

"There is a boom coming for Garden Cities", Lutyens wrote to Herbert Baker in 1909. "I am in the train for Tavistock to lay out a building estate for the Duke of Bedford. I have an estate to lay out at Romford* . . . and then there is the Central Square at Hampstead."¹ Most Arts and Crafts architects were trying to catch similar trains.

The Garden City movement had begun to take shape six years earlier at Letchworth under the guidance of Barry Parker (1867–1947) and Raymond Unwin (1863–1940). Parker and Unwin were half cousins, both born near Sheffield, though Unwin was brought up in Oxford. Their relationship was made closer when Unwin married Parker's sister Ethel in 1893 and, three years later, the two teetotal socialists went into partnership as architects and planners.

Late in life Mrs. Parker remembered, "As I see the partnership, Unwin had all the zeal of a social reformer with a gift for speaking and writing and was inspired by Morris, Carpenter and the early days of the Labour Movement. Parker was primarily an artist. Texture, light, shade, vistas, form and beauty were his chief concern. He wanted the home to be a setting for a life of aesthetic worth.

"I always felt the Parker, Unwin partnership was an ideal one; each had a deep affection for the other and admiration for each other's gifts—so profoundly different and yet complementary."²

Unwin had attended Ruskin's lectures in Oxford and he was a friend of Edward Carpenter, † probably

* In the event neither of these jobs came to much.

† Edward Carpenter (1844–1929) was ordained but broke from the church to spend his life working with the poor. He set up as a market gardener at Millthorpe in Derbyshire near Sheffield and became an influential figure in the socialist circles of the '80s and '90s. He also made sandals on the Indian pattern: they were so popular that they became the hallmark of a whole class of English intellectuals. He shared with his friend Ashbee an enthusiasm for homogenic love (Platonic homosexuality).

through whom he met William Morris. Unwin became a socialist and an enthusiastic contributor to Morris's *Commonweal*. His first job was as apprentice engineer for the Stavely Coal and Iron Company, for which he worked on miners' housing.

Parker was articled in 1889 to G. Faulkner Armitage, who, besides having a drawing office, owned a workshop and smithy—an excellent training ground for a young Arts and Crafts architect. When Parker first set up on his own at Buxton in 1895, he, like Voysey fourteen years before, earned most of his living from designs for textiles, wallpaper and furniture rather than architecture.

The first big commission gained by the Parker and Unwin partnership was at New Earswick near York, where in 1901 the chocolate magnate Joseph Rowntree had bought an estate on which to house his workers. It was to be a philanthropic model village, in the tradition of Port Sunlight and Bournville, created by Rowntree's fellow Quaker cocoa kings, the Cadburys.* The roots of the tradition ran deep—one strand went at least as far back as Saltaire, near Bradford, the model village built for his workers by Sir Titus Salt in the mid-nineteenth century; another strand touched the bosky tastefulness of Bedford Park.

At New Earswick, Parker and Unwin started a series of experiments in layout which were to continue throughout their association (which formally ended in 1914). The aim was to reduce the amount of expensive road needed to give access to all houses on a site while giving every house its pleasant view. They were particularly vehement about the horror of the

* The master plan for Port Sunlight, Lord Leverhulme's model village for soapworkers, was implemented by Thomas Mawson, the Arts and Crafts landscape architect, on the formal lines of an Arts and Crafts garden. Its cottagy rows of houses were to be built in a blend of Old English and Voysey.



