between the houses a wall would ensure the continuity of the enclosure. This would be a much longer close than the previous ones and seemed to increase the degree of privatization of the courtyard space since it would be much deeper in relation to the street.

Asmuns Place appears to be a variation on this type. On the street (Hampstead Way) a setback announces a close; the cul-de-sac slopes slightly up and then, after two semidetached houses, it makes a small bend before one then enters the close proper. The right-hand side of the T is enclosed by ten houses connected in two groups, the first of six and the second of four. An interruption marks a courtyard with a double row of four houses. One emerges then into the end of the close, which is a rectangle built on three sides with a setback on the side opposite the entrance. A wall here ensures the continuity of the façade. This façade differentiates two spaces: the front one on the cul-de-sac and the back one, which cannot be seen by passers-by on the street.

The cul-de-sac, as its name suggests, is a place where one does not enter by chance, because it does not lead anywhere other than to private houses. This restriction, a reduction of the street to a service access, clearly defines the front space: it belongs to the residents and it does not connect to a more global level in the route hierarchy. It is tempting to define it as semi-public, because the people who use it are those who live there. Nevertheless, inside the front space there is a new distinction to be made: on one side there is the street and the pavement and, on the other side, the space is in direct contact with the house. A strip of land, the width of the lot becomes the responsibility of the resident. But it is difficult to see where each piece of land begins and ends and this can be attributed to a particularity of the English tradition. There is a global appropriation, which transforms this front into a common garden in which there are some subtle markings, which make it possible to identify the territory of each resident. This socialization of the space is not a general one and it follows the evolution and the changes of the complex history of the social groups making up English society. The front space is a flowery scene where the informed eye can read the history of the agreements and disagreements within these groups.

The back gardens are usually well isolated from the front. If some are accessible only through the houses, one can gain access to the end of the garden through a small path servicing some allotments, which in some cases pass between the house and the garden. In the first case the entrance to the path is through a small door in the wall (privatization of the place). This path is surrounded by high hedges, which are interrupted at times by small doors, while each garden is separated from the

