The years immediately following the First World War saw a major increase in the development, and a major change in the style, of new land subdivisions around Australia. Real estate vendors such as Henry F. Halloran, Arthur J. Rickard, T. M. Burke and Co., and Peet and Co. were able to market enormous areas of urban frontier (and rural land projected as the site of future cities) to aspiring home owners and investors in the prosperous years to 1929.

In doing so they helped coalesce and support a new cohort of town planning designers. These included the Perth firm of Hope and Klem—Carl Klem was to play a significant part in Perth’s planning progress; in Sydney, planning advocate, architect and planner Sir John Sulman; in Melbourne (and later, Sydney) the Chicagoan architects, planners and landscape architects Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin. Another advocate, prominent at this time in the planning field in Melbourne, was Saxil Tuxen.

Born in the Melbourne suburb of Kew in 1885, the son of August Tuxen—a surveyor of Danish extraction—Saxil was inducted into his father’s firm at the turn of the century and took possession of the business after August’s death in 1912. At this time the firm, having weathered the 1890s depression, was not producing distinctive subdivisional work. Instead, like most of its kind, August Tuxen’s various firms (Allen and Tuxen, Tuxen and Madden, Tuxen and Son) had produced plans which adhered to the grid patterns into which nineteenth-century Melbourne had grown, as a device by which the colonisers of Port Phillip (as in the rest of the Australian continent) sought to create what Richard Sennett categorises as ‘a space of neutrality... achieved by denying to the environment any value of its own.”

Merrilands, a thousand acre portion of the present-day Melbourne suburb of Reservoir, was the first major project of the T. M. Burke company in the large-scale provision of working (or lower-middle) class housing allotments. Its design and development under Tuxen’s aegis in 1919 also makes it one of the earliest large-scale garden suburbs in Melbourne.

There is an important and growing body of urban history related specifically to the planning movement in Australia, most recent of which is Stephen Hamnett and Robert Freestone’s edited collection *The Australian Metropolis: A Planning History*; Freestone’s *Model Communities* is, however, still recognised as the definitive work on this

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In both works, garden suburbs planned for private developers are given serious recognition, as progressive steps in a burgeoning planning movement though often constrained— as were many government projects— by financial considerations. These are broad historical surveys of Australian planning: John Reps’ recent book *Canberra 1912*, by contrast, concentrates on the Federal Capital Design Competition of 1911-12 as an encapsulation of the state of planning practice both internationally and in Australia at this time. The three abovementioned have been joined by works on particular planners and projects, such as Christine Garnaut’s *Colonel Light Gardens* which concentrates on the planning advocate Charles Reade and the suburb he created in his role as South Australia’s first Government Town Planner; and the numerous works on the Griffins who, as Tim Bonyhady recently pointed out, ‘have been the subject of at least one exhibition catalogue or book every year since 1993.’ Of these works, only Freestone’s *Model Communities* has seriously countenanced the work of Saxil Tuxen and the Merrilands project. Merrilands is here described as one of ‘the largest model subdivisions’ in Melbourne, also contributing to ‘a massive oversupply of residential allotments in Melbourne’s northern suburbs’. This, however, is a fault probably better attributed to the onset of the Depression rather than to the plan itself.

Merrilands was reputedly highly successful for Burke and was the first of many subdivisions in that area ‘which sprang into sudden favour with the home site seeker’ in the words of advertising rhetoric of 1924. The name ‘Merrilands’ had been attached to the site, which is situated east of Merri Creek, since the nineteenth century.

Prior to Merrilands, a number of Tuxen designs which had been sold by Burke, such as the Eastern Gardens (Kew) and Hill-Top (Mont Albert) Estates took the same form, in many ways, of estates designed by Saxil’s father, August, in the 1880s. Although there were some elements of curved streetscape and a limited attempt to incorporate natural features into such designs, little public open space was provided on these estates and certainly there were no internal reserves or recommended/embedded

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6 Freestone, *Model Communities*, pp 192-93.