197 Parker & Unwin. *New Earstwick, near York* (from 1901)

back yards created by the parallel rows of bye-law housing, the standard for working people. In a 1902 Fabian tract Unwin wrote, "It does not seem to be realized hundreds of thousands of working women spend the bulk of their lives with nothing better to look on than the ghastly prospect offered by these back yards, the squalid ugliness of which is unrelieved by a scrap of fresh green to speak of spring, or a fading leaf to tell of autumn."¹³ Sunlight was vital too. "It must be looked upon as an absolute *essential*, second only to air-space."¹⁴

Parker and Unwin solved the problem of view and sunlight by abolishing the old cottage parlour and making a living room which ran from front to back of the house. This allowed the cottages to be laid out in terraces and yet attract sunlight no matter how they were turned. The planners were convinced that, when building cheap houses for the working classes, "however desirable a parlour may be, it cannot be said to be necessary to health or family life."¹⁵

The through living room was developed in "Cottages near a town"¹⁶ shown by the partners at the 1903

Northern Art Workers' Guild exhibition in Manchester.* They illustrated plans for semi-detached cottages, with long living rooms, enhanced by a bay at one end and incorporating a snug inglenook round the range. They were to be laid out in a chequered pattern so that streets fronts alternated between pairs of cottages and pairs of gardens; the streets were parallel but the effect—houses set amongst greenery—was intended to be the antithesis of the corridor-like bye-law layout.

In October of the same year, Parker and Unwin were asked to compete with a combination of Lethaby and Ricardo, and with two local architects for the post of planners for the first garden city at Letchworth. The Northerners won and so became the chief interpreters of the new movement.

The idea of garden cities had originated in *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, published in 1898 by Ebenezer Howard, in which the solution to late Victorian urban problems was suggested to be a series of new towns. They would counteract the pull

* The scheme was originally designed for a real site at Starbeck near Harrogate in 1902. A prototype pair was built.

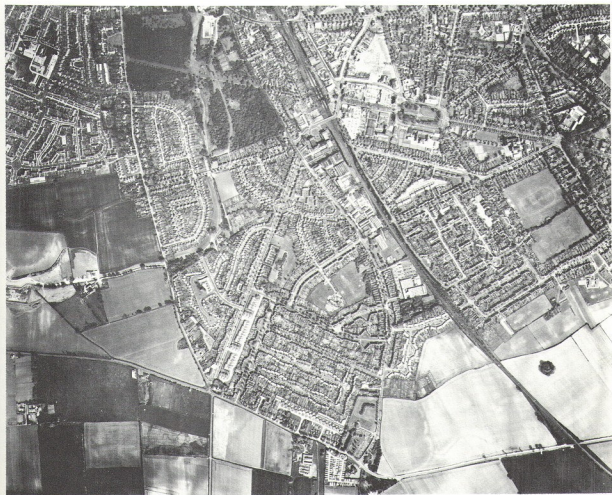
of the cities by offering all the amenities of urban life as well as the pleasures of living in a balanced, semi-rural community. Each garden city was to be defined in size and surrounded by a belt of agricultural land sufficient to feed the predetermined maximum population.

Howard's vision of houses set in gardens in the countryside was very similar to that of *News from Nowhere*, but it was firmly tied to the practicalities of the late nineteenth century. For instance, in *Tomorrow's* successor, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1902), a ring of garden cities was to surround each great metropolis, connected to it radially and to each other in a circle by fast railways. In *News*, the railway, like all

other machines Morris hated, had become obsolete.

At Letchworth 3,826 acres were purchased by a joint stock company set up by Howard's disciples and, in January 1904, Parker and Unwin started work. They took 1,300 acres for the town,⁷ leaving the rest as the agricultural belt. Their design bore more than passing resemblance to Howard's diagrams of the ideal garden city, in which central public buildings were surrounded by a park, and then rings of houses and gardens, all girdled by a railway and factories on the edge of the agricultural belt. But, as Mervyn Macartney recorded in the *Architectural Review*, when Letchworth began to take shape, "The present plan . . . is much more rational. The centre of the town will be taken up by the municipal buildings upon which a number of straight roads converge like the spokes of a cycle upon the hub, and round the centre will be conveniently grouped such buildings as