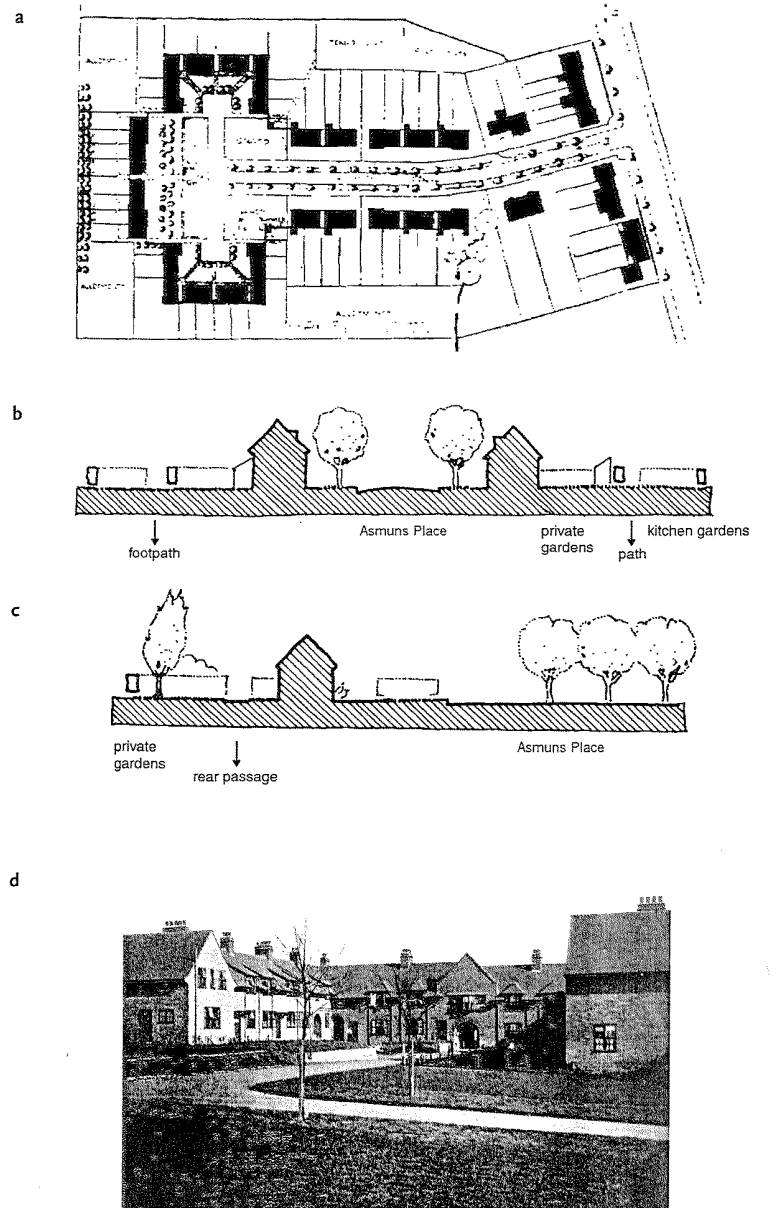


Figure 14

Hampstead Garden Suburb: Asmuns Place.

a. Plan of the close published by R. Unwin in *Town Planning in Practice*.

b. Section, perpendicular to the road. The layout allows a clear distinction between front and back.

c. Section through the centre of the road showing the cut created in the back by the common passage between the cottages and the gardens.

d. The interior of the close at the time of construction.

next one by a hedge. The back-front differentiation is here clearly noticeable: drying laundry, a small shed, a space for storing unused artefacts, and a corner of the garden where a piece of lawn is kept for a table and chairs. The family functions of the garden are moved here from the front socialising space. The scheme resembles the French single-family housing, described in the work of Raymond et al.,⁴⁰ with the difference that the front is less of a private space and more of a collective one.

In the second case, the existence of a back passage crossing the gardens links these gardens into a collective image. The appropriation is more discreet, obeying some common rules. Besides, one can say that the front gardens, of a reduced size, give a much greater impression of privacy than those of houses that have private back gardens. All these observations bear witness to the relationship between differentiated spaces and also to a differentiation in attitudes towards these spaces. The close, if it negates the street as public front space does, at least reproduce the back-front contrast familiar in the traditional tissue, even though this front does not relate to the whole city, but rather to a community of neighbours. To this spatial contrast, symbolized by the wall that connects the houses and the subtle game of the entrances to the back paths, corresponds a contrast in use. If we assume this hypothesis, then we can see how in this type of grouping the rear passage begins to create an inversion of the scheme and we find the rear gardens providing the private representational space. A neutral public space ensures that an image of quality is maintained for the ensemble on the close.

WELWYN GARDEN CITY

Welwyn Garden City is 22 km from London, just beyond Hatfield New Town on the main road north – the A1. Served by trains, Welwyn is part of the ring of new towns that, in the Greater London plan, were intended to be the key to the growth of the British capital.

After World War One, a campaign was begun by Howard and his friends, W. G. Osborn, C. B. Purdom and F. J. Taylor,⁴¹ for the creation of new garden cities, this time financed by the government. The strength of this campaign came from the success of Letchworth (1904) and from the necessity to build housing rapidly around London. In 1919, Parliament voted funds for reconstruction with which the financing of the new garden cities became possible. But the Ministry of Housing, convinced of the need to build rapidly the largest possible number of houses, became uninterested in garden cities.

⁴⁰ See H. Raymond, N. Haumont, M. G. Raymond, A. Haumont, *L'habitat pavillonnaire* (Paris, ISU/CRU), 1966.

⁴¹ From 1917 onwards a series of associations and societies were created in order to prepare for the start of the new garden cities. During the same period and together with these societies an advertising campaign was run through many publications. Thus in 1917 *The Garden City after the War*, by C. B. Purdom, was published and in 1918 *New Towns after the War*, by E. J. Osborn and W. G. Taylor; C. B. Purdom published in 1925 *The Building of Satellite Towns, A Contribution to the Study of Town Developments and Regional Planning* (London: Dent & Sons Ltd, re-edited and completed in 1949), which is an extremely well-documented book on Letchworth and Welwyn.

