

STUART GRAY: Edwardian architect.

The end of 1985 saw the publication of *Edwardian Architecture: A Biographical Dictionary* by Stuart Gray, Suburb resident for more than 50 years. The book is a 400 page tome, lavishly illustrated with photographs and drawings. Stuart spent 15 years working on the book and it well deserves the lavish praise of reviewers who have hailed it as "a predestined classic", "a scholarly triumph" and, not least, "a delight from beginning to end".

Gray is himself a son of the Edwardian era, now retired from architecture, and a mine of information on the Suburb. Born in Gravesend, Kent, he shortly came to London and became interested in architecture while still at Mill Hill School. On leaving he was articled to a drawing master and attended the Central School of Arts and Crafts (now Design) in the evenings. Here "Visitors", the great architects of the day, would survey the students' drawing boards, and among the illustrious figures who peered over Stuart's shoulder was no less than Sir Edwin Lutyens.

Gray's first-hand experience of the Suburb began during his studies in the 1920s, and when he married in the 1930s he moved into Midholm Close. After a few years in Bristol during the slump he returned to Brookland Hill; then moved to Middleway in 1947, and, in 1973, to his present house in Temple Fortune Hill.

As an architect he himself designed a house in Spencer Drive, additions to 97 Hampstead Way and a wing of the then Wellgarth Nursery.

He has long wanted to write *Edwardian Architecture* which, in his own words, allows 320

architects (and sculptors with whom they were associated) a chance to be between hard covers. Without this opportunity these names could all too easily slip into oblivion so far as the general public is concerned.

The coverage of the Suburb in particular reflects Gray's love of his home ground. An introductory chapter places the Suburb in its social and architectural context. As he says, "the planning and planting of the first 243 acres has never been equalled on a suburban estate". There is much useful information, such as the 1906 Act of Parliament "which offered an escape from the rigorous by-laws instituted . . . in the nineteenth century to establish standards of sanitation and safety. This enabled (Unwin) to vary the building line and plan economical closes and cul-de-sacs." There is a good selection of photographs, including one of the (destroyed) clubhouse on Willifield Green, and a listing of the architects involved in the Suburb, naming the individual buildings credited to each one: Bunney (92 houses), Caullfield (houses in Bigwood Road, Meadway, Southway), Crickmer (70 houses), Dawson (houses in

Hampstead Way, Meadway and Wildwood Road), Field (houses in Temple Fortune Lane, Wildwood Rise, Wyldes Close), Curtis Green (houses in Meadway and Hurst Close), Lucas (house in Willifield Way, Southway, Hampstead Way, Bigwood Road and Lucas Square), Quennell (houses in Hampstead Way, Heathgate, Turner Drive, Turner, Romney and Morland Closes), Baillie Scott (houses in Meadway and Hampstead Way), Sutcliffe (houses in Creswick Walk, Oakwood Road and Meadway Court) — and, of course, Lutyens and Parker and Unwin.

Stuart Gray's book is written with wit and a sharp eye for detail. His energetic and lively approach to life is reflected in its pages and the mass of research he carried out to trace the origins of many of the buildings mentioned. He remains totally involved in the architecture of the Suburb and is currently acting as expert witness in connection with the pointing on Temple Fortune and Arcade Houses. Few would disagree that he is one of the Suburb's assets!

EC

LOSE SOME! WIN SOME?

We are sorry when we have to announce that a Chief Warden is retiring, and even sorrier to announce the retirement of two. Elizabeth Beesley of Heath Ward and Nicki Landau of Norrice are both unable to continue because of other pressures on their busy lives. Margery Hinchliff who has been with us for many years as a Warden for Denman Drive is also retiring, she says hopefully "to make way for some one younger" . . . please step forward!

Elizabeth, Nicki and Margery, we would like to thank you for your past services and commitment, and whilst we are gradually recruiting more Wardens, we do need volunteers to accept the challenge of becoming Chief Wardens — if you are at all interested, please contact Alan or Anne Lawson (458 3827) who would be very happy to discuss the matter with you.

