

Langa Township in the 1920s – an (extra)ordinary Garden Suburb

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Langa, Cape Town's oldest black African township, was initially designed as a Garden Suburb aimed at re-housing residents of Ndabeni, Cape Town's first 'location'. Its failure – its lack of a bucolic English village aesthetic and socio-spatial structure – is significant because it lays bare the wistful ambitions at the heart of the Garden City to use the romanticised image of the English village to 'uplift' social 'others'. At the same time its lack of picturesque motifs reveals the implementation of a socio-spatial ordering strategy aimed at resolving class contradictions and tensions that the Garden City Movement's bucolic imagery tended to veil. The underlying modernist impulse for control and socio-spatial order had also manifested itself in Ndabeni – the 'native' location that preceded Langa – but most significantly in the master plan of Langa itself with its 'native' administration centre occupying the 'central square', a typical motif of Garden City Movement planning. Furthermore, the ambivalent attitude towards class at the heart of the egalitarian – yet paternalistic – Garden City Movement, and, the difficulty the colonial administrators and architects had in defining and categorising black Africans in the city of Cape Town, is also apparent in the various types of accommodation that were imagined and implemented at Langa. The colonial context of Langa, thus, defines it as an extraordinary Garden Suburb, and yet, in its clear manifestation of social-spatial order – stripped bare of bucolic imagery – it can be understood essentially as an 'ordinary' Garden Suburb.

Keywords: Ndabeni, Langa, Garden City Movement

El barrio de Langa en los años 20: un barrio jardín (extra)ordinario

Langa, el barrio negro más antiguo de Ciudad del Cabo, fue diseñado inicialmente como un barrio jardín, con la intención de realojar a los residentes de Ndabeni, primer asentamiento informal de Ciudad del Cabo. Su fracaso –la carencia de estética y estructura socio-espacial de un pueblo bucólico inglés- es manifiesto porque pone al descubierto la ambición melancólica de usar la imagen romántica de un pueblo inglés en el corazón de la ciudad jardín, con el objetivo de dignificar a la "otra sociedad". Al mismo tiempo, la ausencia de motivos pintorescos revela la aplicación de una estrategia ordenadora socio-espacial, encaminada a resolver las tensiones y contradicciones entre las clases, que la imagen bucólica de la ciudad jardín trataba de ocultar. El subyacente impulso modernista por controlar y organizar social y espacialmente se había puesto de manifiesto en Ndabeni –asentamiento informal original que precedió a Langa-, pero más significativamente en el propio plan ordenador de Langa, con su centro administrativo "nativo" ocupando la "plaza central", un elemento de planeamiento característico del movimiento de las ciudades jardín. Además, la actitud ambivalente hacia las clases en el igualitario –aunque paternalista- movimiento de las ciudades jardín, y las dificultades de los administradores coloniales y arquitectos tenían para definir y categorizar a los negros africanos en Ciudad del Cabo, son igualmente evidentes en los diversos tipos de viviendas que fueron imaginados y aplicados en Langa. El contexto colonial, por tanto, define a Langa como un barrio jardín extraordinario; sin embargo, en su clara manifestación del orden socio-espacial –sin considerar la imagería bucólica- puede ser entendido como un barrio jardín "ordinario".

Palabras clave: Ndabeni, Langa, ciudad jardín

At the beginning of the 20th century, architectural and social-spatial discourse was dominated by the anti-urban ideals of the Garden City Movement and its adjunct, the Arts and Crafts Movement. As a reaction to industrial urbanisation and the development of the 'deviant' space of slums (Evans 1997), the English village was held to be an ideal social-spatial environment whereby nascent working-class society and culture could be overwritten by an 'Englishness' defined by its middle-class proponents (Meacham 1999: 4). The village formed the touchstone for reformist housing programmes where the rationalising and ordering impulses of modernity were contradictorily aimed at instituting a bucolic medieval environment which had ironically emerged through organic development processes. The picturesque village was literally considered to be an instrument whereby the beautiful and charming aesthetic of village life could magically reform, uplift and 'better' those who had been exposed to the social ills of the city. Whilst the financial mechanisms of the original Garden Cities were aimed at developing cheap and available rural land by pooling residents' initial investment money, Garden *Suburbs* were

essentially similar in form and sentiment to their predecessors but without the communitarian-capitalist development intent. However, both Garden Cities and Garden Suburbs such as Letchworth and Hampstead were nevertheless intended as liquor-free places where both the middle and working class residents could meet in public-betterment buildings but be maintained in ‘appropriate’ and segregated residential zones. In Hampstead Garden Suburb this is most clearly demonstrated in the establishment of an ‘artisan’s quarter’ around Asmunds Place and Asmunds Hill.

These utopian and paternalistic ideals were transplanted and translated by English architects and administrators into pre-apartheid colonial Cape Town where issues of preserving ‘tribal’ or ‘native’ life added their own complexities. Nevertheless, the same reformist desire to overwrite ‘other’ class identities with an imagined bucolic Englishness prevailed – initially, at least – in the promotion of housing schemes for ‘natives’. As we will see, even ‘native’ society at the Cape was stratified into classes that mimicked the socio-spatial segregation evident in Garden Suburbs and Cities in England. Three closely-related housing projects – Ndabeni, Pinelands, and Langa – are key examples of the conundrum of colonial desires and conflicting impulses that the ‘stewards of the city’ were grappling with and the consequences of which are written across the cracked face of Cape Town still to this day. Although this paper will focus on the early development of Langa as a (failed) Garden Suburb in line with English visions of the Garden City Movement, Ndabeni and Pinelands are a necessary adjunct to that story. Thus this paper begins with an overview of the development of Ndabeni and the difficulty it presented the stewards of the city as a ‘location.’ This is followed by an account of the early development of Langa and how AJ Thompson, Raymond Unwin’s protégé and office manager (Miller 1992: 89), initially implemented key Garden City design elements in line with Unwin’s designs in England. Reference is also made to Thompson’s involvement in refining the layout design of Pinelands which can be taken as a closer model for Garden City ideals. However, it is at Langa that essential Garden City Movement ideals were proposed, but were ultimately undermined by a lack of commitment to public funding of the scheme. Moreover, the lack of a softened edge to Langa’s final design is fundamental in helping clarify the strong impulses of social control at the heart of the Garden City Movement which tended to be veiled behind the soft-focus image of picturesque village life. It is in the extraordinary context of Cape Town at the beginning of the twentieth century that these intentions became most starkly revealed, making Langa both ordinary in its embodying these ideals, and extraordinary in laying them so bare.

Ndabeni: the location of ‘the native’

Ndabeni was established about seven kilometres outside of Cape Town and was developed as a residential centre for black Africans who had come to Cape Town as migrant labourers towards the end of the 19th Century (Saunders 1979). Although the arrival of the plague at the Cape in 1901 led to its rapid development, Ndabeni had been planned a few years before as part of the Cape of Good Hope’s governmental strategy for rural, migrant labour control. The dominant rationale for its establishment was that ‘natives,’ who were finding rental accommodation in places such as District Six, were being tainted by ‘civilisation’ and were best isolated from the bad influences of the city. The key to understanding Ndabeni’s development is that it was legally defined as a ‘location’ – a portion of ‘native’ territory administered by the central government of the Cape. Through various legislative amendments the ‘location’ became the only territory in which black Africans could reside in Cape Town – apart, that is, from those living on the farms on which they worked, or indeed if they were property owners in Cape Town itself. By 1902 it became illegal for those not on the municipal voters role to rent accommodation in Cape Town except in Ndabeni. Moreover, unlike in earlier locations in places such as East London (Minkley 1998) and Port Elizabeth (Baines 1994), the space of Ndabeni was highly controlled

and administered to the point where ‘natives’ were not allowed to build their own houses except through plans approved by the Administrator of the Cape. Ironically, this move to establish control over where and how ‘natives’ could live effectively put the onus of providing housing on the government; the creation of Ndabeni essentially established Cape Town’s first state-driven housing scheme.