Howard was convinced that it was time to start building the second garden city without waiting for state aid, and in the summer of 1919 he began to buy the land needed. With the help of friends, he acquired 1,458 acres for a cost of £51,000 and, when it appeared that this was not enough, he raised capital through a new company called Second Garden City Limited, which enabled him to buy rest of the land needed, Sherrards Woods. On 29 April 1920 Welwyn Garden City Limited was founded with a capital of £250,000, in shares mainly sold to industrialists.

The first plan was designed by Crickmers, but Howard preferred to create an office within the company and appointed as chief architect Louis de Soissons, a young architect known as one of the most gifted of the new generation. Construction started straightaway with road works carried out on existing paths. The main avenue was created together with some other streets and the industrial zone was laid out and serviced. The first houses, built by direct labour, were occupied by Christmas 1920, and then, in November 1922, 50 more houses followed with 95 more in May 1924.⁴² The first houses were built under the Addison Act of 1919, but the Housing Act of 1921 would provide the greater part of the funds.⁴³

THE GENERAL PLAN

'As the designer walks over the ground to be planned, he will picture to himself what would be the natural growth of the town or district if left to spread over the area. He will try to realise the direction which the main lines of traffic will inevitably take, which portions of the ground will be attractive for residences, and which will offer inducements for the development of shops, business premises, or industries... there will arise in his imagination a picture of the future community with its needs and its aims...' (Raymond Unwin, *Town Planning in Practice*, p. 149).

This view of the site, considered as a framework that has the necessary elements to structure urban growth, is clearly noticeable in Welwyn. First, there is the use of the existing routes, such as Handside Lane or Bridge Road, which, at the beginning, were nothing but stony rural paths, along which the first constructions were built in an extension of the historical growth pattern. Then there is the use of existing trees, like the two that block the axis of Guessen Walk, where there is a magnificent chestnut tree, around which gravitates the Quadrangle (designed by Louis de Soissons). There is also the overall study of the terrain, which determined the location of residential and industrial areas and, finally, there is the bend of the railways, which made possible Louis de Soissons' brilliant axial composition.

In looking at the plan for the centre of Welwyn, it is difficult not to think of some axial compositions to which we became accustomed through the Beaux Arts' Prix

⁴² See references below p. 204.