8 Coghill and Haughton Papers (hereafter CHP), Kew Box, Melbourne University Archives (hereafter MUA).
shopping or community areas, features which have since become associated with both garden suburb and so-called 'garden city' planning. The creation of a new subdivision like Merrilands on such dramatically different lines is, therefore, a matter requiring some examination.

Robert Freestone's description of the Griffins' Canberra plan as a part of 'the evolution of a distinctive vocabulary of mainstream modernist planning' could almost be applied word for word to Merrilands. So too could his description of the plan itself: 'the holistic, organic approach to urban form and function; the predilection for specialisation of land use functions; the penchant for segregated residential spaces; and the idea of road hierarchies.' Merrilands' plan, with its internal reserves and precinct designations, is of a style that would have been instantly recogniseable as a modern attempt to build community in a garden suburb context. Adding to this impression, its streets are named for representatives of tiers of government (appealing to patriotism and evoking democracy in what was, still, a new nation), and military leaders (who, in the conventional rhetoric of the time, had ensured freedom for Australia), representing 'brotherhood and freedom' in a form easily decoded by prospective homebuyers of the interwar years.

The Merrilands plan may also have had a more pragmatic appeal for homebuyers. Peter G. Rowe, speculating on the reasons for planners' and vendors' shift from the standard grid (also known as 'gridiron') in suburban subdivisions in the United States, suggests that appropriate land for grid plans became harder to find in the interwar period, that subdividers and/or prospective purchasers wished to make their areas less attractive to through traffic, and that public opinion came to regard grid planning as 'overly uniform and monotonous'. However, Rowe places the time of such a change in the United States as starting '[f]rom about the 1930s on', at least ten years after Merrilands.10

If we are to make deductions on the reasons for the irregular, anti-grid outline of Merrilands, much of Rowe's reasoning applies to the Australia of the post-First World War period, and should be taken into account. It may be, however, that it became acceptable in Australia earlier than it gained widespread approval in America (despite extant American developments such as the mid-nineteenth-century suburb of Riverside) due to the example of Canberra. The plan for Canberra had been in existence for six years before the initiation of the Merrilands development, and the similarities in form between the two suggests that the former is linked in some design respects with the latter. The similarity also gives rise to the distinct possibility (there is no direct evidence as the publicity for Merrilands was conducted by door-to-door

9 Robert Freestone, 'From City Improvement to City Beautiful', in Hamnett and Freestone (eds), The Australian Metropolis, p. 40.
salesman rather than through the print media) that T. M. Burke believed that the public would respond to a comprehensively planned garden suburb which made reference to the Griffins' conception of the national capital.

Tuxen re-assessed Merrilands in 1932, thirteen years after its creation, at which time he was serving as President of the Victorian Institute of Surveyors. He used the spare time forced on him by the Depression to write a series of articles entitled 'Design of Subdivisions in Victoria' for the national surveyor's journal, *The Australian Surveyor*. The chief example he used for discussion of surveying practicalities in garden suburb subdivisions was the Merrilands design. He wrote:

[I]t is not contended that it is a perfect plan. It was carried out in 1918 when I was less experienced in subdivisional work than now, and was based mostly on a knowledge of principles gleaned from the very inadequate textbooks then available, and from a study of different subdivisions around Sydney. [...] What features are embraced were, however, sound.11

Although Tuxen did not make clear which textbooks or which Sydney suburbs he consulted in the creation of Merrilands, it might reasonably be assumed, comparing Merrilands with Sulman's Daceyville and Rosebery plans, that Tuxen consulted these.12

By 1932 Tuxen had designed or co-designed at least thirty suburban subdivisions, a majority of which could be termed 'garden suburbs'. Accordingly, it might seem strange that he chose to present this plan, dating from the beginning of his true 'garden suburb' work, thirteen years later as an example of good subdivision planning. It may simply have been large enough to include all the aspects of a plan, including intersections, street curves and internal reserves, which he wished to discuss. It was also the only one of his projects that attempted to address land use issues beyond the provision of, firstly, centres or strips dedicated to local shopping, and secondly, the inclusion of parkland and other recreational area projections; these factors may have made it a more appropriate exemplar. For these and related reasons, it was the only one of his suburban schemes that appeared to fulfil the functions of a discrete