The Main Thoroughfare.

Figure 1
Ndabeni, 1920s (source: The National Library).

What is interesting for this study is the desire of the administrators to institute social hierarchy and structure through the built environment of Ndabeni. Prior to Ndabeni’s expeditious establishment as a reaction to the plague, the Commission on a Native Location for Cape Town reached a draft agreement on the 17th October 1900, which set out some basic principles for the new location that was being considered¹ Three classes of ‘natives’ were defined, namely, “the temporary or migratory, the permanent or settled and the educated or superior Natives,” but only two kinds of accommodation were suggested, namely, “a few small cottages for some stable Natives especially those with families [and] a few larger rooms or barrack rooms for accommodation of migratory Natives”. This desire for social-spatial ordering is indicative of the need to manage the contradictions that colonialism had established at the Cape; gradations of Westernisation were symbolically coalesced into gradations of accommodation where barracks were a blank moment in the lives of the migratory labourers who were meant to pass through its characterless space unchanged and preserved as ‘native’. The sudden arrival of the plague saw the rapid deployment of corrugated iron ‘huts’ that were arranged in regularised rows reminiscent of military encampments that were being established elsewhere as part of the South African war.² (Figure 1) Consequently, Ndabeni did not enact in space its planned or imagined social hierarchies of ‘civilised Africans’ in ‘cottages’ versus tradition-oriented migrant labourers in compounds. Furthermore, the constant removal of signs of ‘otherness’ such as wattle-and-daub wind screens as well as the relentless rigour of Ndabeni’s layout are clear examples of how Ndabeni was, already at its initiation, considered a potentially problematic ‘native’ space that had to be managed because of its proximity to ‘civilisation.’ However, the later establishment of round Nissen huts to the east of the settlement (Figure 2) points to the ambivalence in the conception of Ndabeni; here Ndabeni is both a ‘location’ or ‘native space’ as well as a highly-

ordered and regularised 'white space'. These crude and inadequate imaginings of 'African' dwellings were in essence sanitised through the brutal sterile surface of corrugated iron and cauterised on the grid of efficiency and control. In other words, within the bluntly defined 'native' space of the location, no 'native' building materials and structures were allowed, yet the circle as the 'archetypal' signifier of 'Africa' was deployed, proclaiming this territory as 'native' space and its inhabitants as visitors to the city from *another place*.



Figure 2
Aerial photo of Ndabeni, 1926 (source: The City of Cape Town).

A few months after Ndabeni was hurriedly put together, efforts were made to make the environment more attractive and differentiated, with churches, a hospital, and a recreation hall planned. The ambivalence with which Ndabeni was approached comes through in the provision of the recreation hall, with the Public Works Department's Lewis Mansergh suggesting that the "design already framed might be slightly altered from its present severity of outline in order to make the Hall somewhat more of a feature in the Location".³ The clerk of works suggested a year later that "a market place should be established with stalls erected something similar to those used on the market places in English Country Towns".⁴ The Public Works Department was even keen on building some "model cottages" in 1902.⁵ These records are important, because they suggest that even before Garden City ideas came to dominant Cape Town's housing concerns, and despite the truth of the sterile, efficient and relentless architecture of Ndabeni, there was an impulse on the part of the stewards of the city to implement an environment that they were familiar with, and which would perhaps have been developed if it were not for the arrival of

the plague in Cape Town in 1901. Such moves would have softened the brutal reality of the colonial world for the stewards of the city, with Ndabeni at least pretending to have an air of English bucolic life about it. Notwithstanding these efforts, Ndabeni, with its razor-wire fence and gridded concentration-camp-like layout (Figure 1) was more representative of the emergency housing and concentration camps being developed during the South African War rather than being indicative of Garden City or Arts and Crafts Movement ideals. Furthermore, the seven-inch numbers⁶ attached to the dwellings were a sign, not for postal services, but for the more efficient management and control of this urban workforce, and an index that routed ‘natives’ back to a magisterial district in the tribal areas from where they came. It was, however, through the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 – explored below – that the more precise control and management of urbanized ‘natives’ was imagined.

The Native (Urban Areas) Act and the move towards Langa

The Native (Urban Areas) Act (hereafter NUAA) of 1923 attempted to close the gap between central state and local municipal responsibility in the management and control of migrant labour and the location of black people in the urban areas of South Africa. The passing of the NUAA put the onus of providing accommodation for the ‘native’ residents of the city in the hands of the City Council. In fact, even though Ndabeni was within the borders of the City, it was still a legally separate entity, and as a Government reserve was exempt from legislation such as the NUAA. It was only incorporated into Cape Town because the City Council elected to declare Cape Town under the NUAA on the 1st April 1926⁷ – the registering and control of ‘natives’ in the city, through their allocation in space that this Act facilitated, would have been rendered inoperable had Ndabeni remained as a Government Reserve.

Although the City’s Overcrowding Sub-Committee of the Public Health & Building Regulations Committee had, at the beginning of 1918, entertained the possibility of establishing another location where married ‘natives’ could own land,⁸ it was after WWI and the Influenza Epidemic of 1918 (Phillips 1990) that the presence of ‘natives’ in the city once again became noted as problematic, especially due to the fact that magistrates refused to turn them out of their rented dwellings as there was no space for them in Ndabeni. Consequently, the City Engineer was given an instruction towards the end of 1918 to investigate the possibility of the “development of a portion of the ‘Vijgekraal Estate’ off Klipfontein Road as a Native Location”.⁹ The Native Affairs Commission, set up by the Central Government to investigate retaining and extending Ndabeni, offered their suggestion that a new “location” for “permanent male residents who were usually married with families, and for women” be established, whilst Ndabeni could be used as a residence for the “floating population” – meaning migrant labourers – and as a “clearing house for Natives coming to look for work”.¹⁰ The Special Committee rejected Vijgekraal as a possible site due to its proposed use as a sewage disposal area, and objected to the continued use of Ndabeni “owing to the nature of the ground and to its proximity to the proposed new [‘whites-only’] Garden City [of Pinelands]”.¹¹ Already then, at a preliminary stage, the boundaries and proximities of race and class were being thought through and potentially separated through space.

