

Gardening on the Laing South Lodge Estate

Michael Ann Mullen

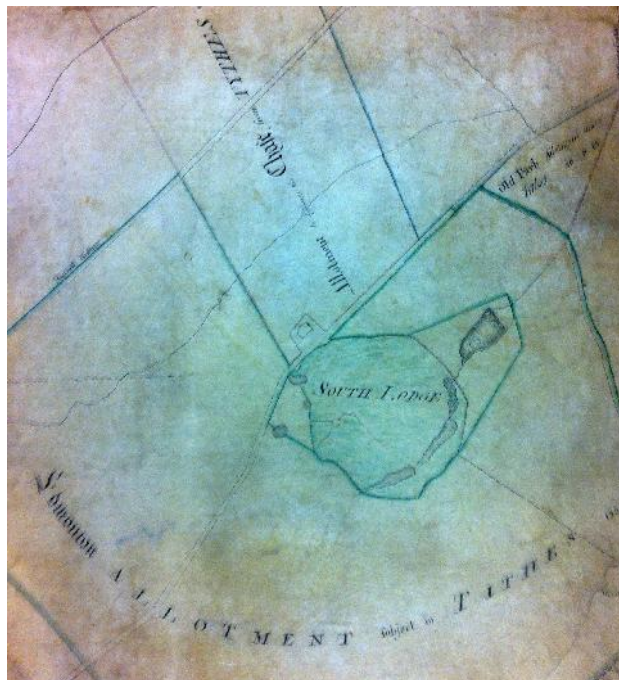


Fig. 1. Tithe Map showing South Lodge grounds, 1793.

The evolution of the grounds of the South Lodge of Enfield Chase, described by J. C. Loudon in 1839, provides a useful link between the wider landscape and the suburban gardens that now dominate this area. Sally Williams enumerates the features of the Lodge garden in her contribution.¹



Fig. 2. South Lodge in 1808.

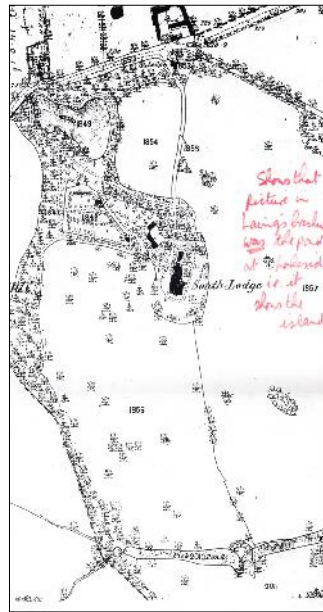


Fig. 3. South Lodge Estate, OS Map 1867.

The Lodge was still a villa estate when the first Ordnance Survey (OS) map was published in 1867. This shows the house set in landscaped grounds with outbuildings, and what look like an orchard and a kitchen garden. In the north there is a large round pond and toward the south a fish pond. Tall trees screen the north and west boundaries. The principal drive gives access to the main east-west road, and, off the map, there are major roads that link the area to London. The 1914 OS map shows only marginal changes.

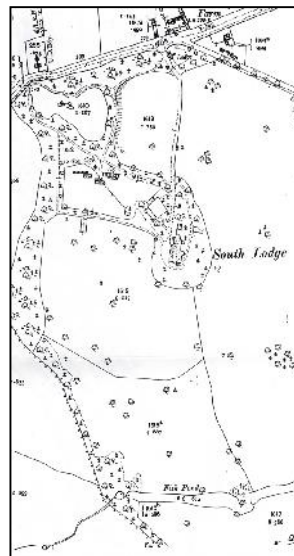


Fig. 4. South Lodge Estate, OS Map 1914.

There is somewhat less planting around the house and the orchard and kitchen garden have gone. Both ponds are still shown. The house was no longer a private residence, however; it had become a school, which may account for the simplified landscaping.

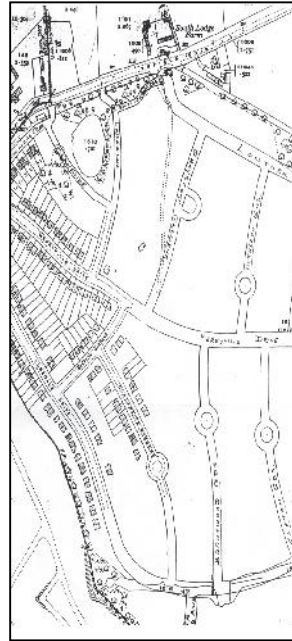


Fig. 5. South Lodge OS Map 1936.