⁴³ For financing details, see C. B. Purdom, *op. cit.*

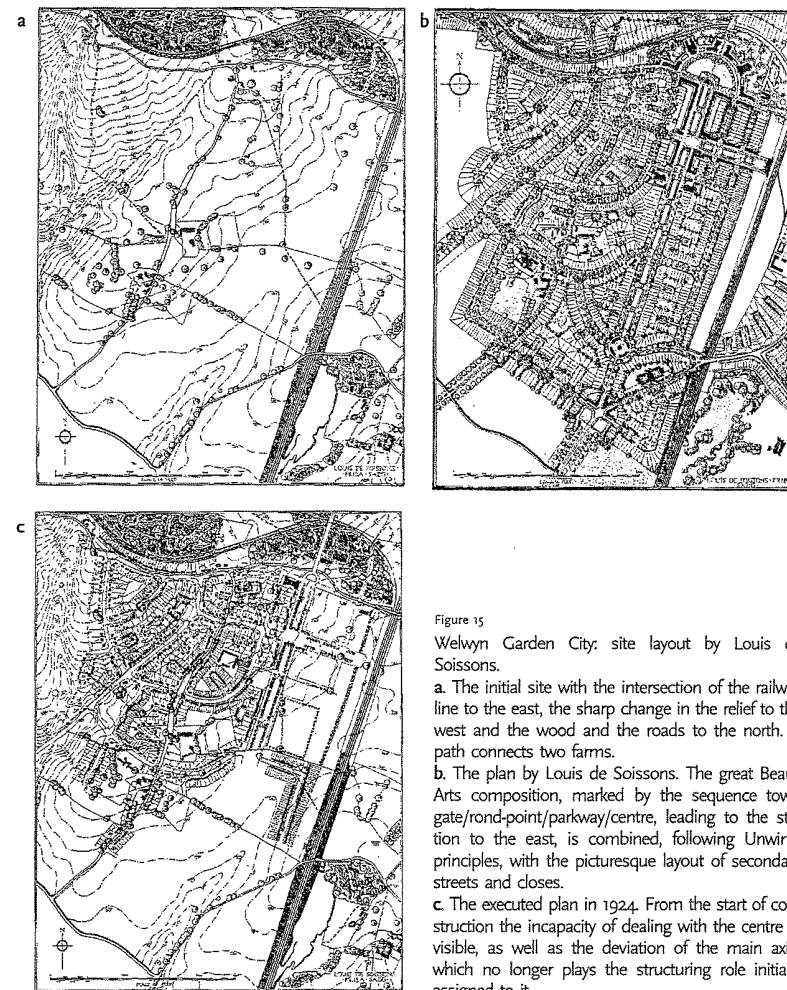


Figure 15
Welwyn Garden City: site layout by Louis de Soissons.

a. The initial site with the intersection of the railway line to the east, the sharp change in the relief to the west and the wood and the roads to the north. A path connects two farms.

b. The plan by Louis de Soissons. The great Beaux Arts composition, marked by the sequence town gate/rond-point/parkway/centre, leading to the station to the east, is combined, following Unwin's principles, with the picturesque layout of secondary streets and closes.

c. The executed plan in 1924. From the start of construction the incapacity of dealing with the centre is visible, as well as the deviation of the main axis, which no longer plays the structuring role initially assigned to it.

de Rome. Here there is a grand unfinished axis, which locates and sets off the administrative centre. Onto this some finite compositions are attached that thus determine a central point, which is not the activity centre, but is a place from where one can read several focal points. Thus, the first principle of Julien Guadet's architectural composition is respected: 'The first principle [that] must

remain present in our mind is that a composition has one direction and that it must only have one. Its axis is only finished in one and only direction... We want to understand a plan from the first glimpse and what above all we value in a work is clarity, frankness and decision.⁴⁴

THE NOTION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD

A simple analysis of the plan makes it possible to distinguish between the neighbourhoods. The commercial centre is dense with an orthogonal grid with the administrative centre as the key to the monumental axis. The station intrudes as a deeply penetrating presence in the city and the residential neighbourhoods of single family houses are composed according to the rules defined by Unwin, with the closes carefully composed arrangements of visual sequences. This reading, carried out at the level of each of the four zones, defined in Welwyn by the railways, can be done at a global level. One zone appears as the centre, and there is an industrial zone and then two peripheral residential zones. The notion of hierarchy is respected at the cost of a more or less segregationist plan. The grand idea of community has disappeared in the search for a functional urban logic.

BARRIER, LIMIT, MARKER

As in Hampstead, the city is bounded. The passage from the countryside to the town happens through special gateways, such as a row of trees signalling the vicinity of inhabited areas, and then a square, followed by dense building, heralding the city.

Thus Louis de Soissons systematically uses the tools of urban composition tried out in Hampstead by Unwin. While avoiding the exaggeration of the picturesque effects and the variations on the closes, he manages to superimpose two visions of the city: that of the 'medieval' town with its great variety, and that of the 'classical' city, with its rigour and its reassuring unity. This superimposition establishes a necessary hierarchy between the centre and the residential districts. The southwest neighbourhood (by the station) clearly formalises this play between two urban arguments and the conflicts it brings about; the central avenue (Parkway), a green rupture between elements, which do not have the same systems of reference, is thus a transition between two neighbourhoods.

This system of contrasts could have been effective if an enlargement in scale had not transformed the avenue into a park. There are now many 'cities', or rather one city, made from exploded elements. The brutal application of a zoning scheme, with, as a consequence, the absence of any overlap between the parts, made the efforts in trying to create a clear morphological identity seem fruitless.

