

A
PEX
ESTATE





HISTORY

THE APEX SOCIETY

Formed in 1965, the Apex Society completed 7 schemes. Only three have Apex in their name – Apex Drive, Apex Close (in Beckenham) and Apex Court (Weybridge - now demolished). All were developed by Derek Sharp Associates.

Completed 1967, Apex Close received an Architectural Design Project Award in 1968. 'It is a cluster of geometric forms, with distinctive cylindrical projections on side elevations. Faced in cream coloured brick, it has exposed painted concrete structural elements supporting upper storey projections under a modernist flat roof with a broad cornice.'

Apex Drive was a 2.2 Acre site with planing permission for 15 houses per acre to Parker Morris standards. Nearby, speculative builders achieved this density with narrow-fronted terraced houses. In Beckenham, the Drum Shape has no real role. Estate Agent photos show the landing on the stairs filling the space, and being a bow shape in bedrooms. The Drum in Apex Drive is a light well, never intended to be occupied by a spiral staircase which would have been prohibitively expensive.



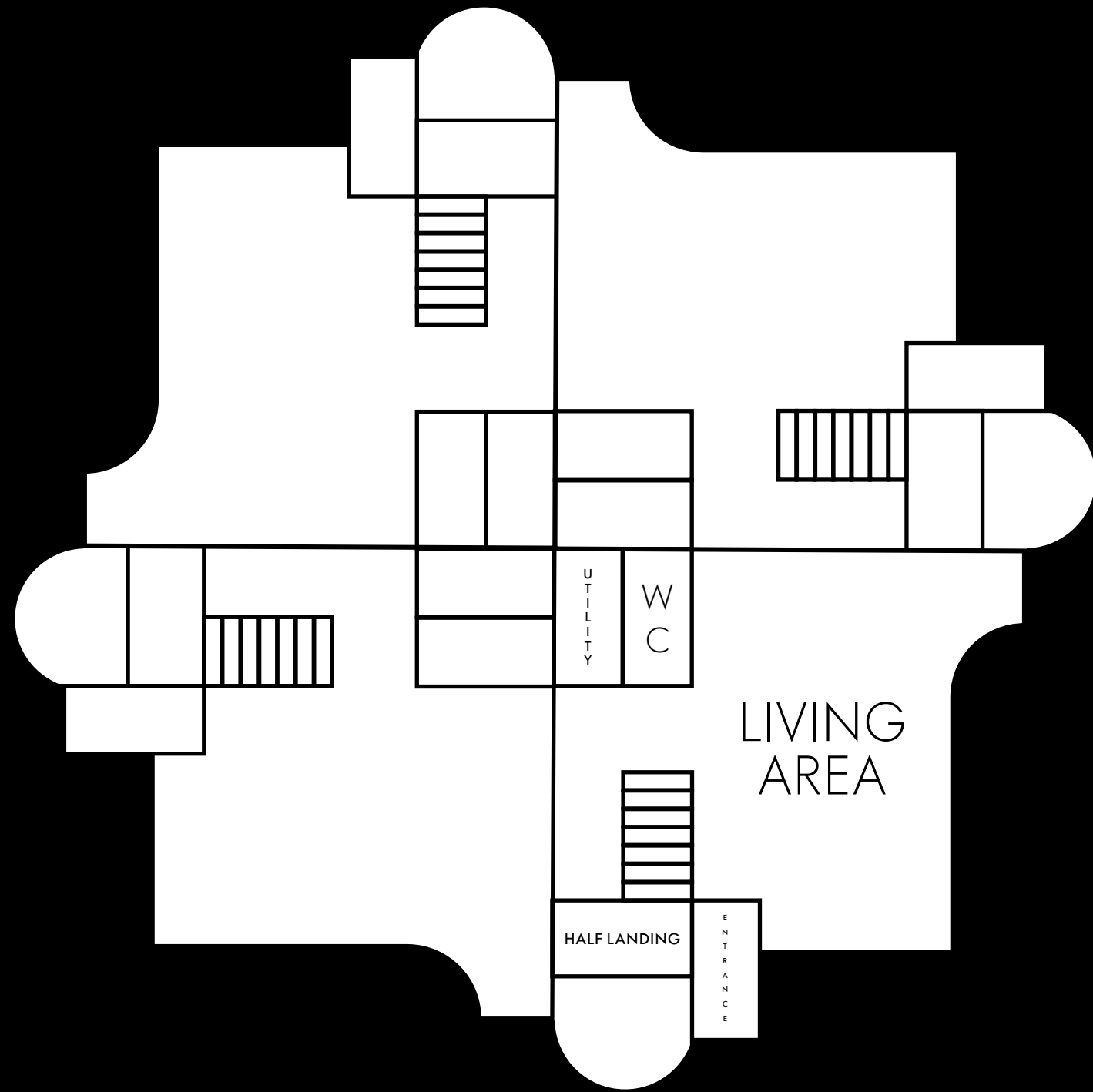
Apex Close



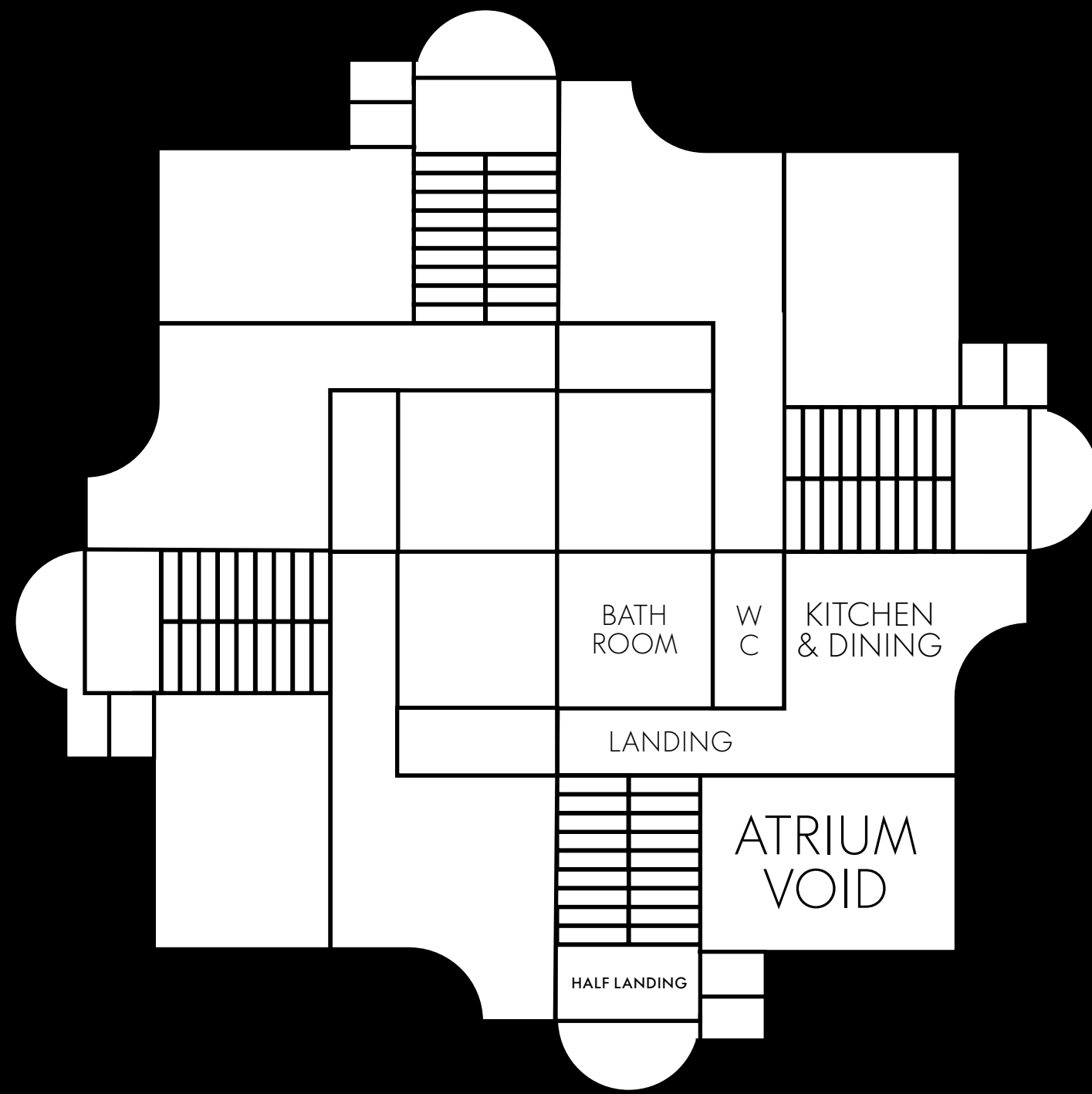
Apex Court



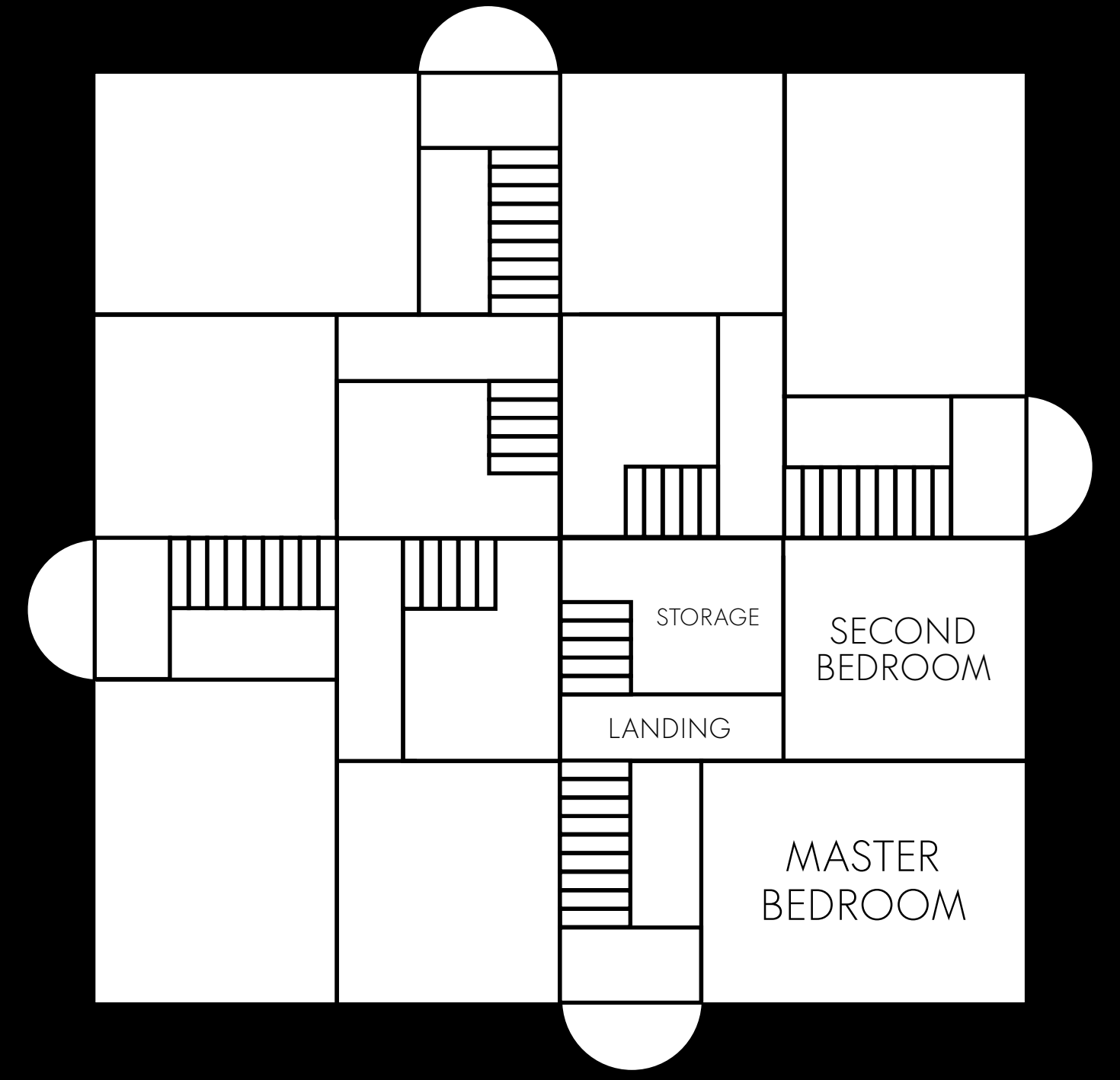
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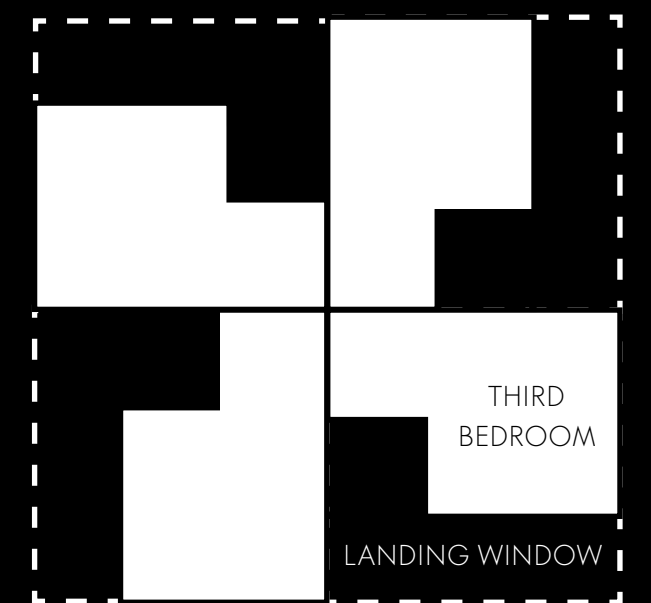
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2