12 In his 1919 paper 'Suburban Subdivisions', Tuxen cited 'an idea that has been successfully carried out in Sydney' for building houses on triangular or otherwise oddly-shaped residential allotments. This suggests that perhaps Tuxen's 'study' of Sydney subdivisions may have been related more to small practicalities rather than, or as well as, larger-scale design templates. The Merrilands design does contain many triangular or near-triangular allotments, for instance at the corner of Weymess and Sims streets and Weymess and Jackson streets. Saxil Tuxen, 'Suburban Subdivisions', *First Victorian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition: Official Volume of Proceedings*, Victoria, Town Planning Conference, 1920, p. 43.
David Nichols
town. The Merrilands plan adhered – at least on the projected plan as Tuxen originally created it– to Sulman’s credo, that suburbs, ‘of whatever kind, should be more or less a town in miniature, with all the conveniences, amenities, and responsibilities of such a condition.’ It was also one of the rare instances in which Tuxen was not compelled to connect his subdivision with others nearby, or to infill between existing roads. There had been a few roads on the estate as it stood when Burke bought the land, but none were adapted for the final project.

Any connection between Merrilands and Canberra can only be deduced from the physical appearance of the two ground plans. Neither the Griffins nor Tuxen publicly acknowledged, or engaged with, each other’s work. The Griffins’ design for the Summit Estate is reproduced within the pages of Tuxen’s paper in the First Victorian Town Planning Conference Official Volume of Proceedings, but the paper does makes no specific reference to the design (a plate of Tuxen’s plan for the ‘Civic Centre’ section of Merrilands is placed in the successive paper, William Gates’ ‘Parks and Playgrounds’, although the portion reproduced features neither parks nor playgrounds: suggesting that the positioning of the plates in relation to text was arbitrary). Tuxen’s newly formed partnership, Tuxen and Miller, acted as surveyors to the Griffins on the Ranelagh estate in 1923, a project which appears to have been completed smoothly, although when developers Taylor and Sharpe embarked on their next project, Park Orchards, they employed only Tuxen and Miller to execute the work. The only evidence of Tuxen commenting favourably on a Griffin project is from 1927. At this time he drew the attention of his fellow Commissioners at the Melbourne Metropolitan Town Planning Commission to the last of the Griffins’ suburban estates, Milleara, for its generous park provision; beyond this, what was actually said is unrecorded. By 1947, however, when Tuxen redesigned the northern section of the Griffins’ ‘Blue Hill’ subdivision of 1923, he made no attempt to incorporate any portion of the Griffins’ original plan into the new ‘Pine Lodge’ estate, suggesting that he had little regard (by this time at least) for their ideas.

There is, however, a distinct similarity between the designs of Merrilands and Canberra, particularly in the replication of a ‘Parliamentary triangle’-styled road plan at the centre of both designs.

The involvement of developer/vendor T. M. Burke in the creation of Merrilands was also important. Burke, as a businessman who supported the growth of Australian secondary industry rather than reliance on British markets and trade, would

13 John Sulman, An Introduction to the Study of Town Planning in Australia, Sydney, Government Printer of New South Wales, 1921, p. 100.
14 First Victorian Town Planning Conference, plates facing pages 44 and 52.
16 ‘Pine Lodge Estate’, pamphlet (n.d.; circa 1947) CHP, MUA.
have been favourably disposed to a suburban form reminiscent of the national capital. Such a form would have been regarded as positive both for patriotic reasons, and also one which followed what may have been seen as an American ‘form’ rather than a British one. As will be made clear, Burke saw a cultural alliance with the United States as a positive step for Australian independence and social progress. Burke sold land at the Griffins’ progressive and unusual Mount Eagle (1914-17) subdivisions in Melbourne, and would have been aware of the success of that project. As the Griffin name was linked at this time with Canberra, the creation of a subdivision with similarities to Canberra would have been a natural step. The evidence of this notion may be embedded in the Merrilands plan.