By 1936, the Lodge was gone (dotted lines indicate where the drive had been), and the land was being converted into a housing estate by the developer John Laing. The road infrastructure was built and, in the west, the land had been divided into long narrow plots with houses and gardens typical of suburbia. The fish pond had been covered by a road, but in the north the round pond, set in a small area of park, had been retained and survives today. Further south Boxer Pond, also surrounded by parkland, was retained as well.

Most of the houses were completed by 1939. Each house [had](#) a small front and a larger back garden. The two small lakes with surrounding greenery provided a reference to the villa landscape past. Comparing the 1867 with the 1936 and 1967 [maps](#) reveals the extent of the transformation.

The origins of the type of suburban development that took place [here](#) in the nineteen-twenties and thirties -- single family homes with gardens -- lie in the garden city and suburbs movement that took off before World War One. These ideas also influenced public housing schemes in suburban areas, such as the Watling Estate in Barnet, which was built by the LCC between 1924 and 1930, but a discussion of this lies beyond the scope of this paper. The origins of the gardens in the new

suburban landscape lie in the villa gardens promoted by J. C. Loudon in the 1820s and 1830s; these provided a template for suburban gardens like those on the South Lodge Estate over a century later.

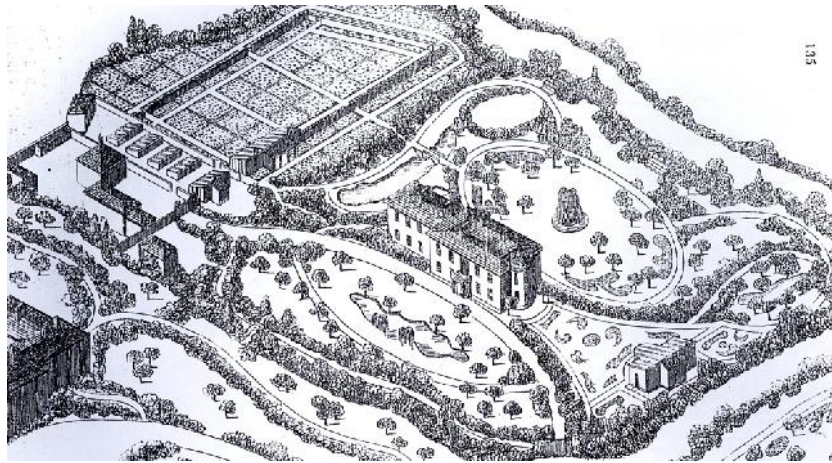


Fig. 6. 'A Villa of Four Acres, with a regular Outline.' J. C. Loudon, 1838.

The one illustrated here appeared in his *Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (1838). It was conceived as a scaled-down country house garden with informal and formal elements. The house is set in landscaped grounds and is approached by a curving drive. In front is an informal lake set in a lawn dotted with trees. Beyond paths wind through shrubberies. To the right of the house formal beds are cut into a lawn in front of a pavilion. Behind, centred in an oval lawn is a large fountain; along both sides are formal beds. From the lawn a path leads across an informal water feature through what may be an orchard to the kitchen garden. The second part of this paper will look at a garden on the Laing South Lodge estate in which it is possible to identify most of these features, but in miniaturized form. Houses with gardens set in a landscaped environment are what defined the suburbs that developed in the 1920s and 30s, according to Gillian Darley:

The garden cities [. . .] the local authority and the London County Council housing which followed the same path, and the developers of the suburbs of the 1920s and 1930s all used the garden, the possession of a patch of more or less fertile land, as the symbol of home. In the latter category the gardens became a central feature of advertising campaigns, with suitably flowery copywriter's language to enhance the message.²

Marketing material was dominated by pictures that conveyed this message. On the brochure covers housing estates were represented as natural, park-like, and anchored to the land.³ Even drawings of house interiors provided glimpses of the garden. The Laing brochure for the Enfield West or Southgate North Estate – both names were used -- where Pitt's house once stood (later South Lodge Estate), emphasizes the natural environment and tells the potential buyer that 'William Pitt the Elder,

Earl of Chatham, was one of the many famous people who resided at South Lodge, the historic estate which Laings are transforming into a beautiful residential garden. [. . .] Here once stretched the dense Forest of Middlesex and near by, kings and their retainers hunted the wild boar and the deer.’ The development is promoted as ‘a beautiful residential garden’, and the potential householder is encouraged to associate buying land and a house there with the area’s aristocratic past.