44 Julien Guadet, *Éléments et théories de l'architecture*, Paris, Librairie de la construction moderne (no date).

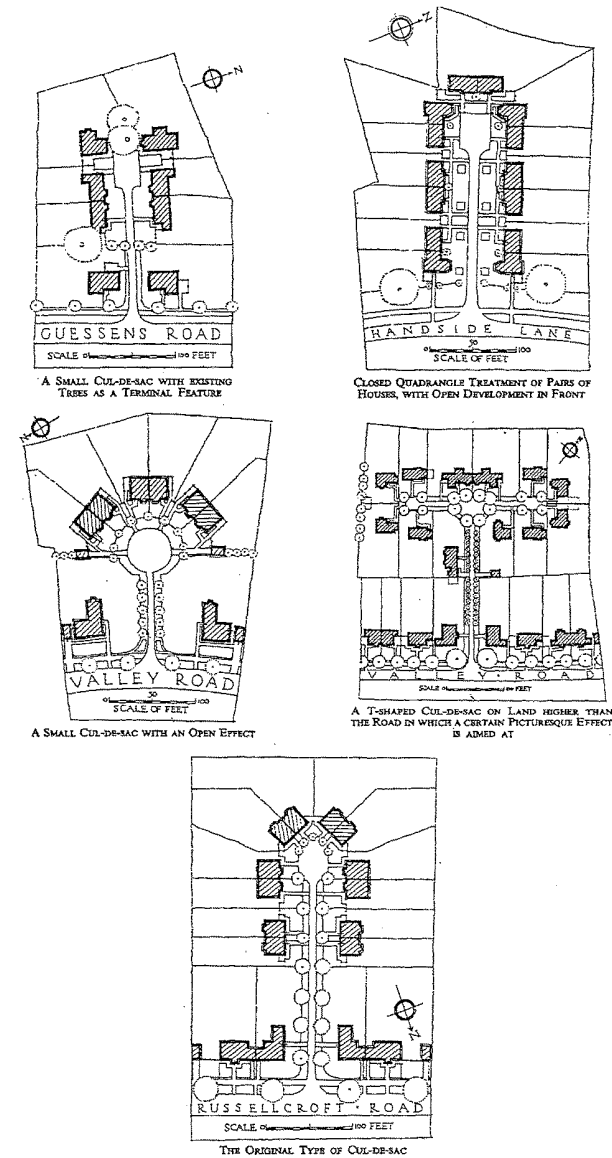
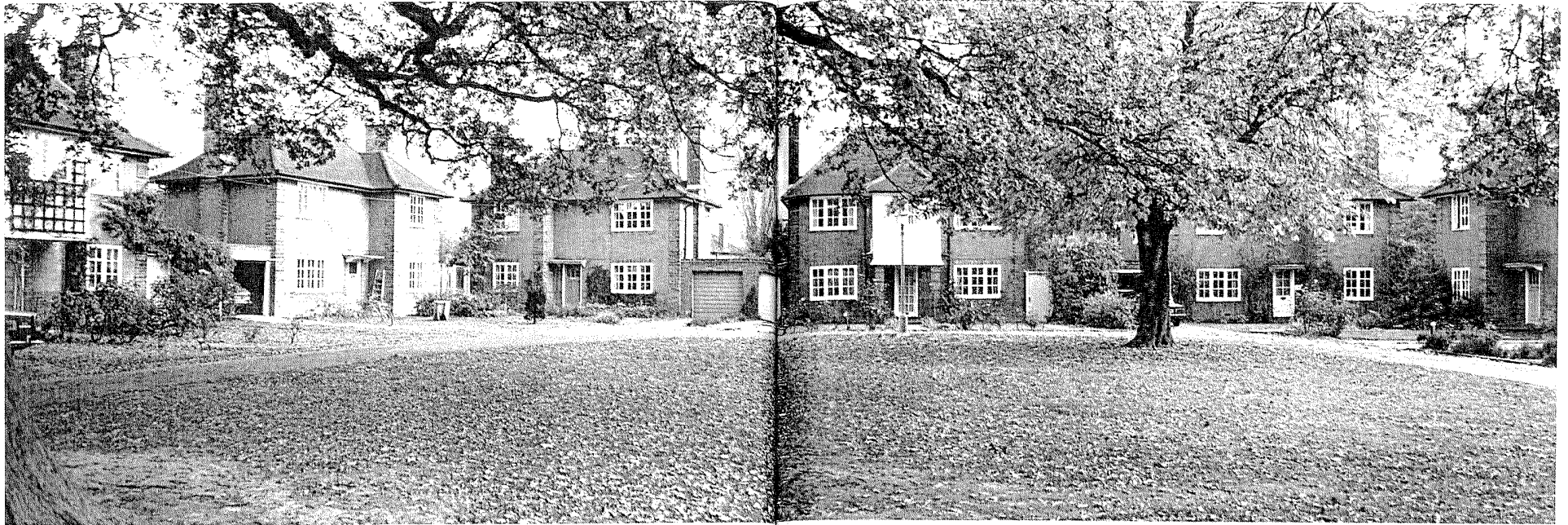