In *Place Promotion*, a study of advertising and publicity for towns and regions in the twentieth century, John R. Gold countenances the possibility that ‘it can be argued cynically that many communicators are happier imitating the best ideas of others rather than innovating, the repetitiousness of place promotion may also reflect the particular nature of their discourse.’ This ‘particular nature’ in Gold’s view is the ‘similarities in ideological outlook’ between promoters and the audience they seek.

There is, as has been mentioned, little evidence of the actual rhetoric provided by Burke’s sales operatives as they went from door to door throughout Australia persuading householders to buy in Merrilands. Certainly there are no visual representations, outside the form of the actual plan, of the ideal suburban lifestyle which can be read as ciphers calculated to appeal to prospective homebuyers. However, the street plan of Merrilands itself fits John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold’s definition of sales rhetoric: ‘images and symbols... selected from reality by the advertisers but fashioned to meet the audience’s needs’. The Merrilands plan as it was made available to real estate agents like Coghill and Haughton, printed in large-format on quality parchment, appears to speak in a common-sense fashion for itself.

Tuxen’s categorisation and allocation of specially designated areas in Merrilands promote the idea of an ordered landscape appropriate to a modern post-war (and perhaps shell-shocked) society. But it also adheres to a new domestic ideal corresponding to the ‘scientific’ reading of suburban home life, now seen as the province of ‘experts’.

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The Griffins produced their final plan for Canberra in 1918, the year that Tuxen claimed he started his design for Merrilands.\textsuperscript{20} As Donald L. Johnson’s bibliography of the Griffins shows, there was considerable press interest in and coverage of the Griffins’ progress in this important work.\textsuperscript{21} Had there been any discussion between Tuxen and the Griffins in 1918, each would have had these projects in mind.

It should not be inferred from comparisons made between Merrilands and Canberra that Tuxen saw any particular symbolic relevance, or any ‘sacred geometry’, as postulated by Peter Proudfoot, in the appropriated Parliamentary triangle.\textsuperscript{22} If Tuxen took the triangle, and the idea of ‘civic’ centres with distinct social functions from the Griffin plan, then he did so for much more pragmatic reasons, as outlined below. The triangle itself had been ‘borrowed’, as Peter Harrison has pointed out, by the Griffins, from the Macmillan Plan for Washington.\textsuperscript{23} There is also a similar triangular design element in Parker and Unwin’s Hampstead Garden Suburb of 1900. Tuxen may have used Unwin’s \textit{Town Planning in Practice} as one of what he calls the ‘inadequate textbooks’ consulted in the planning of Merrilands, but the Parker and Unwin triangle, unlike the Griffins’, did not include designated functions at apexes.\textsuperscript{24}

Was Tuxen directly influenced by the Griffins? It is not possible to establish evidence of contact between the Griffins and Tuxen before they worked together on the Ranelagh estate of 1924. Circumstances, however, suggest so many opportunities for contact that only conscious avoidance could have allowed them to stay unknown to each other. Tuxen would have been well aware of the Griffins’ initial Canberra plan from the time it was first publicised in 1913, if for no other reason than his uncle, Peter Tuxen, who worked in the same building as he and his father, was an entrant in the Federal Capital Competition.\textsuperscript{25} In addition, the Griffins were Melbourne-based between

\textsuperscript{20} There is some confusion over this date, as it appears that T. M. Burke did not officially purchase the Merrilands land until 1919, which does not, of course, preclude the possibility of Tuxen preparing a plan for its subdivision the previous year, regardless of the intentions or the capabilities of the owner as a vendor; indeed, the adjoining area of Keon Park was sold in its entirety in 1925 as a ‘grand subdivisional area’ with a street plan devised by Tuxen. However, references in Tuxen’s ‘Subdivisions in Victoria’ to ‘my client’ suggest that Burke was the initiator of the Merrilands design. Tuxen, ‘Design of Subdivisions in Victoria’, p. 178; ‘Keon Park: Grand Subdivisional Area’, Advertising leaflet dated 1925, Preston Box, CHP, MUA.