To deal with the need to institute a new location and the impending NUAA, the Council established the Natives Township Committee in 1922, which a little while later became the Native Affairs Committee (hereafter NAC). The importance of the work at hand was indicated by the presence of the various mayors of Cape Town at its meetings who were also often enough members when not holding that high office. Right from its first meeting in November 1922, the Committee considered the location as a “township,”¹² in other words, a new residential

significantly, he was conscripted as one of the labourers who planted the trees at Uityvlugt where Ndabeni was established and thus the spatial and historical significance was far more locally rooted. The Superintendent of Ndabeni, R. Harrison, had strong reservations about “honouring a rebel” and suggested naming the township

after the village at which the great explorer and Missionary, Livingstone died, viz., CHITAMBA. There is no doubt that Dr. Livingstone did more for the Bantu races, and the civilization of the sub-continent than any other human being, and although his name and work is not known so well to the general run of natives in this part of the country, especially the uneducated, as that, for instance, the rebel Langalibalele, it is held by many that judged from every other aspect it would be incomparably a happier, and more suitable selection, and more likely to meet with the approval, not only of Europeans, but native people throughout the country wherein he laboured and gave up his long and noble life.¹⁵

The “civilizing” aspirations of the Superintendent and the possibility of developing Langa in the spirit of Livingstone are written between the lines. The NAC after deliberation adopted the name “Nqubela,” meaning “success” as “a suitable name for the new Native Township.” As an ironic conclusion to the naming affair, the Secretary of the Cape Peninsula Native Welfare Society wrote in a letter dated 18th July 1923 that the name “Nqubela” “has a click which is unpronounceable by the majority of Europeans and will therefore be consistently mispronounced,”¹⁶ and requested that the township be called Langa Village. The stage was set to begin design work and the imagining of a new village with cottages located a bit beyond the cottage and picturesque Pinelands Garden City (Figure 3).

Pinelands, AJ Thompson and the design of Langa

At the suggestion of the City Engineer, T.B. Lloyd Davies, the Council engaged the English architect Albert John Thompson, who had successfully completed the design of the Pinelands Garden City, to prepare the layout for Langa township for 5,000 residents, capable of expanding to 10,000¹⁷ residents. Thompson, who as early as 1921 had been lecturing members of the Cape Institute for Architecture on his work in England, had been used by the Pinelands Garden City Trust to rationalise John Perry’s winning layout design for Pinelands and oversee the submittals of building plans. The accommodation for 5,000 residents was intended to cover the number of residents at Ndabeni that needed to be catered for so that Ndabeni could be closed down. However, following discussion with the NAC and consideration of a police report suggesting that as many as 5,000 ‘natives’ were resident in Cape Town proper, the numbers were increased to 8,000 for the first phase and 12,000 for the total. The township, as was the case with any Garden City proposal, was also to include administrative quarters, a hospital, a school, a police station, shops, and staff cottages.

There is scant evidence to suggest that the architect involved in the design and planning of Langa was motivated by any directly racist ideas, yet there was much in Garden City Movement ideology (Meacham 1999: 9) to suggest intended social ordering along class lines of ‘otherness’ ranging from tribal ‘natives’ to Christian ‘natives’ with middle-class aspirations. Thompson had worked in Raymond Unwin’s office through the duration of the Letchworth Garden City and Hampstead Garden Suburb projects (Miller 1992: 53). This in itself would suggest that Langa was intended to be a social machine in which aesthetics and the implementation of “village life” was to have an uplifting effect for the ‘class’ of person it was designed for. Like Ndabeni before it, Langa was conceived programmatically as a place divided between those who were understood to be permanent married residents of Cape Town and those who were single, the latter social status further differentiated between men and women. Thus the residential requirements were considered to be 500 cottages, one hostel for 2,000 single men and one hostel for 100 single women. Thompson, who had been contracted on the 27th April 1923, submitted his initial report and layout to the NAC on the 28th June 1923.¹⁸

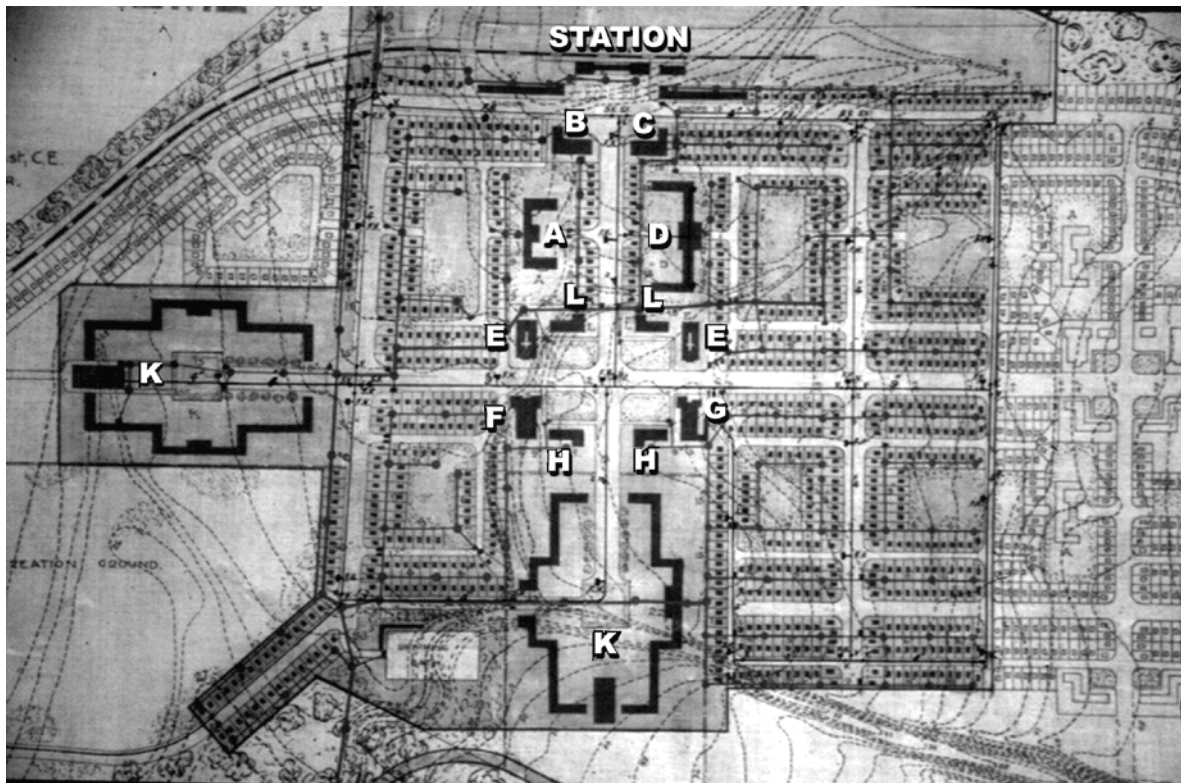


Figure 4

Langa layout, Drainage plan, 1923. Key: A. School, B. Meat Market, C. Fruit & Veg Market, D. Compound for 200 Single Women, E. Churches, F. Picture Theatre, G. Police Station, H. Admin, K. Compound for 2,000 Single Men, L. Church House (source: Cape Archives, M3/4005: key by author).

The only layout drawing remaining from that initial design is a drainage-plan overlay using the basic layout plan underneath (Figure 4). The primary structuring device Thompson used in the layout of the township was to locate the main roads, east-west and north-south, on the line of the existing fire-paths that ran through the forest, the reason being to retain “some of the very fine trees which are already existing on the lines of these proposed roads”.¹⁹ Another main consideration was that the railway line be pushed to the boundary of the township so that no traffic – except that for the hospital – would be required to cross it. The train station and the eating hall of one hostel formed the main axis terminations for Station Avenue running north-south, whilst the other hostel’s eating hall formed a minor axial termination for Central Avenue running east-west and crossing Station Avenue at Central Square. Central Square was the intended location of the administration and police quarters, as well as a cinema and two churches – a sort of church and state power-bloc, and perhaps the cinema a sign of commodification of the public realm. On the other hand, the station and its square was to form the commercial centre of the scheme, with fish and meat market halls, and fruit and vegetable market halls flanking Station Avenue, and rows of shops flanking the station. The women’s hostel was to be located opposite the school, and a pool was to be located at the southwest corner of the scheme, mainly to assist in controlling water run-off at the lowest point. These points aside, it seems clear – from Thompson’s concern for placing the school away from the traffic of the main roads together with his concern for trees and his leaving open play areas behind the cottages – that he was basing the design of Langa on key elements of the Garden City Movement. The 1,920 cottages dotted around the scheme – 8.5 to the acre as he pointed out – are of a density characteristic of the emerging Garden Suburbs in England and South Africa itself and were indicative of the extent to which the township may have been developed in the future. Each plot size was to be standard Garden City Movement sizes of 50’ x 100’.