198 Parker & Unwin. Letchworth (design 1903) from the west. Formal avenues focus on town centre (top right)



the public hall, institute, museum, school, post office, and so forth. This part of the town all lies south of the G.N.R. which runs right through the middle of the estate, and half a mile or so eastwards come the factories. By this arrangement the factories not only gain direct access to the main line through their goods station and sidings, but also are so placed that their smoke, smell and noise will be carried away from the town by the prevailing wind."⁸

Typical of the south of the town are streets edged with broad belts of grass planted with flowering trees; then there are footpaths, the hedges of the front gardens and the houses well set back, usually in semi-detached blocks or short terraces; behind them are ample back gardens. The avenue was common in the affluent suburbs of large manufacturing towns like Leeds and Birmingham in the '90s but through Parker and Unwin planning, its amenities became accessible to relatively poor people.

To the north of the railway, the layout is more economical, lacking so many tree-lined roads but still with sizeable front and back gardens. This was the area in which a cheap cottage competition was held in 1905; several Arts and Crafts architects entered, including Smith and Brewer, Troup, Baillie Scott and Randall Wells.

The layout of the more formal part, south of the railway, is remarkably like an Arts and Crafts garden. While virtually all the houses (by Parker and Unwin and other architects) are based on irregular vernacular models, the streets show the love of vista, axes and order that Prior had so strenuously advocated in garden making. It is a gentle irony that the layout now focuses on a grand symmetrical design of tall poplars which outline the plan of the formal municipal buildings that were never constructed for lack of funds.

Unwin shared Prior's horror of landscape gardening, believing that "any attempt to copy nature must be futile, for the conditions of natural growth are so complex as to be quite beyond the power of the gardener to understand or reproduce." Yet formalism could go too far, for "the formalist needs to remember that his design is subordinate to the site, that the undulation of the ground and the presence of natural features of beauty worth preserving will frequently require some departure from the regularity of his treatment."⁹

Planning, like gardening, should take a middle way between formal and naturalistic. Unwin was sceptical of attempts to recapture the picturesque interest of old irregular village streets which grew up over a long

period of time. In any case, he believed that "the relationships of feudalism have gone, and democracy has yet to evolve some definite relationships of its own, which when they come will doubtless be as picturesque as the old forms."¹⁰

A degree of order in the main features of a town plan would make it easier to understand but excessive symmetry, for instance, could result in inconvenience and over rigid imposition of formal rules could lead to the destruction of natural features such as trees and hedgerows which would help to relate buildings to the countryside.

Raymond Unwin got another chance to test his planning theories when, in 1905, he was made planner of the Hampstead Garden Suburb. The idea of the suburb originated with Mrs. Barnett, a lifelong worker in the East End slums who was instrumental in setting up the Whitechapel Art Gallery, later given its permanent home by Townsend (p. 129). An extension of the underground railway made possible redevelopment on the northern approaches to Hampstead Heath, which until then had been countryside. Mrs. Barnett was determined to preserve at least part of the country as open land and, beyond that, to create an area where working men, at the expense of a twopenny tube fare, could enjoy a life of freedom among gardens and tree lined streets.

Mrs. Barnett secured her piece of countryside, a long thin strip running north from the Heath, and Parker and Unwin were required to work out development in the long thin tongues of land surrounding it and on the hill which terminated the extension to the north. The first plan was full of informal curved roads snaking round the top of the hill on which Mrs. Barnett was determined to build an Anglican church as the community's focus. In the long western tongue of development land next to the Heath extension, the planners proposed a small area of the chequered housing they had exhibited at the 1903 Northern Art Workers' Guild exhibition.

The final plan (1912) was more formal, with a fan of avenues stretching east from Lutyens's central square and its two churches, Anglican and free. On the westward slope, development was more irregular along gently curving streets. To the north, across Lyttleton Road, was an area of semi-detached houses for workers' families on long cul-de-sacs (for which a special Act of Parliament had to be passed to overcome the bye-law insistence on through streets). In the troublesome western strip against the Heath, the planners elaborated cul-de-sac plans by placing



199 Hampstead Garden Suburb centre, from the west

courtyards at the end of each. (Baillie Scott's Waterlow Court was the most complete of these.) The aims, as usual, were to allow maximum use of the site for minimum road length and to provide all dwellings with sunlight and garden views, both front and back.