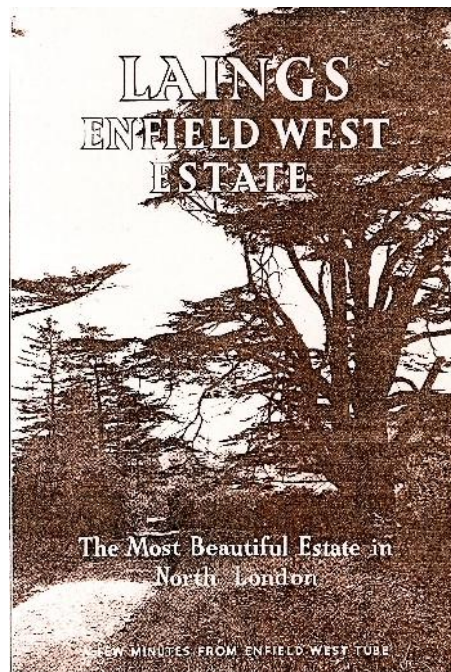


Fig. 7. Laing’s Brochure for Enfield West (South Lodge) Estate.

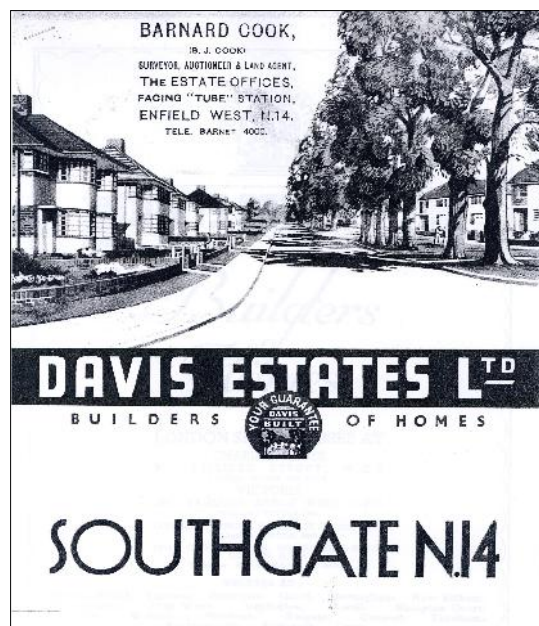


Fig. 8. Brochure for Davis Estates.

In the brochure for a nearby development by Davis Estates Ltd, trees along the centre of the street dominate the scene and provide a leafy setting for the houses. The landscaped nature of the area is emphasized: spaces under the trees are planted with grass, as are the little verges. Low walls separate the front gardens from the public street. The well-maintained greenery implies that gardeners are employed here.

The illustration on the cover of the brochure for Laing's Southgate North (South Lodge) estate encapsulates the message the developer aimed to convey: green spaces and park land are the most important features here. Not only is the estate represented like a park, but three local public parks are also indicated: Grovelands, Oakwood and the large 1,400-acre Trent Park. There is not a house in sight.