\textsuperscript{24} Raymond Unwin, \textit{Town Planning in Practice: An Introduction to the Art of Designing Cities and Suburbs}, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1909, Fold Map VI.

\textsuperscript{25} Reps, \textit{Canberra 1912}, p. 373. Reps incorrectly states here that Peter Tuxen was Saxil Tuxen’s
1914 and 1924. Even if they did not make contact with Saxil Tuxen in Melbourne’s
town planning forums, such as the Victorian Town Planning Association or the
Metropolitan Town Planning Commission (the Griffins appear to have distanced
themselves from town planning circles to a certain degree, probably in view of their
unpleasant experience in Sydney at the hands of the somewhat despotic Taylors of
Building magazine), they shared numerous contacts in the real estate industry. Both the
Griffins and Tuxen worked on properties sold by T. M. Burke, H. V. Palmer (whose
office was in the same building as the Griffins) and Coghill and Haughton. The
Griffins were also in contact with eccentric dried fruit magnate and land developer C. J.
De Garis, who employed Tuxen to design the ‘Heart of Rosebud’ Estate in 1923. Both Walter Griffin and Tuxen attended the 1917 Australian Town Planning
Conference. The Griffins’ office at 395 Collins Street, Melbourne, was less than a city
block away from Tuxen’s at 94 Queen Street. While it is impossible to know whether
the Griffins actually socialised with Tuxen on any regular basis, they were clearly
professionally acquainted.

Whether the similarity to the Canberra plan was visited on Tuxen by example,
in personal conference with the Griffins, or by direction from T. M. Burke, it is
nevertheless undeniable. The similarities between the Parliamentary triangle and the
triangular area of Merrilands formed by Botha, McFadzean and Hughes Avenues are
numerous. The clearest connection is that both the Griffins’ and Tuxen’s plan identify
(in the words of Reps) ‘the exact sites for a variety of municipal and business uses’. Whereas in Canberra, as designed by the Griffins, the triangle’s corners are given
special features – ‘Civic’ and ‘Market’ centres, and the ‘Capitol’- Tuxen’s triangle has
only two demarcated ‘centres’. There is a ‘Civic Centre’ in the north east and a ‘Social
Centre’ in the south; additionally, the delineation of Hughes Parade as a ‘Business Area’
seems to suggest that the north east corner of the Merrilands triangle was intended to
parallel the Griffins’ ‘Market Centre’. In Tuxen’s plan, another Centre, the ‘Education
Centre’, appears further west of the triangle: this feature might be equated with the
position of the University to the west of the triangle in the Griffins’ Canberra plans.

There is another point of design ‘unification’ which, in Merrilands’ case, is
really only appreciable on maps or plans. These are the internal reserves situated inside
the Merrilands triangle, forming a discontinuous line of parkland dividing the triangle.

26 De Garis knew Walter Griffin well enough to nominate him as a judge for a competition he
held to name his ‘Windulva’ estate in 1924: Evening Sun, 25 October 1924, p.14. The diaries of
King O’Malley put De Garis and the Griffins together a number of times, for instance the entry
for 21 November 1921: ‘Wynn/Oliphant/Mr. and Mrs. Griffin/S Miller/Tracy/De Garis’. King
O’Malley papers, Box 13 Items 7366-7411, MS 460, NLA.
27 ‘Heart of Rosebud Estate, Rosebud’, advertising pamphlet in Rosebud Box, CHP, MUA.
28 Reps, Canberra 1912, p. 141.
The Canberra triangle is similarly bisected, though in this case so as to create a sight line across the central basin of what was to become Lake Burley Griffin. In Tuxen’s plan, the terrain of Merrilands does not lend itself to any line of sight through the centre of the triangle. The positioning of its east and west sides does, however, allow a clear view along these avenues, thus adhering to his stated position: ‘Points from which good views may be obtained may be placed at street intersections, or alternatively in a park reserve…’