3



The diagrams above show the floorplans for the original late 1969/1970 layout for each House, formed within the cross sections complex per block at Apex Drive

FLOORPLANS

APEX DRIVE WAS COMPLETED IN MID 1970 AT A TOTAL CONTRACT OF £145,000. EACH HOUSE (920 SQ FT) WAS:



BUILD:	LAND	£1,113
	BUILDING	£4,531
	OVERHEADS	£835
	TOTAL COST:	£6,489

CHARGE TO RESIDENTS:	REPAYMENT OF LOAN	£7.43
	NON-LOAN CHARGES	£0.89
	INCLUSIVE RENT/WEEK	£8.32



LAURIE ABBOTT

Before winning the Architectural competition with the Apex Society, LaurieAbbot worked on Creek Vean – a house built by Team 4 (which comprised Norman Foster and his wife with Richard and Su Rogers). Despite its 1960s modernism, it achieved listed building status in 1998. As Apex Drive (and Apex Close in Beckenham) came to fruition, Rogers and Piano unexpectedly won the commission for the Pompidou Centre, Laurie was recruited to work on it with them. Laurie did initial drawings for the Lloyds building, which displays his fondness for drum shapes.

His architecture studies began at Walthamstow Technical College at the age of 16 but he left before taking any exams to work with his brother at Owen Luder's office and also at Tooley & Foster, where he was later joined by founding RRP partner John Young, whose first impressions of Abbott were: "As I walked into the driveway to the office, a kit-built Lotus 7 pulled in and out climbed Laurie in black leather with long hair." His break came in 1964 when, aged 24, he was appointed as project architect for Team 4's Creek Vean. Rogers lured him back after winning the Pompidou competition with Renzo Piano. He did the very first sketches which placed the services on the exterior.

"Once I've finished work, I go into the garage at home and play around with my cars [he owns

eight, including a 1950s Aston Martin, a vintage Bentley, E-type Jaguars and a Porsche Carrera] or put up shelves. Abbott confesses he "fell into architecture" because his brother was an architect. "I was only interested in cars, and still am. I'm not a passionate architect, but, whatever I do, I try and do the best I can."

From the 80 or so projects that Abbott has worked on at RRP, his personal high points are Lloyd's, the Berlin Daimler Chrysler headquarters and the 1986 Royal Academy exhibition London As It Could Be. Abbott drew up the concept designs for Lloyd's before it was handed over to Young for completion because Abbott had been invited by Piano and the later engineer Peter Rice to join them in Italy to carry out research into the application of lightweight materials for Fiat cars. He says he didn't find it hard to leave Lloyd's at such an exciting stage. He had just devoted five years to Pompidou, and Lloyd's would have required the same level of commitment.

