

Charles Reade

1880-1933

Charles Compton Reade was born in Invercargill, New Zealand on 4 May 1880, the third son and child of Lawrence and Margaret (nee Booth) Reade.

After 1890, with family and independently, he resided in several towns on the north and south islands of New Zealand as well as in Australia. In 1905 he travelled to Britain where he worked as a journalist visiting industrial cities and towns in England and Europe. He familiarised himself with conditions under which workers lived and worked contrasting these with the life and lifestyle of workers in planned communities such as Port Sunlight, Letchworth Garden City and Hampstead Garden Suburb. Reade recorded his observations in a series of articles for Australian and New Zealand newspapers eventually compiling them as *The Revelation of Britain* (Auckland: Gordon and Gotch. 1909). Throughout these journalistic years he identified with and supported the aims of the British Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (GCTPA) an organisation that promoted planning of residential environments “on garden city lines”.

In 1911, employment took Reade back to New Zealand as editor of an Auckland newspaper. Through that medium and his own public lectures he promoted slum eradication and town planning legislation as well as the GCTPA message. In 1912 he returned to London to work in the GCTPA offices. At about the same time he impressed upon the Association the need to educate the newly emerging colonies about the benefits of planning over haphazard development. However his suggestion of a lecture tour of Australasia was then rejected. As a volunteer for the GCTPA Reade improved the Association’s lantern slide collection and immersed himself in a range of propagandist activities. He so impressed the Executive with his enthusiasm, initiative and administrative skills that when the



Charles Reade courtesy P. Ratuszny

proposal for a lecture tour of Australasia was revived, Reade, by then the Association's acting secretary, was appointed organiser and co-lecturer. In 1914 he and William Davidge conducted the Australasian Town Planning Tour delivering a series of lectures in the principal cities and towns of New Zealand and five Australian states.

Following completion of the Tour Reade remained in Australia accepting an appointment in April 1916 as Adviser on Town Planning to the South Australian Government.

Eventually in 1918 he was made Government Town Planner, the first in Australia. Under his leadership a Town Planning Department was established, a report written on towns and cities in South Australia (1919), draft legislation proposed to the Government for a Town Planning and Housing Bill (1916) and a Town Planning and Development Bill (1920); a scheme devised for Greater Adelaide; designs drawn for private, state and corporate sponsored subdivisions and residential developments and plans made for recreation parks, children's playgrounds and soldiers memorial gardens in metropolitan and rural South Australia. In 1917 Reade designed the Mitcham Garden Suburb in accord with garden city planning principles. Intended as a model residential environment, the suburb was enabled under the Garden Suburb Act (1919) and established in April 1921 as Colonel Light Gardens.

Reade left South Australia in December 1920 for a temporary appointment as Government Town Planner in the Federated Malay States. After the position was made permanent he resigned his Australian post remaining in Kuala Lumpur until 1929. From there he moved to northern Rhodesia and South Africa.

In October 1933, a mere nine days after taking up his job as Chief Planning Officer to the Witwatersrand Joint Town Planning Committee, he committed suicide in a Johannesburg hotel. He was fifty-three years old.

Reade made a lifelong commitment to spreading the message of garden cities and town planning on five continents, demonstrating how it could be applied and guiding its implementation.

He touched the lives and affected the lifestyles of countless people world-wide.

His greatest practical achievement is the Adelaide suburb of Colonel Light Gardens where he demonstrated how the garden city message could be transposed from Britain and adapted to suit Australian conditions.

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Further Reading:

Garnaut, C "Of passion, publicity and planning: Charles Reade and the Mitcham Garden Suburb", *Australian Planner*, Vol 35 No 2:181-189. 1995

Garnaut, C. "Revealing reminiscences Charles Reade from his children's perspective" *Planning History* (England) Vol 18 No 2 pp.20-25. (1996)

Garnaut, C *Colonel Light Gardens: model garden suburb*, Crossing Press, Sydney 1999.

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The Revelation of Britain.

A Book for Colonials.

By Charles C. Reade.

The Revelation of Britain