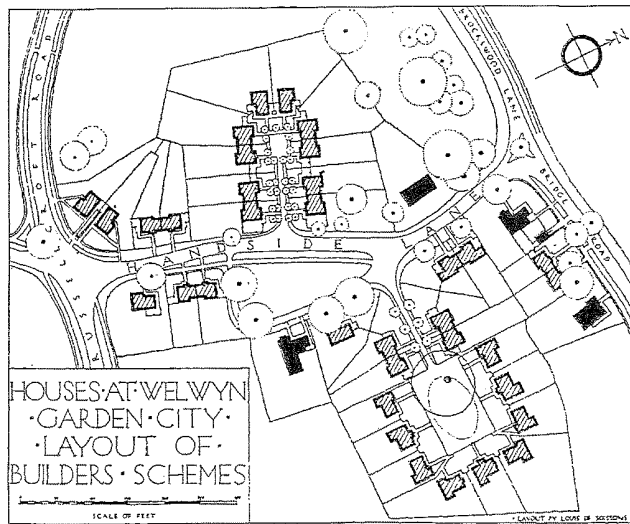
Figure 16

Welwyn Garden City: typological variations on the theme of the close.

A comparison with Unwin's variations shows the explosion of the original spatial type. The close is no more the reinterpretation of the courtyard of the manor house or of the farm, but a way of grouping a series of semidetached houses.

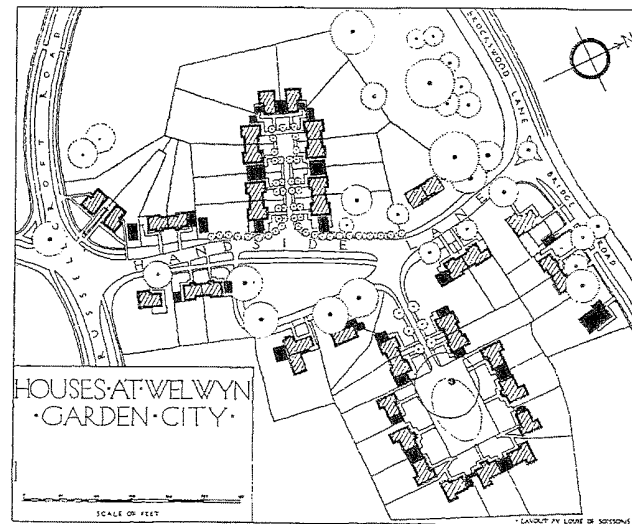


a



b

Figure 17
Welwyn Garden City, the Quadrangle and Handside Walk.
a. The Quadrangle, internal view of the close.
b. Initial plan.



c

c. Situation in 1975 of the layout, showing extensions. The building of garages, outhouses or walls (in black) between houses re-enforces the continuity of the enclosure between the space of the close and the back gardens.