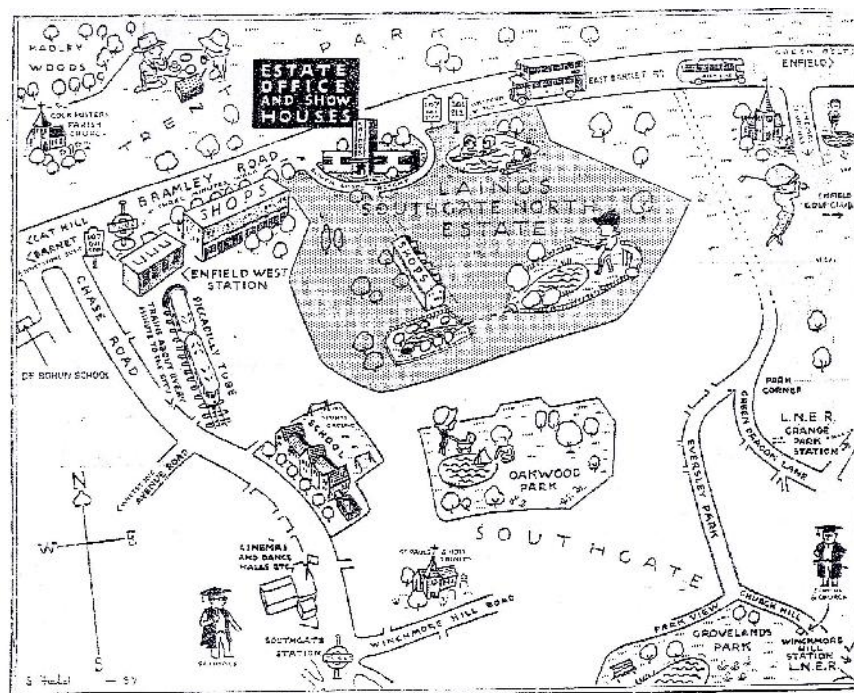


Fig. 9. Laing's Southgate North (South Lodge) Estate.

Most of the privately built houses in this area were set well back into the plot. This became the accepted way to situate the English suburban house. Although some of the promotional material shows only cursory interest, most pay considerable attention to the design of the space in front of the house. It invites potential buyers to imagine themselves in a house set *in a garden*. By focusing attention on the designed area in front of the house in this way, the images associate these houses with the tradition of the villa and the country house. This seems to suggest that by buying one of these houses the new owners will be buying into the land-owning classes.

Laing gives us an overview of three house styles (out of fifteen) popular at the time: ‘moderne’, a sort of generic traditional which they call ‘circular bay’, and Tudor, the style made popular by the Arts and Crafts Movement.⁴ Each is set in a lawn with the odd shrub and what purports to be hard landscaping appropriate to the house style. The Tudor house with its rustic gate and sundial is the most striking here. Lawns provide a graceful setting. Gates and fences are important: they act as references to the ownership and privacy afforded by a suburban house and garden. Trees in the background of all the images suggest that the houses are sited in a larger landscape. A picture of the tube station places the houses with their gardens in relation to the city beyond.

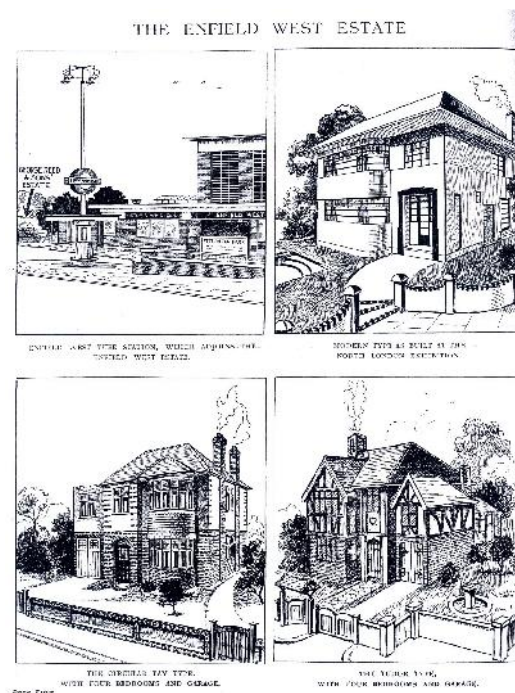


Fig. 10. Choice of building styles on the Enfield West (South Lodge) Estate.

Lush vegetation is suggested in an illustration of one design for a John Laing house. A prominent front gate defines the property line, and the house seems anchored in the garden behind its bushy hedge and shrubs. A back garden is suggested by the trellising on the far side. A front garden is a transitional space between the public street and the private house with its hidden back garden (usually when we say ‘the garden’ we are referring to the back garden). We tend to view back gardens as private spaces, and as a result we see comparatively few pictures of them.