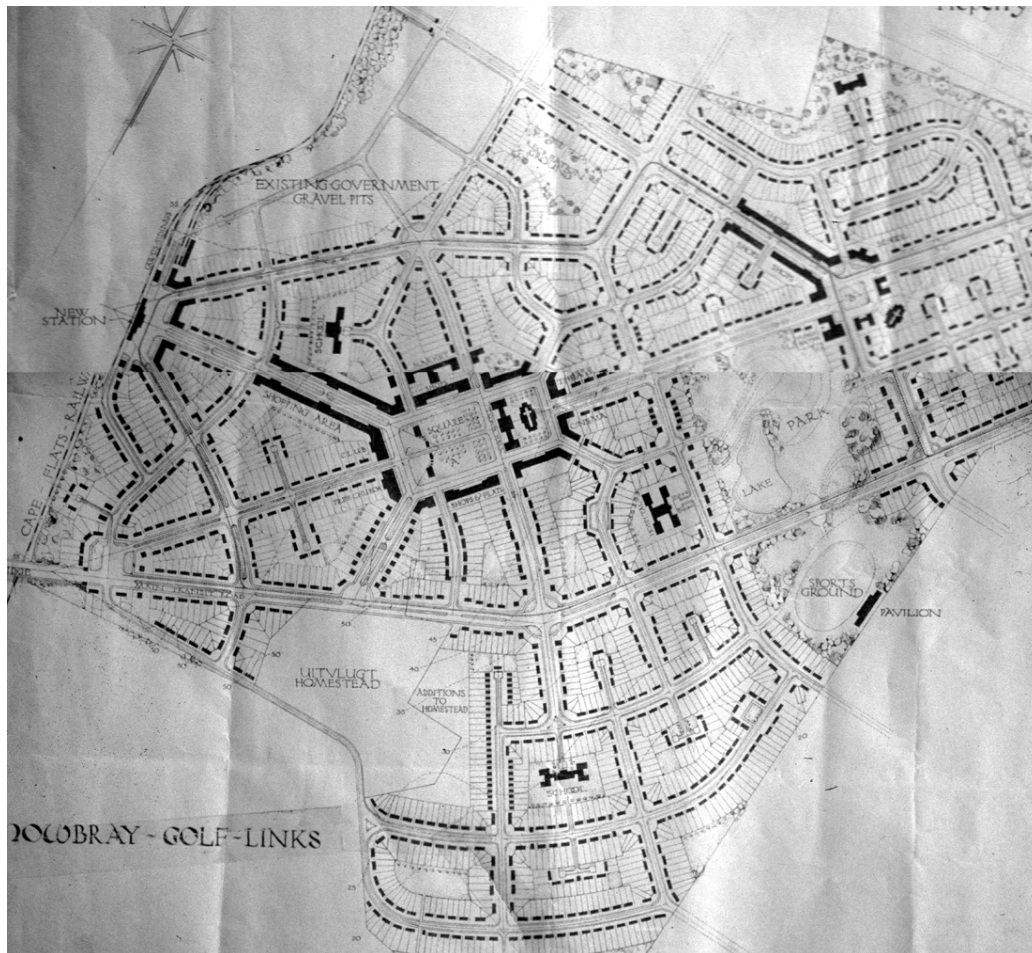


Figure 5

Pinelands layout of initial development c.1920 (source: Cape Archives, M4-1902).

There were, however, telltale elements of the design that defined the space as a ‘location’ and suggest that the implications of the country’s racial rationalities were not lost on Thompson. The Police Station was specifically located to give “efficient police control,” whereby:

A man on duty at the tower will be able to see over the whole Estate, and again a man on point duty at the centre of what you might call the Central Square will be able to see not only from end to end of the Central Avenue, but will be able to look into each of the large Compounds and directly up to the Station Square, and a Police Patrol on the roads running North and South would get immediate view East and West down all the other roads and across the open spaces.²⁰

Furthermore, Thompson suggests that his “compounds” were modelled on those on the Crown Mines in Johannesburg (although the 27’ x 30’ unit was intended to accommodate 25 men and not 40 as in Johannesburg) – it should be noted that ‘hostels,’ rather than ‘compounds,’ was the standard form of group-housing in the typical Garden Suburb; the word ‘compound’ indicates an acknowledgement by Thompson that the single men were considered more along the lines of prisoners held within a controlled space.

Thompsons’ use of other words indicates similar difficulties in making sense of this extraordinary context that the Garden City ideals were being transposed to. At one point in the report Thompson refers to the family dwellings as ‘huts’ which suggests either that Thompson was using the term in a way he thought appropriate to the proposed inhabitants, or because he thought they were to erect their own dwellings which would be traditional in construction, but this term was most likely used to signify that it was small 20’ x 20’ dwellings that was intended to be provided by the City. Whatever the case, a little later in the project he was regularly

referring to them as “cottages”²¹ – in line with Garden City Movement nomenclature – as much of the general correspondence of the NAC and other Committees involved did.

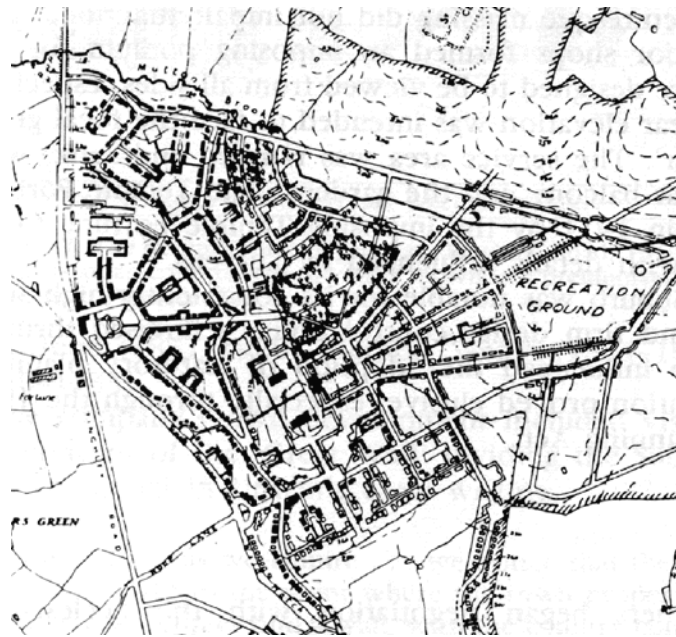


Figure 6
Hampstead Garden Suburb layout, c.1910 (source: Miller, *Raymond Unwin*).

