

‘Luxuries held in common’

Waterlow Court was officially opened on July 1st 1909 by Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, Queen Victoria’s 6th child. It was the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company’s latest building, one which today in many ways epitomises the philosophy of the Suburb’s founders, the Barnetts and particularly of Dame Henrietta, its guiding light.

Some two decades later she writes of that occasion in her memoir, ‘The Story of the Growth of Hampstead Garden Suburb 1907-1928’ that, although unreported by the local press at the time, she herself recalled the ceremony as ‘carefully managed’ and (therefore) ‘very enjoyable.’ She goes on to note that, ‘visitors were both pleased and surprised by the tennis grounds, croquet lawns and other luxuries to be held in common’ by the prospective inhabitants of the new building.

The Company had then lately completed 65 cottages facing onto Willifield Way and onto Erskine Hill, all of which the Dame considered ‘pleasing and appropriate’, as designed by Mr Arthur Moore, ‘the courteous and efficient company secretary’. In further collaboration with both him and Mr David Waterlow, she next set about making clear her requirements for another more

‘pioneering’ building planned as accommodation for single women in public service who might otherwise have to endure ‘digs in drear neighbour-hoods lodged in rooms over-filled with furniture and attended perhaps by disagreeable landladies’.

To spare them these horrors, Dame Henrietta’s specification may be paraphrased as being for a range of flats organised around a quadrangle providing a communal atmosphere and possessing the associated benefits of privacy and security. Each flat, she further stipulated, should have a separate bath, cooker and food cupboard plus sitting room and bedroom, with a communal dining room, and access to an individually owned piece of land, however small, providing ‘opportunity for digging’.

Once fixed, the brief was passed to Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott, one of the most original English architects of the period, who came up with a design characterised by Dame Henrietta as ‘quaint and interesting’ but since reckoned, both at home and across Europe, as simply that architect’s masterpiece. Commentators have detected a number of influences at work in Scott’s design: the regular rhythms of the arched cloister seen at Edwin Lutyens’ Orchards; the comforting depth of steeply



Baillie Scott’s masterpiece “quaint and interesting”

pitched, thatched country-style roofs; and Scott’s own fondness for ‘softness and gentleness of proportion’. At any rate the individual flats, and indeed the building as a whole, both within and without, exhibit Scott’s now celebrated Arts-and-Crafts style and display his trademark attention to detail.

Nor should we take Dame Henrietta’s apparently naïve description of Waterlow Court as any sign of her own lack of aesthetic nous when it came to the realisation of what she so clearly envisioned. The Garden Suburb might very easily have become, without her decisive oversight, a permanent open-air Ideal Homes exhibition showcasing a wide range of contemporary experiments in

the style of the modern movement, at the time newly-burgeoning.

Bearing in mind that nearly 100 individual architects and their practices were involved in the creation of her Green Golden Scheme (as Barbara Honeyball’s composition to celebrate the Suburb’s centenary delightfully calls it), it is perhaps even more remarkable that she, a lay person (and, as she herself stresses, a mere woman), managed to resist such all-pervasive influences. It is a standing tribute to her clear-thinking purpose and strength of character that the completed Suburb exhibits both architectural diversity and range, within an overall cohesive unity.

Certainly, where individual architects have best appreciated the directors’ primary goal, that of creating an environment conducive to the good health and peace of mind of all dwelling within its boundaries, the results were both remarkable and enduring.

Dame Henrietta and Cannon Barnett’s Suburb has demonstrated itself to be both inspired by tradition and resolutely forward-looking. In the case of Waterlow Court in particular, indeed, the design has proved more of both

than at the time could possibly have been suspected, as anyone who visits Fishbourne Roman Palace, discovered in 1960 at Chichester in Sussex, may observe. True, there are no hypocausts at Waterlow Court, but there surely is, lingering in the air about the cloisters, the same hint of a higher aspiration, and a bigger idea.

DAVID POPE



The original function of Waterlow Court was to provide accommodation for ‘single working gentle ladies’ at the time when it was not yet common for young women to live away from their parents’ homes. There were 50 flats, a communal dining hall, a resident housekeeper/matron, a porter and seven servants who slept in the adjacent bungalow.

Today the building consists of 53 (mostly one-bedroom) self-contained flats, plus the bungalow, all modernised but retaining many of their Arts and Crafts features. They are now sold on the open market on 999-year leases. Each Leaseholder has a share in Waterlow Court Residents Association Ltd, a company set up in 1986 to buy the freehold from the previous owners. There are no other shareholders.

Residents – now both women and men – come from many walks of life, are of various nationalities and range from people at the start of their careers to active pensioners. Currently they include lawyers, teachers, architects, journalists and management consultants.

WATERLOW COURT
RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION



Choosing the right windows will enhance your house and protect its value

Many Suburb houses are at an age where the windows need attention. This does not necessarily mean they need to be replaced. The original windows may just require some repair and redecoration.

For residents keen to thermally upgrade their homes, timber double glazed windows can usually be made to closely match originals. There are examples of these throughout the Suburb that are almost indistinguishable from the windows they replaced. But careful detailing is needed to get the appearance right.

The Trust is happy to advise homeowners on how to get the right result. And Trust Consent is always required for replacement windows.



UPVC windows like these detract from the appearance of your house. They are often marketed as being maintenance free. These claims are incorrect. They do not have a long life, they cannot be repaired when damaged and they seriously devalue your house.



Repairing your existing windows is often the most cost effective option. Adding draught stripping will have a dramatic effect on heat loss and costs very little.



Replacement timber or steel windows can normally be double glazed to enhance the thermal efficiency of your property.



Timber windows can be easily repaired, prolonging the life of the window and keeping the character of the house.

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