

THE ESTATE MARKET

BEATING THE BOUNDS AT BURHILL

By MICHAEL HANSON

IN the original development brochure published by the Burhill Estates Company in 1930, its scheme for "the building of good-class houses for seekers of privacy and quiet" on 1,200 acres of land at Burhill, between Walton-on-Thames and Cobham, Surrey, was described as "the first of its kind in the kingdom".

As apparently similar high-quality private estates were already in existence nearby at Wentworth and St George's Hill, Weybridge, this claim may have sounded extravagant. What was to be different at Burhill, however, was that not only would buyers enter into covenants not to spoil their surroundings, but "the land owner binds himself to keep the natural features of beauty undisturbed and to prevent the erection of disfiguring buildings". What was bold and unique about their experiment, the developers claimed, was that "no land owner has ever before undertaken to place himself under similar covenants to preserve the amenities of a property in the course of development and after".

As the landowner in question was the 2nd Earl of Iveagh, chairman of the Burhill Estates Company and titular head of the Guinness family, which was renowned for its enlightened housing for the working classes, his word was his bond. Now that the development of the Burhill estates is virtually complete, just over 50 years later, it is appropriate to consider how far the original intentions have been realised, bearing in mind that no one in 1930 foresaw the effects that politicians and planners would have. War, planning controls and compulsory purchase have all transformed the original proposals, but the promise has been fulfilled that "here a man may safely invest his two or three thousand pounds, with the knowledge that the house he builds will never be deteriorated in value".

Then, as now, the Burhill estates were on both sides of the old Portsmouth Road (the A3), but most of the residential development has taken place in Burwood Park, to the north of the Burwood Road, which runs between Weybridge and Horsham. Burhill itself is a Georgian house that the 1st Earl of Iveagh bought in the 1880s, together with its parkland, farms and woods extending to some 840 acres south of the Burwood Road. The Guinness family never lived at Burhill, the house continuing to be occupied by Elizabeth, dowager Duchess of Wellington, the widow of the 2nd Duke. When she died, Burhill was converted into the present golf clubhouse, and an 18-hole course was laid out in its parkland, opening in 1907. A second course was laid out at Burhill in 1931. It was ploughed up for farming during the war and never reinstated.

A few houses were built on the edge of the old course at Burhill before the war; these included the King's House (now Kingsmere House), which was built in 1935 beside the 10th tee by the royal warrant-holders, to mark the Silver Jubilee of George V. Designed by Charles Beresford Marshall, the house contained the finest materials from many parts of the British Empire. Never occupied by the

Royal Family, it became a grace-and-favour residence before being sold by the Crown Estate Commissioners in 1954, since when it has changed hands a number of times. Although half a dozen other houses were built on the edge of the golf course before the war, the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 put an end to plans for others, for both golf courses (including the one ploughed up) and all the farms and woods were declared to be Green Belt land, not to be developed.

Some farmland was sold; the remaining 400 acres is being managed as one unit with the 830-acre Guinness Farm at Pyrford. Land was sold for council housing, and some land at the Lea, Cobham, was compulsorily acquired for a

of the houses, though those built since the war (and in many cases before) were by other architects. Imrie was responsible for laying out the closes and culs-de-sac, however, where it was intended that "the children can wander in safety, the dog run free of the lead".

As in other private estates, the standards have been maintained by a system of enlightened self-interest that transcends outside planning controls. Thus the development company still has to approve all proposed external alterations to houses; and restrictive covenants control development, preventing the subdivision of houses, and allowing only one house on one plot—though a few plots are large enough to be split into two, to permit a