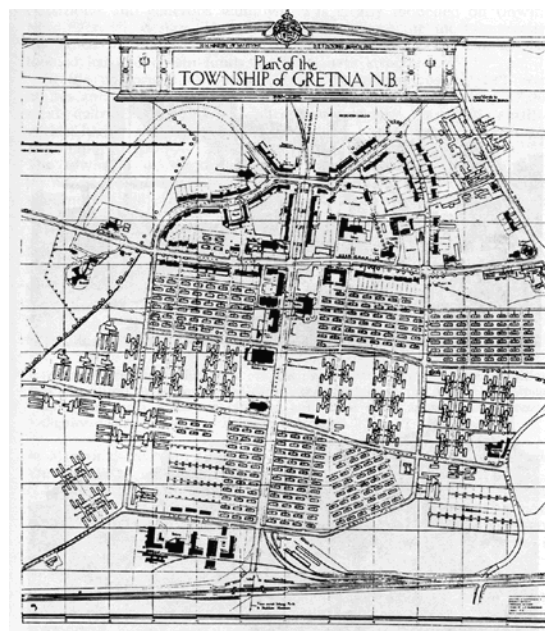


Figure 7
Unwin, layout for Gretna, c.1915 (source: Miller, *Raymond Unwin*).

It seems fairly apparent that Thompson used basic Garden Suburb principles he learnt under Unwin in his initial and subsequent layout designs of Langa. This is suggested by comparisons made between the Langa layout and the Hampstead Garden Suburb in London (Figure 6) along with the WWI munitions township of Gretna outside Carlisle (Figure 7) and confirmed in his layout of Pinelands (Figure 5).

These four layout designs all share a similar, and somewhat formal and orthogonal, civic and commercial centre, although Langa’s exhibits a far more symmetrical design. All four have a main square designated Central Square, whilst Gretna, Pinelands and Langa both have an

avenue extending from this called Central Avenue, although this name did not remain in use at Langa. Hampstead, Pinelands and Langa show a concern for and the development of *cul-de-sacs* as well as communal areas behind the dwellings forming internal squares, although in Pinelands these had been largely subsumed by *cul-de-sacs*. Furthermore, both Pinelands and Langa show the development of a women's hostel 'protected' from the street in a quadrangle form behind a row of houses, again, typical Garden City design motifs. Whilst Hampstead and Pinelands have a far more 'organic' and web-like layout, both Gretna and Langa show a fairly rigid disposition of dwelling accommodation, suggesting their common status as labour centres rather than fully-fledged Garden Suburbs. For its part Pinelands shows a remarkable similarity to Hampstead in its disposition of the buildings in and around the Central Square.

Although the City Engineer had been given complete control of the development of Langa until a Superintendent of Natives – a paternalist position of mediation and control akin to the status of a White 'chief' – could be selected,²² he specifically requested that Thompson be retained as "Consulting Architect" on the project for a year.²³ Together they set about interpreting the comments from the Provincial Secretary reporting suggestions made by Colonel Trew, Deputy Commissioner of Police, and Dr Wilmot, Assistant Medical Officer of Health for the Union of South Africa. These included:

- 2). A Compound should not hold more than 1,000 natives and should be so designed that not more than 250 men should occupy one section and further that the sections be so planned that in case of emergency each can be closed to access from any other section.
- 3). The Compounds should be so placed that they are in the vicinity of the railway station so as to avoid passage through the area set apart for married natives.
- 4). The Compounds should be surrounded by an open space. It is considered that the suggestion No.3 would be in the interests of morality and all would greatly facilitate police control.²⁴

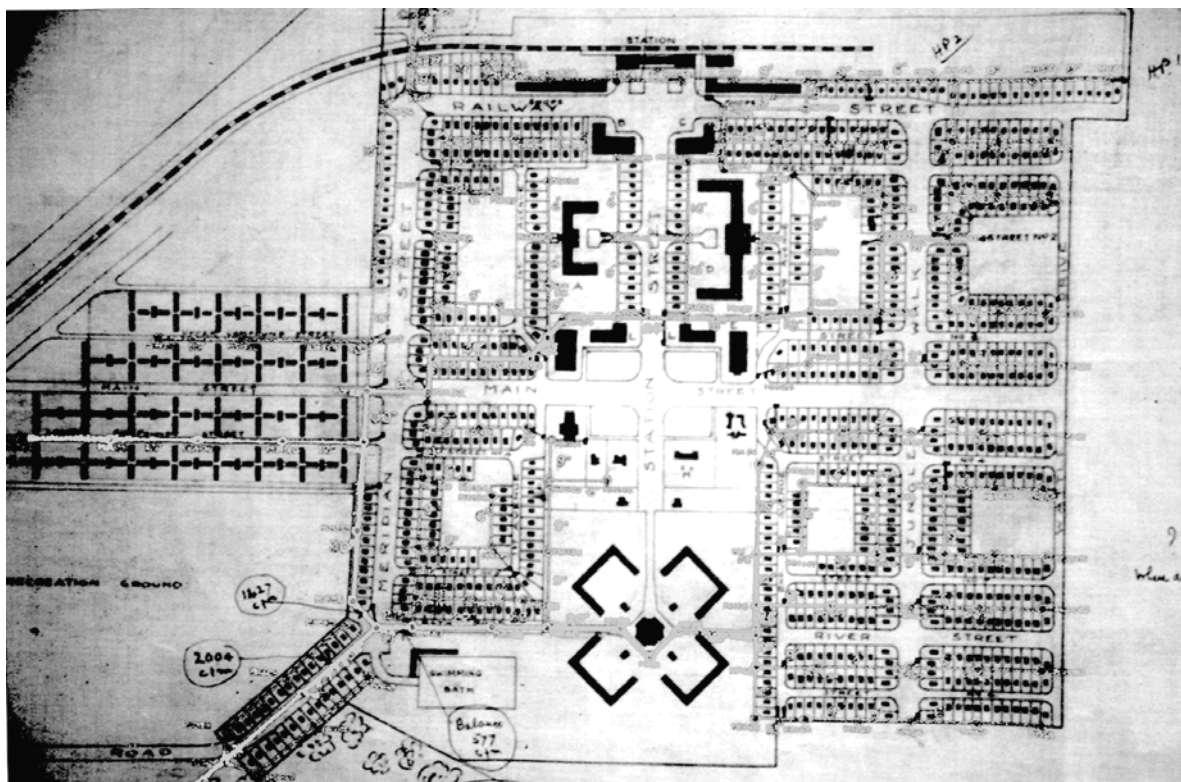


Figure 8

Langa, interim layout showing the star-shaped 'panopticon' compound and the 'Single Quarters' on the west (left) (source: [CAmap]M3-4008).

That the Compound was considered to be a space apart – yet without the Romantic pretences of Hampstead Garden suburb and its 'medieval' wall – is clearly indicated in the

above quote and shown in the resulting design in which the suggestions of Trew and Wilmot were taken into account (Figure 8) in the star-shaped compound that is indicated (although the Compound was not moved to the station area as suggested). Yet even the single males were further classified and ordered into appropriate accommodation; those migrant labourers who were thought most likely to return to tribal areas at the end of their contracts would occupy the Compounds or barracks as they were now being called, whilst those who had been in the city a fairly long time and were not considered to be “temporaries” were to be housed on the “cubicle system” or “Quarters” for more “comfort and privacy”.²⁵ The second layout design (Figure 8) shows the compound at the west end of what became Washington Street being replaced by these “Quarters” with ablution facilities located between the units (Figure 9). Whilst it is plausible that the permanent, single men of the city may have preferred and motivated for these single room dwellings²⁶ and indeed could have afforded the higher rents intended to be charged for them, the basic intention of keeping ‘tribal natives’ separate from permanently urbanised ‘natives’ for fear of mutual social and moral ‘contamination’ plays itself out in the interim (Figure 8) and final design (Figure 13). Whilst Hampstead and Letchworth had largely failed at their intended aim of bringing the different residential classes together in public areas of common interest, the design at Langa shows a clear intention of ‘class’ segregation, the only possible interaction taking place in the communal kitchen and dining area which had moved to the centre of the barracks (Figure 13).