Tuxen did bring some elements of the Griffins’ use of visual endpoints (once again, a feature they may well have taken from Washington D.C.) to his Merrilands scheme. Most notable is the placement of what Tuxen called ‘an important church’ east of the Civic Centre, where it would rise above the town hall and form a ‘closing vista’ eastwards along Hughes Parade. The Griffins did not place churches on their plan of Canberra but created picturesque endpoints with parks within circuits. These fulfilled a similar visual purpose (and, given the Griffins’ interest in natural harmony and aesthetics, may also have had a ‘moral’ role) in that they could be seen through Canberra’s Civic Centre.

However clear the connection between the Griffins’ Canberra plan and Merrilands, the latter plan goes beyond imitation; its differences to the Canberra plan are revealing. One of the most overt is the direction and orientation of the streets outside the triangles. The suburbs of the 1918 Canberra plan featured many short streets which switched their orientation half-way between intersections, thus creating endpoints in each street section without the drawback of the disorienting, continually circular street; longer streets were straight. The majority of the shorter streets in Merrilands, however, are straight, and longer streets change direction at intersections. The effect of this, in the westernmost part of the plan in particular, is a similarity to Sulman’s hypothetical ‘spiderweb’ plan, which Reps describes as containing ‘radial and ring thoroughfares’ to ‘provide monumental vistas and speed traffic’.

Tuxen need not have looked as far as Sydney for an existing example of this type of design; Fawkner Memorial Park (also known as the ‘New Melbourne General Cemetery’), less than a kilometre from the westernmost point of Merrilands and dating from 1905, was laid out in such a design. The author of a 1930s pamphlet promoting the cemetery recognised the scheme by which its roads were laid out, and commented that ‘the principle of the spider’s web was selected by the Architect as being that on

29 *ibid.*, p. 43.
which to base the main lines of the design.\textsuperscript{31} The designer of Fawkner was Charles Heath (1867-1948), an Australian-born architect and surveyor, who had entered the Federal Capital Design Competition with a design which also featured many radial and diagonal streets.\textsuperscript{32} Heath’s son, Frank, would take over his father’s business in the late 1940s at which time he was already a highly influential figure in Victorian planning circles. The ‘spider’s web’ at Fawkner allows efficient access via diagonal lines, leading from Fawkner railway station, to most areas of the cemetery; in this, it is similar to many garden suburb designs, including Tuxen’s, in which the street plans focuses on easy access to a railway station.

Curiously, Tuxen typifies his major roads in his 1932 explication of Merrilands as ‘long, straight streets’. In fact, only Mahoneys and Broadhurst Roads, which form the northern and southern boundaries of Merrilands and which pre-date it, strictly fit this description. Tuxen may have been defining the ‘straight’ streets against the curvilinear street, which does not appear in the Merrilands plan. ‘Nature works in curves, the contours following sinuous lines all over the plan’, he said in 1919. ‘But a town is the work of man, not of nature, and man works in straight lines.’\textsuperscript{33} In expressing this belief, while not expressly drawing attention to the differences between his own work and the Griffins’ in this regard, he was representing this aspect of his work as originating from a personal standard which was, coincidentally or otherwise, quite removed from the Griffins’ approach. Tuxen’s garden suburb work almost always included some curved streetscape, and he clearly recognised the appeal of such a design feature for clients. His designs of the 1920s are, however, more frequently executed with use of straight lines, though rarely in formal square or oblong blocks.