Other than in this strip, the Suburb (carefully so called because it did not possess all the urban amenities of a Garden City) was laid out according to Unwin's rule that there should be no more than twelve houses to the acre. The rule was based on sound economic principle, elaborated in Unwin's pamphlet "Nothing gained by overcrowding", in which he showed that, except where land was unusually expensive, such developments "cause the cost of roads to outweigh the saving in cost of land which results from there being more than twelve houses to the acre."¹¹

This low density was later to produce some of Britain's duller housing estates from the drawing

boards of local authorities and speculative builders in the inter-war years. But the Garden Suburb as seen from the long north slope of Hampstead Heath is a complete Arts and Crafts village, rising sharp out of the green (though not quite as crisply as Unwin, who advocated a great town wall which was only partly built, would have liked). It is tight-knit, yet leafy, with tile pitch piled upon brick gable until the whole composition is crowned by the leaded spire of Lutyens's superb Gothic-cum-Georgian church—wonderfully picturesque, but scarcely the image of a new democracy for which Unwin was searching.

The style of the church is symptomatic of the suburb in which the alteration in Arts and Crafts inspiration from vernacular to Georgian is frozen at the point of transition. Parker and Unwin had learned from the experience of Letchworth that some kind of visual control was necessary over development. At



200 Hampstead Garden Suburb, view from the Heath today dominated by Lutyens's St. Jude's Church

Letchworth, in theory, the company was to build virtually everything, but actually lack of capital necessitated involving many other developers and their architects, resulting in a great variety of architectural expression. For all the strong planning, Letchworth is architecturally chaotic, often no better than a low key, low density suburb. At Hampstead, care was taken over eaves lines, roof pitches and textures, unifying the composition. Yet below the eaves, architects were more or less free to do what they liked, Gothic or Georgian, within a restricted palette of materials. As well as Parker and Unwin, distinguished Arts and Crafts architects such as Geoffrey Lucas, Curtis Green and A. J. Penty contributed housing.

Parker and Unwin themselves usually stuck to vernacular models. From the first, they were committed Ruskinian Goths, working from the inside out. Parker, in an 1895 lecture, urged the virtues of large living rooms in small houses, then usually stuffed with small rooms modelled in miniature on the houses of the rich. The number of rooms should, he

urged, be reduced, "keeping such rooms as we do retain, large enough to be healthy, comfortable and habitable . . . But if your big room is to be comfortable it *must* have recesses. There is great charm in a room broken up in plan, where that slight feeling of mystery is given to it which arises when you cannot see the whole room from any one point in which you are likely to sit; when there is always something *round the corner*."¹² This is as clear a description of changefulness applied to domestic planning as the Arts and Crafts movement ever produced.

Equally clear is the echo of Morris. "The true method of making a room beautiful is to make all the necessary and useful things in it beautiful; so much is this true that it becomes almost impossible to design a really beautiful room that is to have no useful work done in it or natural life lived in it."¹³

The combination of these two principles created living rooms of subtlety and great simplicity of construction—white walls, exposed beams with rugs on simple timber or tiled floors: the "decorative properties inherent in the construction and in the details necessary to the building,"¹⁴ which Parker, following Morris, dearly loved.