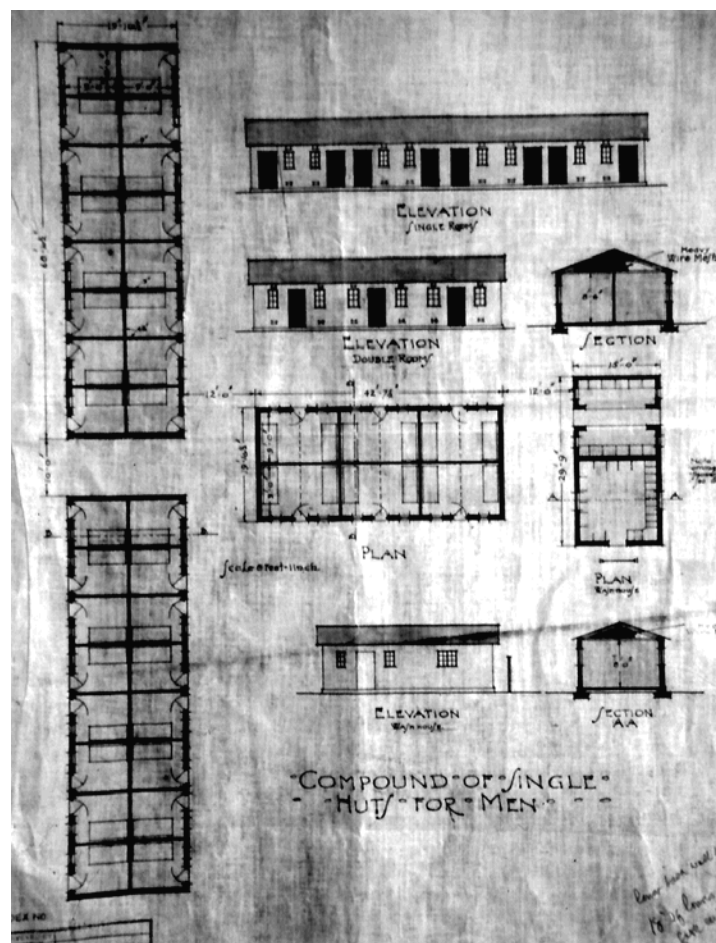


Figure 9

Langa, design for ‘Single Huts for Men’ (source: [CAmap]M1-3375).

With regard to the compound, Thompson stated, in a report dated 20th November 1923, that “we should endeavour to make it look as little like a barracks as possible.” Control of the ‘inmates’ was, however, a major concern. As was mentioned above, the barracks were divided

into four 250 person ‘wings’ (shown as large U’s on the layout, and perhaps similar to Garden City quadrangle accommodation) to better isolate potential unrest. The design essentially had the U’s turn their backs on the outside world, setting up a series of contained courtyards focused in on a kitchen, eating house and ablution blocks. The revised design, although having no central guard-tower, does resemble the general radial patterns of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century prisons based on the panopticon (Foucault 1977: 107) idea of surveillance, and is a distinct move away from the more subtle quadrangle designs for the hostels of Hampstead and other Garden Suburbs. Certainly the main axial entrance to the barracks was between the admin building and the Superintendent’s houses, as well as between two of his assistant’s houses allowing them a certain amount of visual control over who entered and left the barracks.

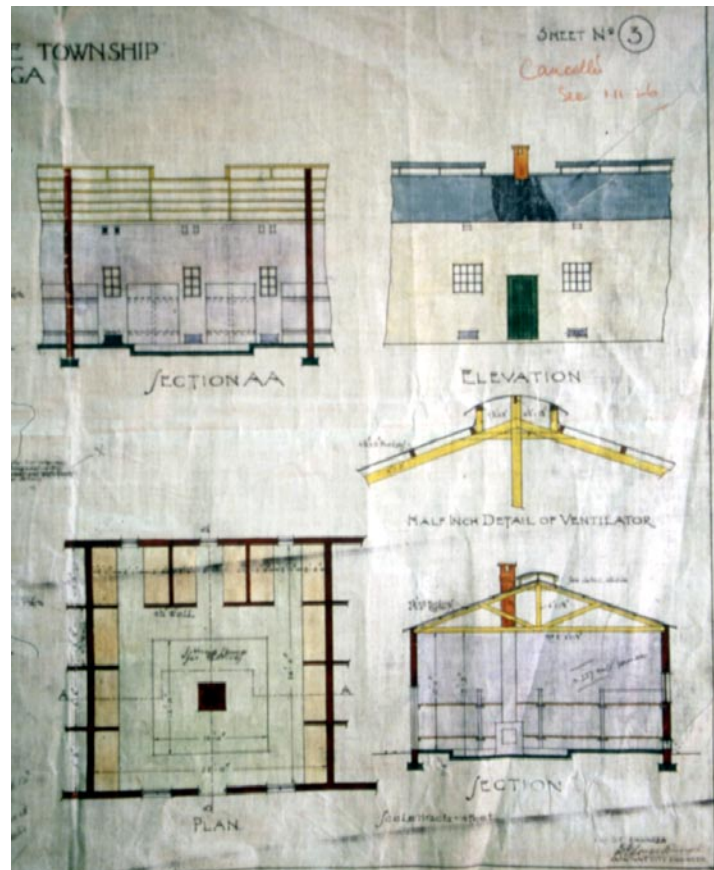


Figure 10
Langa, design for ‘barracks’ (source: [CMap]M1-3375192).

Following what Jennifer Robinson (1996: 59) has noted as the emergence of a ‘location strategy’,²⁷ the space of locations in general was overlaid with a complementary set of regulations and rules; that the administrators of these rules were located so close to the objects of these regulations was clearly a part of this strategy of control. That these dwellings were fairly large and had tiled roofs compared to the corrugated roofs of the other dwellings would have set them further apart from the smaller ‘married’ and more settled ‘singles’ quarters. Although the fence that enclosed Langa was initially required as part of the conditions by which the central government had granted the city the land in order to “protect” the adjacent forest,²⁸ it no doubt served the added purpose of forcing people to enter and leave Langa at a single point. The detail design of the barracks also contributed to this attempt at control. Thompson pointed out that the windows at the back walls of the barracks were all fixed-panes so that “parcels could not be passed through from the outside of the compound”²⁹ (figure 11). This was in deference to the

temperance sensibilities prevalent at the time as well as the restrictions on the type of alcohol ‘natives’ could legally consume.

The fixing shut of the windows of the barracks brings to light another aspect of the design for Langa. As a further indication of the ambivalence of Langa as both a ‘location’ and a Garden Suburb it was exempt from municipal building regulations, although the more ‘scientific’ aspects of dwelling inhabitation were implemented through the Public Health Act, albeit in a less stringent form. Consequently, and in keeping with the emerging ‘science’ of inhabitation introduced into the municipal building regulations, a ridge vent and vent grilles in the walls had to be included to maintain the ‘correct’ air circulation. This requirement also had an influence of the design of the quarters for single men and women. The original sketch design by Thompson shows a hand-written acknowledgement that the design was illegitimate as it was “back to back” and the ceiling was potentially too low at 8’ 6”.³⁰ The dwelling type was eventually built without ceilings and with dividing walls not extending to the roof, thereby facilitating cross-ventilation and complying with health regulations. The obsession for fresh-air as a preventative measure against disease and ill-health – not forgetting the common addition of ‘sleeping verandas’ in many of the middle-class house designs of the period – made the barracks and quarters very draughty, such that it became a major cause for complaint by the inhabitants.³¹ Residents of the barracks also complained that the central fireplace in each unit caused the rooms to be filled with smoke even though they had chimneys. Locating the fireplace in the centre of the room obviously gave greater heating efficiency but there is also the possibility that this may have been an attempted reference to the central fireplace of the rural ‘hut’ (figure 10)



Figure 11
Photo of ‘Barracks,’ c.1934 (source: Schapera,
Western Civilisation & the Natives of South Africa).