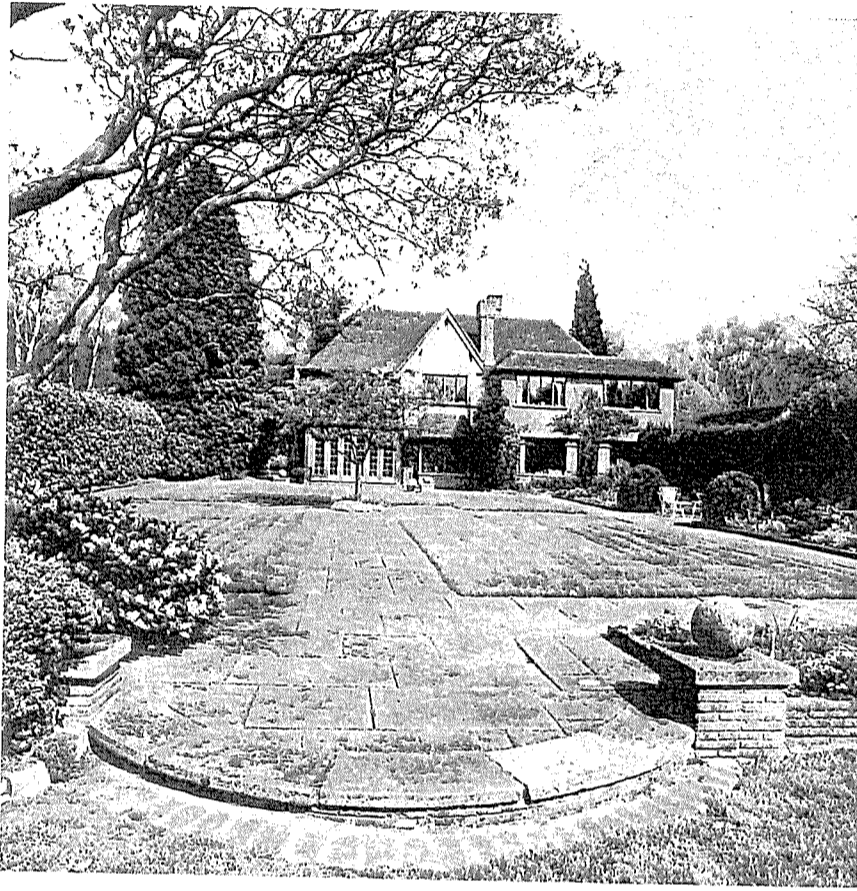
new house to be built. Such is the demand that a building plot of less than half an acre can cost £65,000, and it is rare to find anything but the smallest house for sale at less than £125,000, with prices today for the larger houses in the western portion of Burwood Park tending to be upwards of £165,000.

Apart from the possibility of dividing a few of the larger gardens, all the original building plots at Burhill and Burwood have now been sold, although planning permission has recently been given for nine new ones, and the development company would like to build more. This is not universally well received, but the resident agent, D. J. G. Howard, is adamant that it is desirable. "With the roads and open spaces being maintained without charge, we are left with a management problem. We have got to look for further development on the estate to raise cash, though we do not need to sell the land to survive. If we do not continue to build, it will come to the point when we will have to talk to the residents about taking over responsibility for the roads and open spaces."

Houses at Burwood Park have continued to sell this year.

Though prices are perhaps not as firm as many residents would like, there is a steady demand from overseas buyers, particularly American businessmen, who like to send their children to the American community school at Heywood, Cobham, which adjoins Burhill on the east. To the west of Burhill is Whiteley Village, the model estate for retired people, built in 1911 on 230 acres of land bought from Lord Iveagh by the trustees of the £1 million bequest of the drapery magnate, William Whiteley.

While no estate agent has a monopoly of houses for sale at Burwood Park, most of the better ones these days tend to be handled by the country house departmental of Mann and Co, at Weybridge. In recent weeks they have sold Whitfield, a six-bedroom house in three-quarters of an acre, to a foreign buyer for £175,000, only £10,000 less than the asking price. Another foreign buyer paid £170,000 (just £5,000 less than was sought) for Little Warren, a four-bedroom house with 1½ acres of garden. Other sales have included Sunnywood (for which offers of £152,500 were being invited) and 7 Ince Road (on the market at £195,000). At any time, Mann and Co also have a dozen or more houses for sale at Burwood Park, at prices from £135,000 to more than £200,000.



WHITFIELD, BURWOOD PARK, SURREY. Possibly one of the original houses designed in the 1930s by Blair Imrie, it recently sold for £175,000

school after the war. Almost the only housing development begun before the war and completed afterwards, as planned, on the original Burhill estates, is that known as the Fairmile estate, south of the Portsmouth Road.

Most of the housing development originally envisaged in 1930 had been confined to the Burwood Park area, to the north of the Burwood Road. Like Burhill, Burwood Park is a Georgian house, built about 1780, and bought in 1927 by Lord Iveagh, with 367 acres of land. Here, several hundred houses have been built over the past 50 years, most since the war, on plots varying from one-quarter of an acre up to about 2½ acres.

The eastern part of Burwood Park was developed to a fairly high density after the Second World War, and the estate roads were made up and adopted by the local authority. The rest of Burwood Park, however, still has private estate roads. The Georgian house, initially converted to a school for the children of those who would buy the houses and plots laid out in the walled parkland and around the lake, is now a school for deaf children. The original master plan for Burwood Park (and the rest of the Burhill estates) was prepared by G. Blair Imrie, who was also intended to be the architect