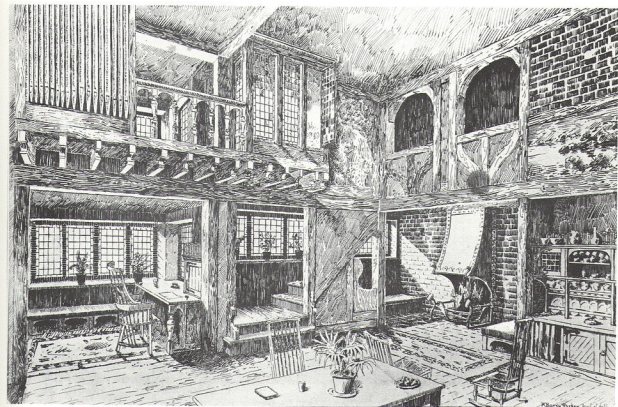
It was the vernacular cottage idiom but adopted, so

Parker and Unwin claimed, not for sentimental but for practical and artistic reasons. Even the beauty of the leaded light windows they favoured "has nothing to do with [an] old fashioned look, with romantic associations or quaintness of effect; it is simply an inherent property of all leaded glazing; due to the wonderful and never ending charm of the play of light and shade on different panes, each one catching the light slightly differently from any other, some glistening brightly, others dead and sombre, and the rest occupying every tone between the two."¹⁵

Furniture should, as far as possible, be built in to avoid the clutter of miscellaneous ornament and achieve the sensation of "reposefulness" which was the architects' main goal. The largest pieces of built-in furniture were the settles round the inglenooks, a device favoured by very many Arts and Crafts architects, which Parker and Unwin incorporated in virtually every house, no matter how small. These inglenooks were one variety of recess used to complicate and add variety to the basic oblong of their living rooms. Elsewhere, the architects rarely lost an opportunity to make a bay window or a niche for a piano.

No effort was spared to catch a view or a ray of sunlight by opening small lights wherever they were needed. The living-rooms and living halls are the great achievement of Parker and Unwin houses. They are as spare as Voysey's spaces yet more snug; they are as spatially inventive as Baillie Scott's without (except when compelled by economy in houses for the poor) adopting all the excesses of his open planning.

For all their spatial and constructional ingenuity, the outsides of Parker and Unwin houses are often disappointing. Part of the disappointment is caused by lack of originality, part by the hamfistedness which bedevils most young architects' work but which the cousins never entirely outgrew. Originality was consciously eschewed by Parker and Unwin. Parker was insistent that architects should "do nothing different from what we have done before, until we feel it to be better than what we have done before."¹⁶ By the time that Parker and Unwin started to practise, a good deal *had* been done before by the Arts and Crafts architects born in the '50s. To architects of Parker and Unwin's generation, they were models of inspiration.



201 Parker & Unwin. A living room (from "The Art of Building a Home", 1901)



202 *Parker & Unwin. The Homestead, Chesterfield, Derbyshire (1903)*



203 *Parker & Unwin. Own houses, Letchworth Lane, Letchworth (1904)*



Voysey was the main early influence,* yet externally Parker and Unwin's houses rarely achieved his serenity. For instance, their Homestead at Ashgate Road near Chesterfield (1903–5) is plainly derived from Voysey's Broadleys (1898–99)—it has the same double-height curved bays, the steeply pitched hipped roof and the buttresses. But the Parker and Unwin version is like a couple of bays of Broadleys with the rest lopped off. The roof comes down only just beyond the top of the bays, instead of engulfing them in Voysey's generous warm hug, so the eaves are high, making the house stilted and vertical. The awkwardness is enhanced by the material: rough ashlar instead of Voysey's smooth harling.

A similar gawkiness is seen in the semi-detached houses the partners built for themselves in Letchworth Lane, Letchworth (1904). Here they had the courage to carry the tiled roof all the way down to the top of the ground floor bay which projects uneasily in

204 Parker & Unwin. *The Den*, Croft Lane, Letchworth (1905)

brick from the harling of the rest of the mass. The roof is sprigged with spiky gables, and the building terminates unhappily to the south in a tower with vestigial half-timbering on the upper floor.*

More coherence was achieved in the Den, Croft Lane, Letchworth (1905) where a complicated series of white wall planes is tied together by a cosy of thatch which swoops down to near head height over the veranda—a kind of outdoor inglenook. One of the best houses of this period was 102 Wilbury Road, Letchworth (1908), designed for Stanley Parker, Barry's brother, an artist craftsman. The white walled, stone trimmed influence of Voysey is very clear, yet the manner is used with much more confidence than Parker and Unwin had achieved before. And the result, roofs sweeping down to ground floor round a

* Other influences ranged from Old English and Baillie Scott in his heavier moods to, curiously, Hoffmann. There is a design for a girls' club in Manchester (c.1909) which is plainly derived from Hoffmann's Palais Stoclet (p. 205).