Initially, 725 dwellings for married ‘natives’ were to have been erected by labourers from amongst the residents themselves, following the designs and example of two model cottages that were planned to be built as suggested by G.P. Cook, Superintendent for Langa.³² Cook, who had previously been Superintendent of the location at Bloemfontein, felt that this approach had been used to good effect there. Qualifying for the Married Quarters, however, was fairly onerous. Cook recommended that the husband – female heads of households and widows could not apply – would have to prove being resident in Cape Town for a number of years as well as be of a “good character” and “legally married other wise there would be a danger of the wrong class getting a hold of stands”.³³ Eventually, Cook recommended that the self-built cottages be abandoned in favour of cottages provided by the Council. This was in order to facilitate the

removal of residents from Ndabeni to Langa in a complete and managed way which the ad hoc self-built approach would have disallowed.³⁴

Although Thompson's scheme had initially shown detached single-family units, the dwellings that were eventually built were grouped into six units of two-rooms each, 150 of them being handed over for occupation towards the end of 1928³⁵ and 300 having been completed by August 1929.³⁶ That Langa was to receive no subsidy³⁷ from the government no doubt played a role in attempts to affect a cost saving in this manner. Three elements of this change in design and product illustrated the eventual abandonment of the idea of Langa as a Garden Suburb: firstly the usual maximum grouping of standard Garden City Movement dwelling units was four and not six; secondly, most Garden Suburb dwellings for the working classes were at least three-roomed; finally, the plans themselves show these two rooms vaguely labelled as "room" as if the interior space was impossible to define through any 'standard' functions of the home (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997) (Figure 12).

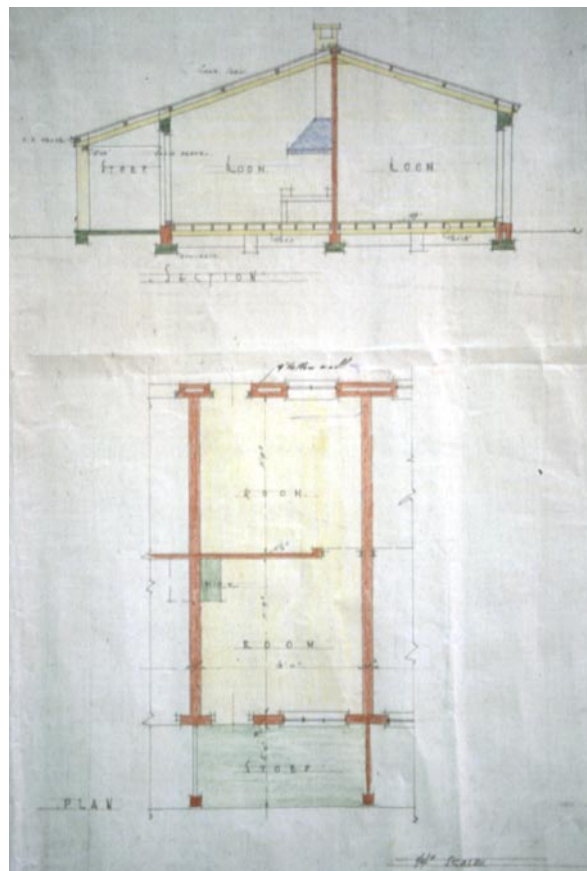


Figure 12
Langa, design for 'barracks' (source: Cape Archives, M2-2524).

This whittling-away of Garden Suburb standards is also reflected in the way in which Langa eventually changed its official and colloquial designation from Township or Village to Location over the years. It perhaps signifies the change in perception of the reality that the NAC and the City Engineer had created through the processes of compromise based on economy and expediency. Yet the design, as it developed, did not lose all of its Garden Suburb sentiments or values. For example, the Postal Authorities suggested that the proposed post-office and savings bank be located in the station building as this was the "business quarter".³⁸ That the City Engineer and the NAC were concerned for maintaining Langa in a certain image is given by their response to the Railways Department who proposed erecting wood-and-iron dwellings for the station:

Read memorandum from the City Engineer dated 6th October, 1923, stating that in his opinion wood-and-iron buildings would not be in keeping with the scheme the Council were about to undertake and further stating that permanent buildings with ample accommodation should be provided, and that the plans of the station and buildings connected therewith should be submitted for the approval of the Committee before construction was commenced.³⁹

All the buildings at Langa were indeed built of brick.