Sulman’s Daceyville and Rosebery designs have already been mentioned as possible sources of inspiration for Tuxen at Merrilands. If the visual similarity of the western part of Merrilands to a version of the ‘spiderweb’ design was suggested to Tuxen by Sulman’s advocacy of the same as a building block for the national capital design, then the end result was not intended to achieve the same function. Sulman’s web was conceived to cut the shortest route between various ‘key’ points and was meant only as a schematic sketch for a design intended to be altered to accommodate natural features. Sulman himself had already arrived at an adaptation of the spiderweb which he used in his ‘Proposed Subdivision of Dacey Garden Suburb’; the blocks numbered 1-17 by Sulman in this plan are very similar to those placed by Tuxen between what is now Davidson Street and Massey Avenue.\textsuperscript{34} Tuxen visited Daceyville

\textsuperscript{31} The Fawkner Memorial Park, n.d., n. p., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{32} Reps, Canberra 1912, pp. 177, 315-17.
\textsuperscript{33} Tuxen, ‘Suburban Subdivision’, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{34} John Sulman, ‘Town Planning and Garden Suburbs’, The Salon, August 1913, facing page 22.
(the design of which was substantially altered from Sulman's proposed plan by William Foggett) in the mid-1920s, if not before, and wrote of it favourably in 1927.35

Sulman's Rosebery estate is also close, in some respects, to Merrilands. It includes a tramway 'loop' (tramway 'loops' were unknown in Melbourne at this time, but they were common in Sydney, for example in Millers Point, La Perouse and Erskineville36); an internal reserve denoted a 'lookout point' (Tuxen wrote in 1919 that parts of a terrain which offered 'good views' could be placed in 'a park reserve'); and its accommodation of creeks as picturesque features, with avenues either side.37 While Tuxen may have encountered these features in many plans, there would be few examples extant at the time of such plans being brought to fruition by government or private enterprise; it seems therefore likely that areas like Rosebery were in some respects influential on the Merrilands plan.

While there is value in identifying the influence of Sulman and the Griffins on the Merrilands design, the tool which brought about the overall unification of the final plan was probably the 'very inadequate textbooks' of the time. Raymond Unwin (whose own work was in part the result of engagement with the ideas of German planner Camillo Sitte38) might well have played a part, in this respect, in Merrilands. For while it is difficult to imagine that Tuxen genuinely considered Unwin's book 'inadequate', it is probably harder to imagine that he was unaware of, or did not have access to, this important work. While Tuxen did not openly extol Unwin's concept of suburban 'crystals' (as outlined by Freestone),39 he was compelled in his practice to create suburban sectors, and Merrilands was to be the first of a number of areas in the northern suburbs of Melbourne which Tuxen designed.

None of the above is intended to suggest that Merrilands was simply the sum of its influences, with Tuxen no more than the technically skilled assembler of a collage; nor that he was laying a second-hand plan over an unsuitable terrain. His street plan at Merrilands was directed, for instance, in part by a wish to minimise bridges. He wrote in 1932 that 'the number of crossings... was kept down to a minimum to avoid expense in bridge construction'.40 As was typical at this time, the expense would not be met by T. M. Burke but by the Preston council through its ratepayers, so that limited access to portions of the estate would limit sales and growth; thus a subdivision's street plan would necessarily guide growth and the nature or extent of development.

35 Saxil Tuxen, 'Town Planning and the Working Man: Giving the Small House its Proper Place in the Community' Australian Home Beautiful, 1 September 1927, p. 29.
37 Tuxen, 'Suburban Subdivisions', p. 43.
38 Reps, Canberra 1912, pp. 35-37.
39 Freestone, Model Communities, p. 11.
Merrilands Triangle

Tuxen was, in certain respects, far more experienced in planning for Australian suburban conditions than others in the field. By the time he designed Merrilands, he had worked on many more suburban subdivisions (fourteen) than the Griffins (seven) and Sulman (three). Most of Tuxen's planning work prior to Merrilands was not 'on town planning lines'. However, considering that Sulman, the Griffins and Tuxen were all required to be skilled at recognising the balance between a vendor and developer's requirements and the needs of purchasers/investors in a subdivision, there is no doubt that Tuxen was by far the most successful, if success can be defined in terms of projects reaching completion in a form recognisably close to the original design.

