

Bartlett School of Architecture UCL, MA Architectural History Dissertation

“Designing For Everybody”: A Study of George Finch’s Cotton Gardens Estate, 1966-8

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Abstract:

This research is a study of Cotton Gardens Estate in Lambeth, London, by the architect George Finch, conducted in order to place this estate in the post-war council housing narrative. It dwells on the estate’s architectural, material and political history, its initial and current position in post-war council housing in London and in the borough of Lambeth, and perception of it by its community. It also analyses how George Finch’s architectural and political influences, principles and visions, especially of housing, contributed to the estate, at the time of completion and as a legacy. Furthermore, it questions the position of the estate within the representation of post-war council housing estates and London, considering George Finch’s intentions, the integrity of the estate and feedback from its residents. The study relies on archival research, literature review and oral history.

The main chapters are architect, plan, section and elevation. The architect chapter provides information on George Finch and his work, in context with the era. The plan, section and elevation chapters are based on other archival material and conducted exhaustive interviews to represent missing original drawings. The plan focuses on the larger story and conception of Cotton Gardens Estate and user experience of the site. The section talks about how spaces were configured and are currently used on a detailed scale, and user personalisation. The elevation zooms on the aspect of individuality within the whole and how this manifests in the estate, along with construction methods. With analysing Cotton Gardens Estate and George Finch, presenting the ideas, applications and experience, the research concludes that this estate is significant in council housing history. It also shows that council estates that are not in the public eye can influence the representation of post-war council housing and steer the discourse in a different direction.