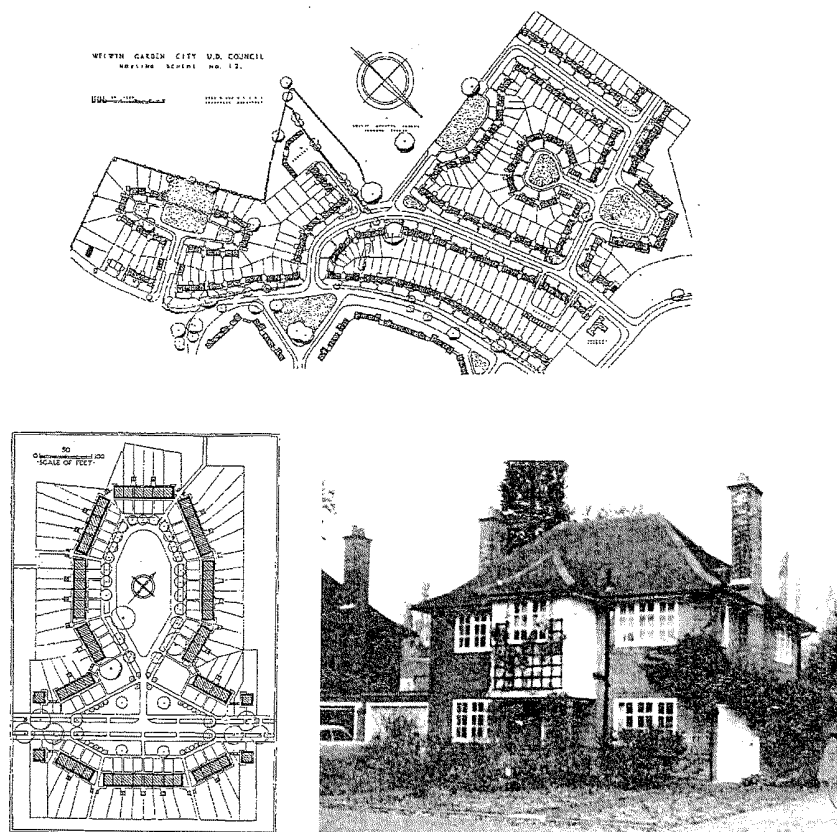


Figure 18

The close, continuation and reduction of the type.

The increased dimensions and the repetition of identical houses in the closes and in the neighbouring streets lose the specific character of the close. The garden city slides into a picturesque plot subdivision of semi-detached houses.

The implementation also produced other important changes. First was the growth of Welwyn beyond the limits decided by Louis de Soissons and Ebenezer Howard, an extension that, for economic reasons, was carried out rapidly and without taking into account the original logic. It makes the notion of barrier and entrance appear invalid. But the most regrettable thing is the disappearance during implementation of the systematic utilization of the close as a unit of intervention. Thus, the lack of care given to the local level reduces the close to a cul-de-sac, often determined by the overall

street layout and most of the time deprived of its main characteristic, which is the existence of a collective space strongly demarcated in relation to the public and private spaces. The close thus represents nothing more than the disappearance of the street.

THE CLOSE: PURSUIT AND REDUCTION OF A TYPE

The two closes designed by Louis de Soissons – Handside Walk and the Quadrangle – together with the small triangular square from which they emerge, form the ensemble, which, in Welwyn, can be considered to be that which makes the most concessions to the picturesque. This is perhaps due to the consequence of the use by Louis de Soissons of the existing path and trees.

Handside Walk is a rectangular close, open to the street and formed by semidetached houses and closed at the end by two houses located at each side of the central axis. The houses are separated by gardens. The Quadrangle is a rectangle surrounding a very beautiful tree, which existed before the construction of the garden city. This rectangle is formed by detached houses, separated by gardens, and is closed by two groups of semidetached houses. Here, contrary to Hampstead Garden Suburb, where special care had been given to the differentiation between backs and fronts, there was originally some permeability of space. In fact, no wall connected the houses in the Quadrangle and even the back gardens of the first two houses of Handside Walk could be seen from the street. The modifications that this omission has provoked seem significant to us.

In the Quadrangle all the interior façade has been treated as continuous by the construction of garages, outhouses and walls. If the construction of garages can easily be explained by the appearance and general use of the car, the origin of the outhouses and, more significantly, of the walls cannot be of the same nature. The front space defined in this way seems to be an example of the same type of collective appropriation as has already been observed in Hampstead Garden Suburb, with the changes that result from a different population. This type of change is even more noticeable in Handside Walk.⁴⁵

In Handside Walk one can notice the same phenomenon of the enclosure of space as in the Quadrangle. A hedge prevents any visual communication between the street and the back gardens of the two houses forming the entrance to the close. It has a secondary effect of shutting off the entire close, which makes the interior space seem to be ideal collective appropriation by the surrounding houses. This observation should

⁴⁵ Welwyn residents were surely less well off than those of Hampstead Garden Suburb. This can be explained by the wish to build an economical city, a wish that was aided by state subsidies and by the repetitive character of the construction (in fact there are fewer types of house and, in addition, the closes or the neighbourhoods were built as wholes and were let only when they were all finished, which was not the case in Hampstead Garden Suburb). Another reason is the relative distance from the centre of London. This prevented the intensive speculative activity that happened in Hampstead. A third reason is the character, or rather the absence of character, of the architecture of Welwyn: too much or not enough systematically to tempt an intellectual elite.

be compared with Wilmot's observation on Dagenham, where he emphasises the existence of community activity inside some closes.⁴⁶ It is thus tempting to correlate the special morphology of the close with these types of collective practice. The closed space of the close at least forms a space that is specifically suitable for supporting any group activities that may be characteristic of English culture (see Wilmot's studies on matrilocality).