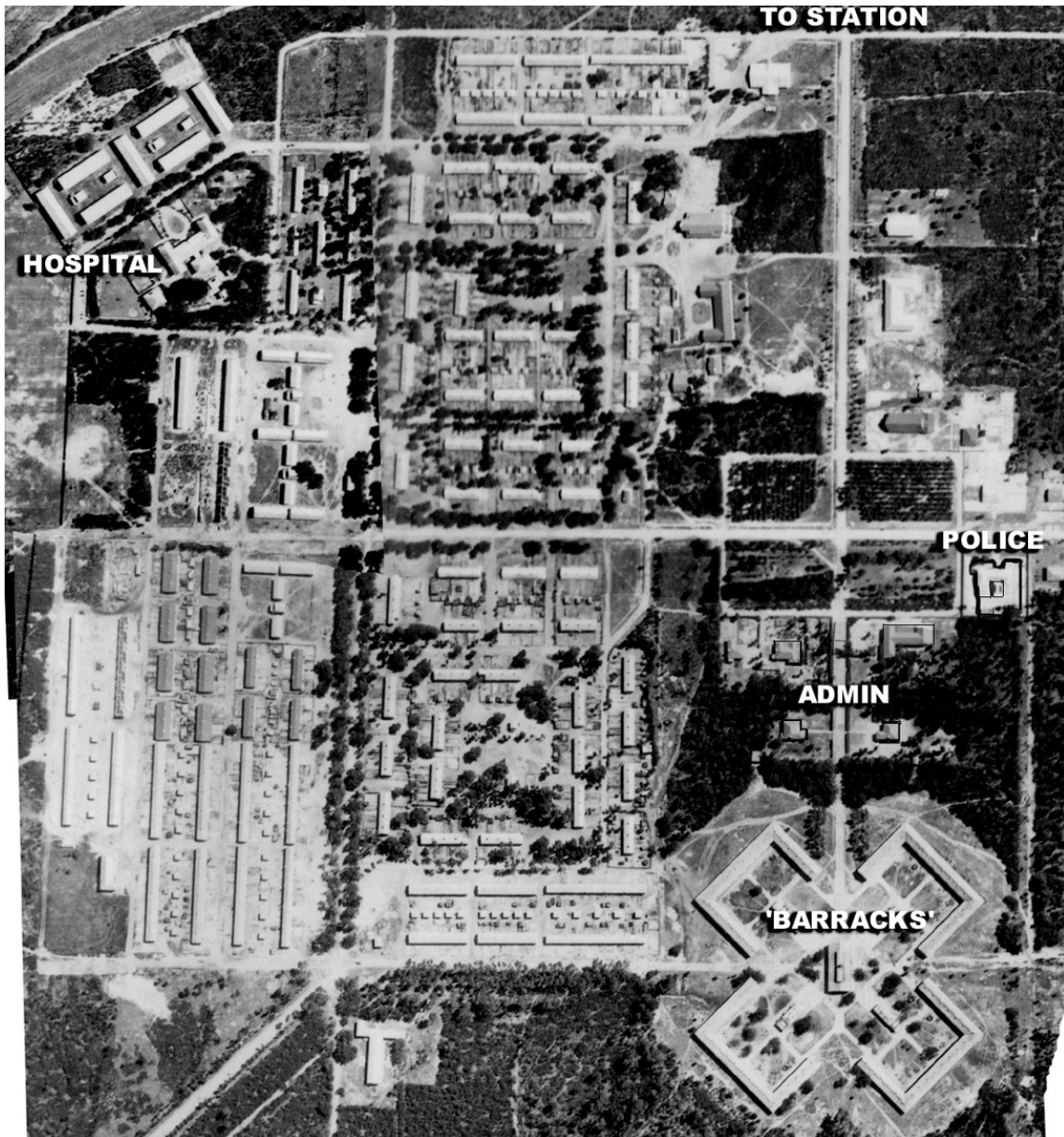


Figure 13

Langa, aerial photo, 1935 (source: Cape Town City Council, Labels added by author).

The first few years of Langa's development saw the city having to manage the location of Ndabeni whilst attempting to have its residents removed to Langa. In fact, prior to the Married Quarters becoming available, the accommodation at Ndabeni had to be increased with the introduction of Nissen tents – hut-like corrugated-iron dwellings visible on the aerial photo from 1926.⁴⁰ (Figure 1) The establishment and development of Langa had been urged in 1924 by A.G. Godley, the Secretary of Native Affairs, as the only way for the “Council to achieve any measure of success in cleaning up the City”.⁴¹ The first ten years saw a significant amount of building at Langa, yet, and as others have noted (Saunders 1984), the City was plagued by the general avoidance of living at Langa and consequently large parts of it remained empty.

Certainly by 1936, after the increase in accommodation at Langa and the eventual closing of Ndabeni, much of the “cleaning up” the City had occurred, with most ‘natives’ being required to live there. The City even employed “special constables” in an attempt to fill Langa with single ‘natives’,⁴² the arrests made for November 1927 being 242.⁴³ Yet there were those who managed to remain beyond its fences and the controlling influence of its administrators. The NUAA allowed employers of black labour to apply to establish mini-locations at their point of employment and Cook, as the Superintendent of Natives for Cape Town, received many applications from dairies and brickfields in this regard. Many domestic workers resided in the suburbs as live-in servants, whilst a few ‘natives’ avoided Langa through being property owners and on the voters roll, although even then Cook was keen to have their living conditions investigated.⁴⁴ Yet, there were many more who avoided being brought under control through the establishment of informal settlements located at the periphery of space that had been produced and surveyed, or in the back alleys of District Six. These remaining instances of fluidity were eventually micro-managed with the introduction of numerous apartheid laws in the 1950s.

Conclusion: an (extra)ordinary Garden Suburb

It could be said that Langa’s early development as a Garden Suburb was fairly ordinary as this urban development approach was emerging as the dominant housing strategy at the time – even Ndabeni before it was initially intended to be developed on similar sentiments. What is extraordinary about it is the extent to which its initial design ideals were underfunded and diminished to the point where even building and health regulations were compromised in favour of expediency; this indicates the willingness of the authorities to consider black Africans as extensively different in needs and even sub-human in health requirements. Its architecture was also extraordinary in terms of what might have been expected of a real Garden Suburb as is shown in places such as Pinelands and Hampstead; ironically, the ‘extra’ here refers to a lack of bucolic details and materials such as thatch and stone. The most significant aspect of Langa, however, is that it lays bare the nascent social-spatial segregation, articulation and control at the heart of the Garden City Movement as evidenced in its central square admin bloc and panoptic sensibilities; these tendencies tend to be more disguised by the Arts and Crafts architecture of English Garden Suburbs as at Hampstead, which nevertheless deliberately enacts socio-spatial ordering and class segregation in its layout and structure. As such, Langa is an (extra)ordinary example of a Garden Suburb, ordinary in its use of these devices, but extraordinary in the starkness by which they are shown. Despite its failings as an architecturally convincing Garden Suburb, Langa nevertheless achieved what the stewards of the city intended it to achieve; it deployed the Romanticism of the Garden City Movement to symbolically and literally maintain the city as a white space bereft of signs of otherness, and thereby, temporarily erasing the contradictions of colonialism intent on preserving tribalism whilst simultaneously crafting ‘natives’ into socialised and ordered labourer-visitors.

Notes

1. Cape Archives, NA 457: 1900.10.17.
2. For example see chapters 17 and 18 of Johan Wassermann and Brian Kearney (eds), *A Warrior’s Gateway. Durban and the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2002).
3. Cape Archives, NA 457: 1901.04.09, Letter from Mansergh to The Chief Inspector of Public Works.
4. *Ibid.* 1901.07.15, Report from J. Edward Fitt.
5. *Ibid.* 1902.01.16, Letter from Mansergh to The Chief Inspector of Public Works.
6. *Ibid.* 1902.11.24, Requisition by the Clerk of Works.
7. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/2: NAC, 1926.04.16.

8. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/5/1/1/8: Special Committee, 1918.01.29. and 1918.02.01.
9. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/5/1/1/9: Special Committee, 1919.10.16.
10. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/5/1/1/10: Special Committee, 1921.09.03.
11. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/5/1/1/10: Special Committee, 1921.09.03.
12. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/1: NAC, 1922.11.06, Letter to the Secretary of the Divisional Council, 6th October 1922.
13. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/1: NAC, 1923.08.28.
14. *Ibid.*, NAC 1923.07.04.
15. *Ibid.*, NAC 1923.07.04, Letter from Superintendent of Natives dated 16th May 1923.
16. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/1: NAC 1923.07.25.
17. *Ibid.*, NAC, 1923.04.27. Report by the CE dated 18th April 1923.
18. *Ibid.*, NAC, 1923.07.04.
19. *Ibid.*,
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, 1923.09.12.
22. *Ibid.*, NAC, 1923.07.18.
23. *Ibid.*, NAC, 1923.09.12.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, NAC, 1923.08.28.
26. *Ibid.*, NAC, 1923.11.27, the idea of Quarters came after meeting with the Cape Peninsula Native Welfare Society.
27. Robinson, J., *The Power of Apartheid*, p.59.
28. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/1: NAC, 1923.02.14.
29. *Ibid.*, 1923.11.27.
30. Cape Archives, M1/3380.
31. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/2: NAC, 1927.10.25.
32. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/1: NAC, 1924.02.05.
33. *Ibid.*, 1924.07.29.
34. *Ibid.*, 1924.07.29.
35. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/3: NAC, 1928.10.15.
36. *Ibid.*, 1929.08.19.
37. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/1: NAC, 1924.08.27.
38. *Ibid.*, NAC, 1924.02.05.
39. *Ibid.*, 1923.10.11.
40. *Ibid.*, 1923.05.15.
41. *Ibid.*, 1924.11.19.
42. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/2: NAC, 1927.10.18.
43. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/3: NAC, 1927.12.19.
44. Cape Archives, 3/CT-1/4/10/1/1/3: NAC, 1929.04.15.

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