Tuxen's earliest known public pronouncement on subdivisional design has not been preserved, but there is a record of the debate it caused. Completed with his father, and presented by both to the Victorian Institute of Surveyors, the proposal for the creation of an independent body to approve suburban subdivisions on behalf of local councils shows that, from relatively early in his career, Tuxen was a campaigner for reform in suburban planning.\(^4\) It is clear that he also firmly believed in the value of expertise and that he felt that the surveying profession was responsible for the central tenets of Melbourne's planning, including its 'magnificent layout and park system', and that this was a responsibility that could not be taken lightly.\(^2\)

Just as Tuxen's interest in both civic improvement and the advancement of professional practice preceded the widespread interest in town planning, there are aesthetic preferences in his work which suggest a connection both to 1880s garden suburbs in a broader sense and, more specifically, the work of his father. One feature of Tuxen's work, apparent in Merrilands and many other projects he executed throughout his working life, is the semi- or quarter-circle road, or concentric roads, which usually expanded from the corner of a subdivision where sales were initially made. Kenneth T. Jackson describes 'the image of the bending road— not a short cut, not a thoroughfare, not a commercial strip, not a numbered street' as 'part and parcel of the suburban ideal'.\(^3\) Tuxen regularly utilised this simple device: McLagan Crescent, at the southeastern corner of Merrilands (near the proposed 'Merrilands Station' which ultimately was not built, although Ruthven Station was erected further north in the 1920s) and Tuxen's original design for Newton Crescent in Lalor (1947).\(^4\) Viviani Crescent, in


\(^{42}\) Saxil Tuxen, 'Presidential Address by Mr. Saxil Tuxen, Retiring President', *Australian Surveyor*, Vol. 4, No. 6, 1933, p. 321.


Heathmont (1921) is an inversion of the usual design orientation, probably necessitated by the shape of the subdivision block.

Tuxen may even have considered the simple curve a Tuxen family trademark. Tuxen Street, in Balwyn, on an estate he designed (or perhaps completed from his father's conception) in 1913, is a much larger example of this type of curved street. Tuxen wrote in 1932 that he 'followed in the footsteps of my father, who was a staunch advocate of curves'. Both father and son had come to appreciate, long before Unwin had published *Town Planning in Practice*, the 'beautiful street pictures' he describes appearing in the curved streetscape. The use of the curve was also, for Tuxen, a demonstration of the surveyor's technical skill. 'For the inexperienced designer,' he wrote, 'I would strongly advocate leaving curves alone.'

While Merrilands is undoubtedly a blending of styles and fashions of planning immediately after the first world war, to the educated eye it is also – alongside such diverse plans as those for Park Orchards, Lalor and the 'Leslie' estate – recognisably the work of Saxil Tuxen. While few of the proposed land use conceptions included in the original plan were realised, it is nevertheless a unique example of the beginning of the 1920s garden suburb in Australia. Its conception is the result of the imaginative appropriation of original, local, and foreign ideas by a skilled Australian technician.

At the onset of the Depression, which affected his practice severely, Tuxen became disillusioned with the type of town planning for which he had been such an enthusiastic spokesman. He moved instead from environmental determinism into more direct action to aid those most affected. His first step was to promote schemes for the prevention of erosion at Sandringham beach, which he hoped would create employment in the area. The late 1930s saw him aligned with both the nascent Brotherhood of St. Laurence (he laid out the organisation's Carrum Downs settlement) and Oswald Barnett's Slum Study Group and the Slum Abolition Board which emerged from it. He did not go on to work for the Victorian Housing Commission under Barnett; his designing role appears to have been assumed by Frank Heath.

Tuxen, like many planners of the interwar years, maintained a peculiar balance between pragmatism (the recognition that he was operating in a commercial real estate market, for instance, and that his planning work would need to appeal to buyers) and idealism (as typified by the belief in environmental determinism that infected the majority of planners at this time). The Merrilands design is a melting pot of various ideas.

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46 Tuxen, 'Design of Subdivisions in Victoria', p. 182.
design practices prevalent in Australia (and in some instances internationally) in 1919, combined with features unique to Tuxen’s work.

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