What is quite clear here, and confirms the observations with regard to Hampstead Garden Suburb, is the necessary existence of a spatial differentiation that provides a third type of space between the public realm and private space. When the spatial arrangements do not take this necessity into account residents themselves, as a consequence, modify their space, when this is possible. This also means that one of the qualities of the design of Welwyn is that it allows for these modifications.

THE CLOSE: FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE SPACE

To reduce the block to the close could seem arbitrary. In fact, in both Welwyn and Hampstead Garden Suburb, the block exists beyond the close. But the close introduces a new hierarchy in relation to the traditional tissue and the space of the cul-de-sac produces a level of unusual relations and allows different activities to take place. The setting apart of the front space vis-à-vis the city is fundamental. It means that the close has some autonomy so that it is tempting to consider it as a separate unit. In Hampstead Garden Suburb as well as in Welwyn, the block is the combination of individual plots and of closes. This combination, first, obeys some general rules with respect to the density and the walkways. Secondly, it attempts to respect the difference between the private and the public domain. It is at this level that the close operates as a sub-

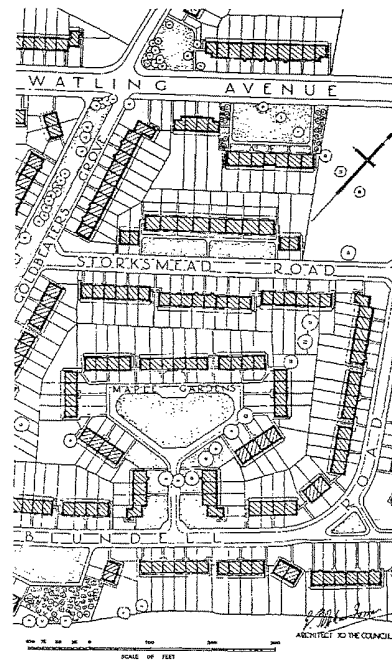


Figure 19
A London County Council housing estate.
The formal building typology of the garden cities is used in the 1920s on all residential developments of low density, built at the edge of cities.

division by functioning as a unit. The interior space of the close contrasts with the specifically public space of the street through an element of enclosure such as a narrowing of the space between buildings, a hedge or even a gate. The public-private contrast functions again in the interior of the close, but is reduced due to the collective appropriation of this space.

Thus the close takes away from the street a whole series of important activities, reducing it to the technical role of a route that allows for movement only. If this reduction of the street is not entirely due to the close, it is at least the most important factor in this process. Monopolising a certain number of practices and reducing and transforming them, the close formalizes this privatization of space, which follows the privatization of ways of life both in England and in France. And the grouping that it induces, mainly among the most disadvantaged classes, where the group is a practically and culturally vital extension of the family, does not contradict this assertion: confined to the close, they are rather the reflection of its autonomous character. But, apart from the close or even with the close, Hampstead Garden Suburb and Welwyn represent the traditional scheme of contrasting space that is still differentiated, and can be appropriated and modified.

The garden city carried out wonderfully the transition between a space where public life is privileged, so that private activities need a lot of support, and a space that, by privileging private activities, demands that the public space must be carefully supported. Thus, the garden city, by its skilful design, goes to the heart of English culture with its love of nature reduced to the private garden (and gardening). It brings to the neighbourhood community a group vitality that meets the needs of capitalist urbanization and, at the same time, provides a technical answer to urban growth and the social answer to the necessary reproduction of bourgeois cultural models.

46 P. Wilmot and M. Young, *The Evolution of a Community, A Study of Dagenham after Forty Years* (Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1963.