"If I'd gone through Lloyd's the same as I had done with Pompidou, I would be dead and buried years ago," he says. Besides, his two-year stint with Fiat allowed him to indulge in his lifelong passion for cars. When the Fiat contract came to an end, Abbott tried his hand at designing his own cars. He built about 10 and received a lot of interest in a lookalike Lotus 7 that he built "just for fun". But, as he explains: "The problem with cars is that there is no money in it. He spent 5 years as head of the Japan office in Tokyo, overseeing 9 projects including the Kabuki-cho Tower, the Iikura Building in Tokyo and

experimental research on incorporating a wind turbine to generate power. Other projects in the Far East include the Seoul Broadcasting Centre, an industrialised housing scheme in Korea and a stadium at Saitama, near Tokyo. He has also designed residential schemes in Sagaponac, New York and Palisades, Los Angeles.

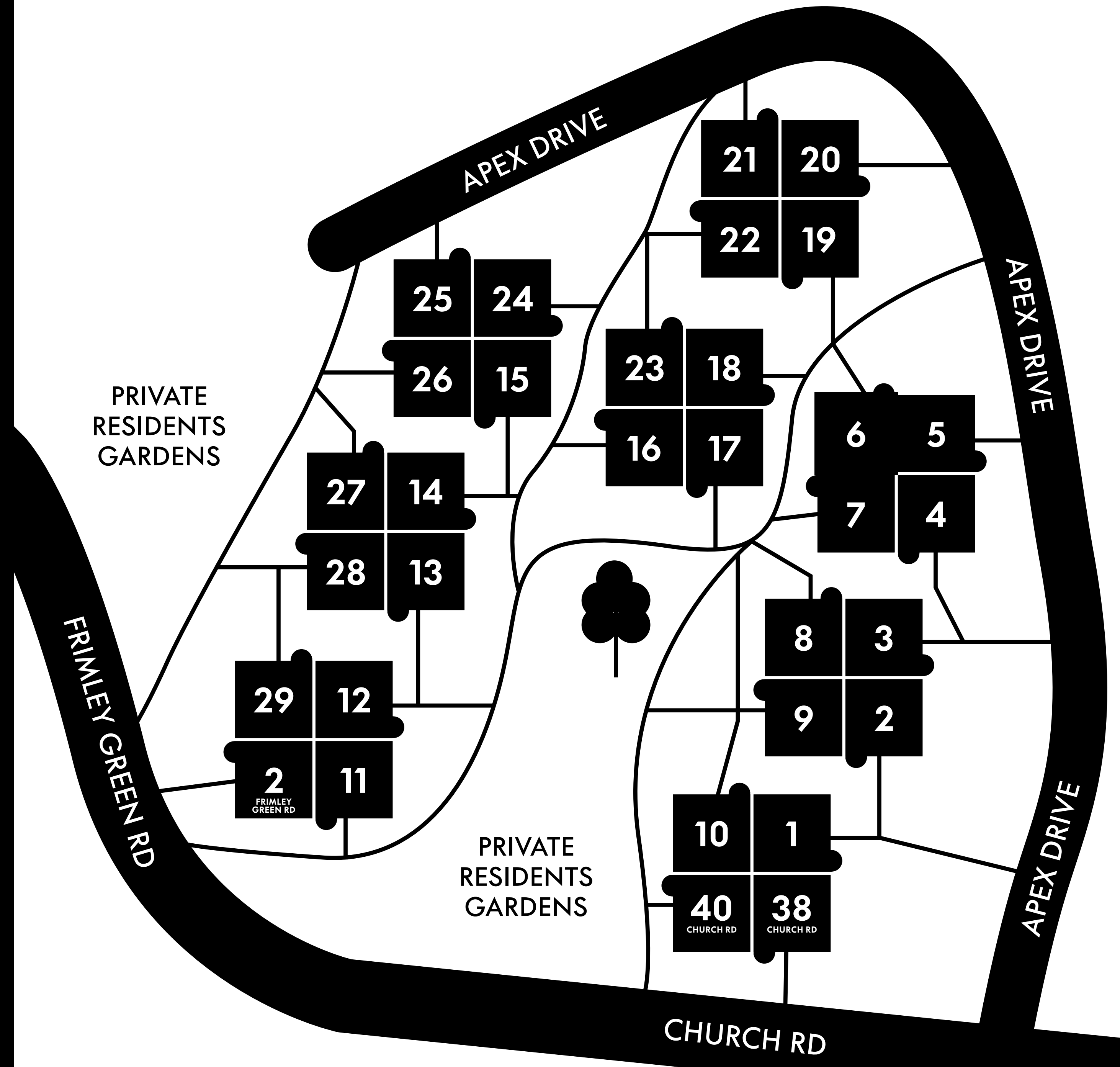
He was involved in the original competition for Terminal 5 at Heathrow Airport and has worked on T5's process for ten years.