THE DRESSER

Let's have a little moan about *The Dresser* first! The audiences on the whole found it a rather boring play — it does go on rather and who cares if an elderly, egocentric actor appears to be losing his marbles. Or is it all symbolic? Is Sir the old order dying and do brash Oxenby and unscrupulous Irene represent the "new"? It is difficult to know what the author, Ronald Harwood intended; the film certainly went all out for a portrayal of the dear old actor-manager of the good old days of touring theatre.

There were many good things in Roberta Smith's production for the Hampstead Garden Suburb Dramatic Society but why choose a play which is almost a duologue unless you have two charismatic actors available. Peter John White as Norman, the dresser in question, was good enough to hold one's attention and so at times was Michael Sabine Bacon, but there were occasions when one absolutely longed for another character to appear.

But credit where credit's due. Sir is an extremely difficult role — the actor has to portray a man of great vanity who either knows or suspects that he is dying; he has to make one believe that he is a great actor and, in spite of all, loved by the older members of his company. Michael Sabine Bacon made a very good attempt at that.

The lesser characters came off best. There was a very pleasant, sympathetic performance by Patricia Collins as Sir's leading

lady and "wife", known by the name Her Ladyship and by Diana Bromley, as the adoring Madge. Mortimer Bennitt as the ageing Geoffrey Thornton, forced to play Fool to Sir's Lear at an age when he should be retired, made something very touching of the scene where, after the performance, he thinks his efforts worth more salary. As the younger members of the troupe, Andrew Craze made an aggressive Mr Oxenby while Fiona Riem, at last allowed to play against her personality, produced a nice cameo performance as the unscrupulous and sexy Irene.

The play demands that one sees Sir's dressing room, the prompt corner and part of the stage on which "King Lear" is performed all at the same time and Tim Solomons, the designer, and Roberta Smith, as the director, are to be congratulated for making it possible on the stage at the Institute. LS



L to R: Her Ladyship (Patricia Collins), Madge (Diana Bromley), Norman (Peter John White) and Sir (on couch — Michael Sabine Bacon).

Tawny owls

The Tawny Owl must be a common bird of prey in the Suburb, and while frequently heard, is rarely seen. A sight of any kind of owl always makes my day. Pairs breed in Bigwood, and one of my neighbours in Erskine Hill was honoured to find a Tawny Owl roosting regularly in the cypress at the foot of his garden: he invited his friends to owl viewings, providing binoculars for the purpose. More usually the bird is heard persistently calling in the darkened garden and after a short cold wait, a blob one has not noticed, detaches itself from a tree and drifts silently away over the hedges.

October is the most vocal month, and everyone has heard the "key-week" call employed by the Tawny Owl establishing a territory for hunting through the winter, and for subsequent breeding in early March. Owls are, in fact, very territorial birds, and defend their hunting grounds with passion. This aggression gives rise to a further bout of "key-weeks" and "who-who-who?" at the end of the winter when the owls strive to work out which of their territorial neighbours are of the opposite sex. This is done by means of calling, and behavioural differences: probably as good a method as any, in the dark.

Owl territories vary in size according to the abundance, or otherwise, of food. In the Suburb the number of owls does not, probably, vary as much as in the country where rodent populations rise and fall

dramatically. In fact, hereabouts, mice and rats form only about ten per cent of the owl's prey, most of the remainder, I regret to say, will be smaller birds, up to the size of pigeons. These are approached on the famous silent velvet wings, and grabbed as they twitter drowsily through the doings of the day in their roosts.

There is no defence against an enemy who can see you when you can't see him, and when he can't see you he can hear you sleeping!



For human residents however, it is a comforting thought that Tawny Owls have lived and bred here in NW11 since the ice receded north of Henley's Corner. Woods, farms, suburbs and even cities are home to this bird, and very few animals can have adapted so easily to environmental change. No other British owl species can tolerate the increasing urbanisation or loss of habitat resulting from intensive farming. The Tawny Owl has managed it and is consequently unique. A bird who can bring up its chicks anywhere from a rabbit hole to a town hall, and can at least partly digest almost anything alive from an earwig to a duck, deserves all it can get. LG



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