* The tower was added by Parker in 1914 to provide a sleeping balcony, a very popular feature in Letchworth. The timbering framed glazing which could be thrown open on three sides to let in the health giving night air.



high gable with staggered fenestration, is something that Voysey would never have attempted but which achieves much of his clarity and calm.

In the Hampstead Garden Suburb, Parker and Unwin amalgamated vernacular and Georgian in red brick houses which, under their steep, hipped roofs, combined strips of mullioned leaded lights from the seventeenth century with brick string courses and quoins from the eighteenth. Despite their disparate origins, these semis achieve a quiet four-square elegance which, though never reaching the heights of Arts and Crafts work, shows what an excellent second eleven the movement could field, given the opportunity.

Of the little non-domestic work produced by the partnership, the shops at the entrance to Hampstead Garden Suburb are the most dramatic example. High and Hanseatic, the buildings were intended to be a formal gate to the suburb, but, instead of choosing classical forms to make a monumental statement, Parker and Unwin stuck to their ideals and produced a group in brick topped with hipped

205 *Parker & Unwin. 102 Wilbury Road, Letchworth (1908), for Stanley Parker*

gables and a little tower. It was a monument in the Gothic spirit though the architects had to turn to Germany for inspiration.

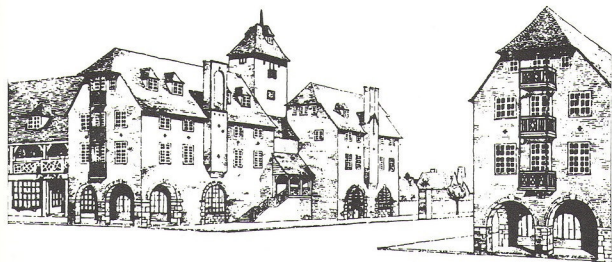
Parker was one of the very few Arts and Crafts architects able to pursue the movement's ideals relatively free of commercial and stylistic pressures long after the War.

In 1901 Parker had dictated that "the influence of machinery on art is one of the most degrading we have to contend with, for every advance made by machinery must mean a corresponding retreat on the part of art."¹⁷ But by 1925, he accepted that "the introduction of machines into art and craft has changed everything. The machine has come to stay and we must accept it. It is useless to hark back and demand only things made by hand. As a work of art, a thing which can be made as well by a machine as it can be made by hand is equally good made either way."¹⁸

If the machine was accepted, the quietness of



206 Parker & Untwin. Houses, Hampstead Garden Suburb



207 Parker & Untwin. Shops at entrance to Hampstead Garden Suburb

Parker's designs was unaffected. His clumsy gentleness continued in buildings like the Royston Cottage Hospital (1924-28) and the library and dining hall of King Alfred's School, Hampstead (1927-29).

By the time he was working on King Alfred's, Parker was a man out of his time. Most architects had accepted the rule of the Orders. A few were struggling to establish the fledgling Modern Movement, which was to subject architecture unequivocally to the rule of the Machine.