Laurie Abbott's fondness for drummed features, used in the designs for the Lloyds of London building



MAP



A Wedding day on the 13th September 1969, with Apex Drive in the background still under construction



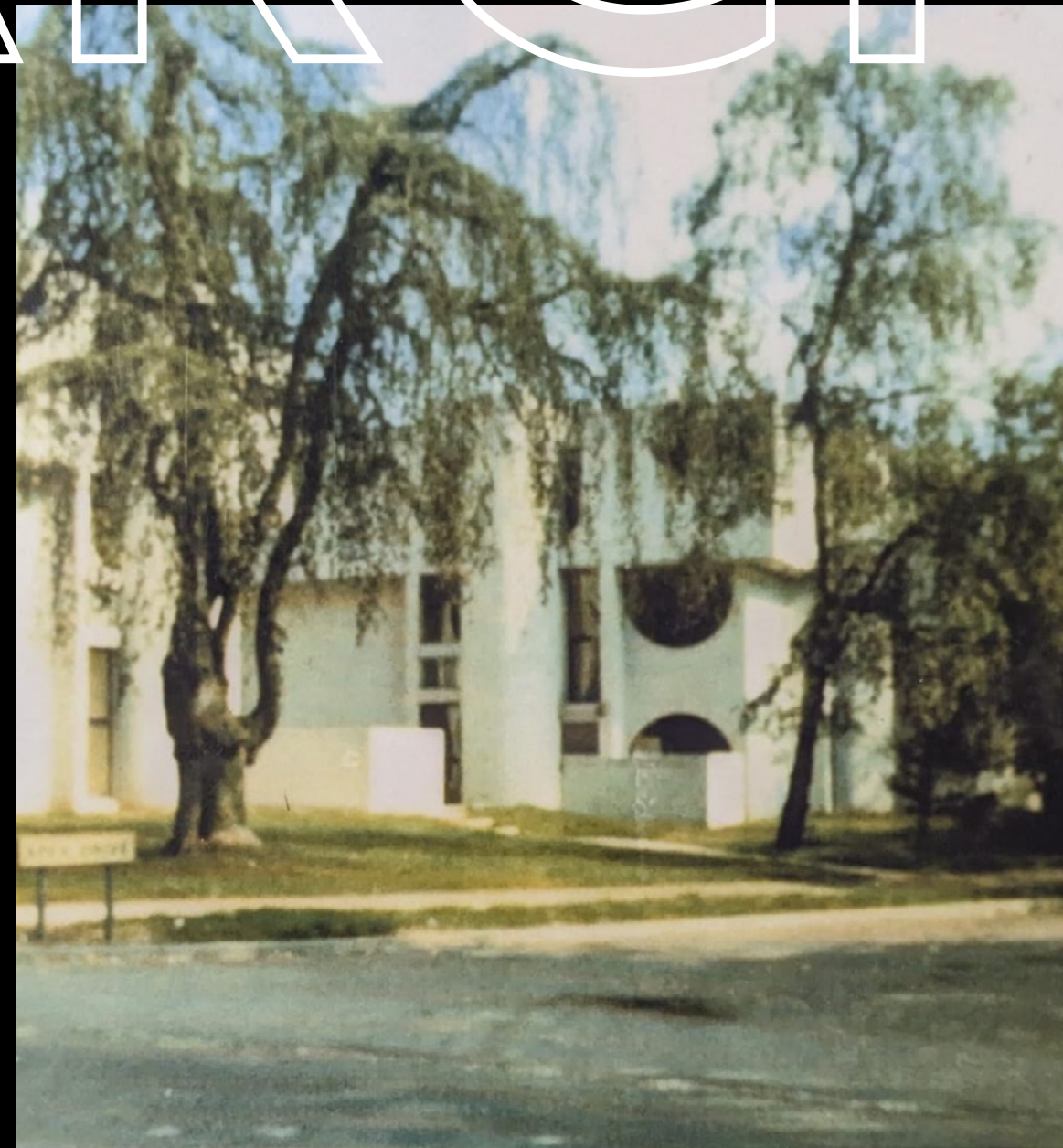
Apex Drive, taken from Frimley Green Road on the entrance steps to St. Peters Church. Built by Streeter's of Hampton, their innovative design, taking account of the preservation order on most of the trees on the site, had let Apex Drive to become locally listed buildings.