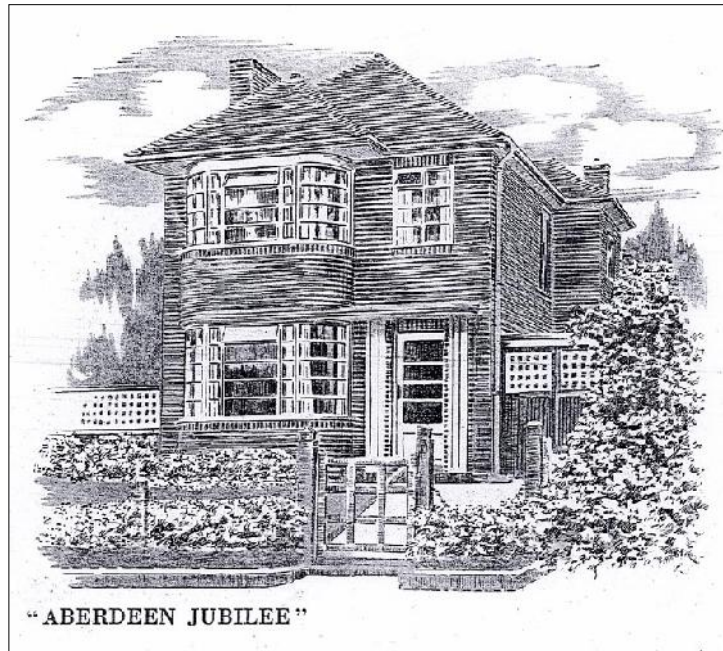


Fig. 11. One of the Laing's designs for South Lodge Estate.

The illustrations that appear in 'home and garden' magazines and coffee-table books are idealizations of the garden. They play an aspirational role today similar to that played by Loudon's villa garden plans 180 years ago. The visual evidence for real suburban gardens in the interwar period comes from pictures in a million family albums like that of the Misselke family, who bought a Laing home in the Enfield West Estate as it was being built in 1936. Their home, number sixteen Lakeside, was not finished when the survey for the 1936 map was made, nor in fact when the family bought the plot. When this research was completed in 2008, the house was still occupied by Eric Misselke, the youngest son of the original owners. Another photograph shows the garden sloping away from the house with a view in the direction of the site of the original South Lodge.



Fig. 12. The new house with old tree.



Fig. 13. View towards newly-built estate houses.

Eric Misselke's father, with the help of the family, built walls and steps and planted a lawn in 1938-39, and the eldest son helped with further works after the War in 1945. The tree seen in the background was one from the original estate incorporated into the development as the developers promised. Photographs show the family having tea on the lawn in 1948, and a meal on the terrace that Mr Misselke made in the 1970s.



Fig. 14. Hard landscaping, 1940s.



Fig. 15. Tea on the Lawn, 1948.



Fig. 16. A meal on the terrace, 1970s.

The family are seen growing vegetables in 1956, and flowers in the 1980s. So here were walls and steps, terrace, lawn and flower borders, vegetable garden, fruit trees and a garden shed, all elements of the villa garden in Loudon's plan but in miniature form. The Misselke's garden lacked only a water feature.



Fig. 17. Vegetables, 1956.



Fig. 18. Flowers, 1970s.

During the winter of 1999-2000, however, the garden was substantially changed when Eric, the son who then lived in the house, decided to redesign the garden, adding a summer-house and a pergola. On this land that was once part of the garden of the South Lodge Estate, Eric was living out the vision formulated by the garden-city makers in the 1890s and 1900s and promoted by the developers who built the place in the 1930s.



Fig. 19. Old design.



Fig. 20. New design, circa 2000.

What conclusions can be drawn? For millions of families like the Misselkes the suburban garden provided outdoor space for creative and recreational activities; each family adapted it to their own vision. Such gardens were and are used for activities that do not differ greatly from those that took place in older, ampler villa gardens. Their owners have similar aspirations; perforce, they express them on a smaller scale.

¹ J. C. Loudon, 'Notes on some Suburban Villas between London and Cheshunt, made on July 24th and August 10th 1839', *Gardener's Magazine*, 15 (1839), 509-16 (pp. 513-14); Sally Williams' paper, *Lodges and Estates of Enfield Chase*, above..

² Gillian Darley, 'Cottage and Suburban Gardens', in John Harris (editor), *The Garden: A Celebration of One Thousand Years of British Gardening* (London: V & A with Mitchell Beazley, 1979), pp. 151-58 (p. 158).

³ The Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture (MoDA) Collections Centre, Middlesex University, 9 Boulevard Drive, Beaufort Park, Colindale, London NW9 5HF contains a collection of brochures produced in the 1920s and 1930s by developers such as John Laing, Davis Estates Ltd, George Reed and Sons Ltd, George Reed and Sons Ltd, Fred Bysouth and Son, Allen Fairhead and Sons Ltd, and others who were responsible for building the housing estates during this period.

⁴ For more details of the houses on offer, see Jon Clarke, 'South Lodge Estate, Oakwood, London Borough of Enfield', in *Rediscovered Utopias: Saving London's Suburbs*, ed. by Bridget Cherry and Anne Robey (Save Britain's Heritage, 2010), pp. 150-8.

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