H. S. Goodhart-Rendell summed up the inter-war mood of the majority: "In the present market . . . Victorian liberty is depreciated, and the few traditions the Victorians did not sever are at a premium. We cannot understand why when Adam had perfected orderly planning the Puginists must innovate disorderly planning: why when Cockrell had brought to England the independent doctrine of the French rationalists Ruskin must force architecture to become the unquestioning handmaid of Protestant morals: why when at last secular Gothic was systemized by Waterhouse and Street it was necessary to turn from it and woo Queen Anne with bric-a-brac. We cannot understand these reactions because the memory of the actions that produced them has faded away. We have been born to freedom and find it cheap and unsatisfying; we see it against no background of broken tyranny; we see it rather as a heritage of outlawry, as the curse of the wandering Jew. We feel that we need not a Rousseau but a Mussolini."¹⁹

The great Arts and Crafts architects lingered on disdainful alike of neo-Georgian and the Modern Movement. Lethaby jeered at "ye olde modernist style" then appearing on the continent (p. 66). Voysey, who was hailed as a father of the Modern Movement, railed against the Movement's "vulgarily aggressive" proportions, its "mountebank eccentricity in detail and windows lying down on their sides." Baillie Scott spent much of his later years attacking the Modern Movement's pretensions in yards of woffly invective. Ashbee retired to keep a cynical eye on curious new developments from deepest Kent. When he met Voysey in the street in the late '30s, he "asked him how, as he looked so down and out, he was getting on. He, who had built more houses than any of us, shook his head ruefully and said 'Any house is good enough to start a car from'."²⁰

Yet it was precisely in the houses from which most of the cheap cars were started that the Arts and Crafts tradition lingered longest. Abandoned by architects, the forms were adopted by speculative builders and

local authorities. Round every sizeable town in England there is a ring of Arts and Crafts suburbs where, following planning rules drawn up by Unwin, behind laburnums and flowering cherries, the architecture of Voysey, Baillie Scott, Parker and early Lutyens lives on in endless copies of hips and gables, half-timbering and harling, mullions and leaded bay windows, with here and there an inglenook. The builders did what the architects, for all their high ideals, failed to accomplish. They brought Arts and Crafts to the people.

The image is not so very different from that seen by the man who brought news from nowhere. Cheap transport and the builders' crude copies of Arts and Crafts architecture offered a new life of individuality and freedom to multitudes who escaped from deprivation in the hearts of cities. For a movement which had started with the ideals of Ruskin and Morris, the inter-war suburb was not an entirely ignoble ending.

1 Hussey *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens*, Country Life, London 1950, p. 187

2 Mrs Parker, letter to Walter Creese 25 March 1960, Parker papers
3 Unwin, Raymond "Cottage Plans and Common Sense", Fabian Tract no. 109, London 1902, p. 4

4 *Ibid.*, p. 3

5 *Ibid.*, p. 13

6 Parker, Barry and Raymond Unwin "Cottages near a town", pamphlet in the RIBA collection

7 Creese, Walter L. *The Search for Environment*, Yale 1966, p. 205
8 Macartney, Mervyn "The first garden city", *Architectural Review*, Vol. XVIII, 1905, p. 15

9 Unwin, Raymond *Toten Planning in Practice*, T. Fisher Unwin, London 1909, pp. 119 and 125

10 Unwin, Raymond "Co-operation in building" in Parker and Unwin *The Art of Building a Home*, Longmans Green, London 1901, p. 95

11 Unwin, Raymond *Nothing gained by overcrowding! or how the Garden City type of development may benefit both owner and occupier*, Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, London 1912

12 Parker, Barry "The smaller middle class house", lecture "delivered before an audience of architects in 1895", printed in *The Art of Building a Home*, *op. cit.*, p. 3

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18

14 Parker, Barry and Raymond Unwin *The Art of Building a Home*, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. 11

15 Parker, Barry "The dignity of all true art" in *The Art of Building a home*, *op. cit.*, p. 32

16 Parker, Barry "The smaller middle class house", *op. cit.*, p. 9

17 Parker, Barry "The dignity of all true art", *op. cit.*, p. 30

18 Parker, Barry "Art in industry", lecture delivered at Balliol College, Oxford, 3 October 1925, p. 7, Parker papers

19 Goodhart-Rendell, H. S. *RIBA Journal*, Vol. XXXIII, 1926, p. 468

20 Ashbee, C. R. *Memoirs*, *op. cit.*, Vol. VII, p. 333