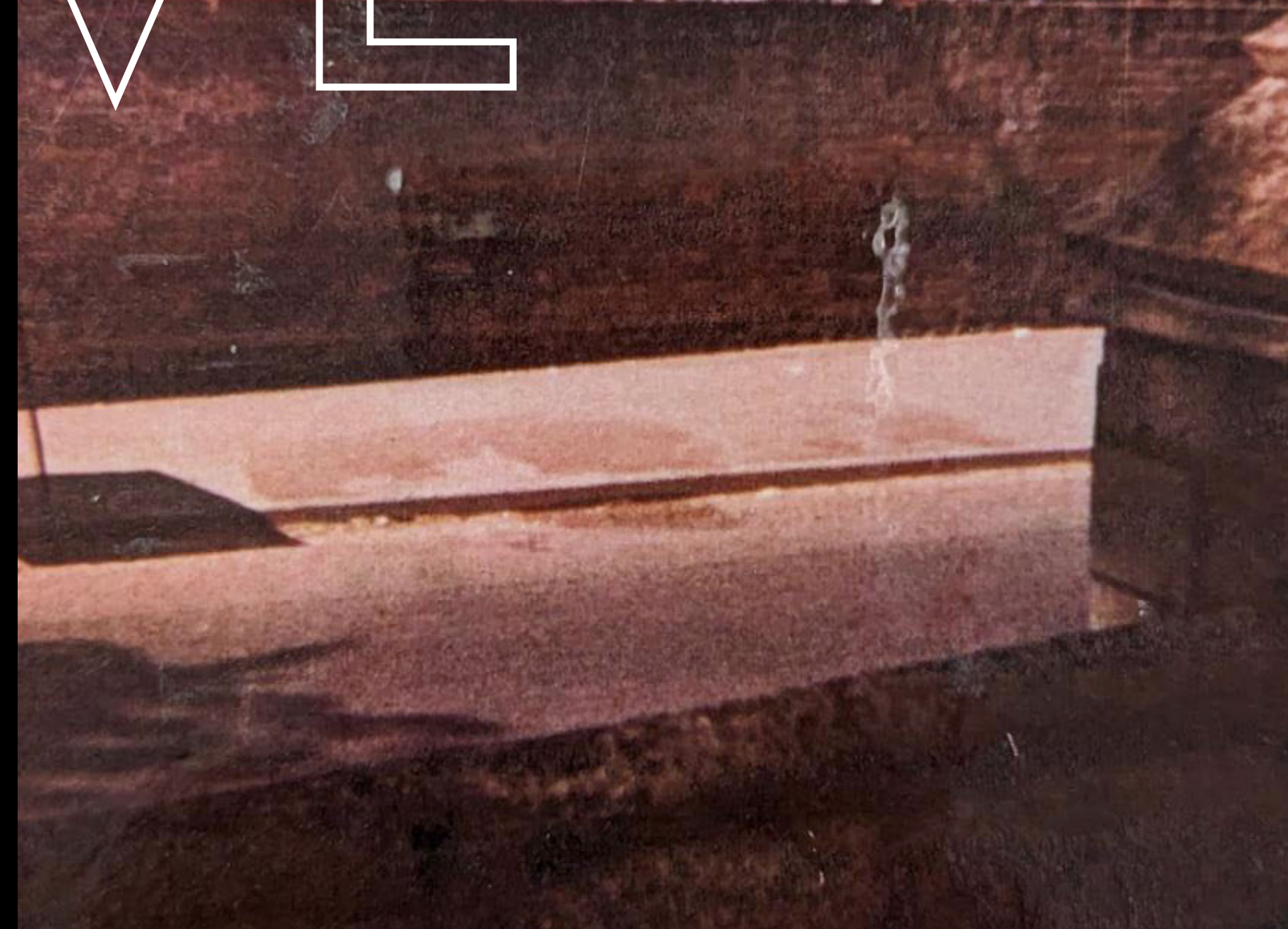
ARCHIVE



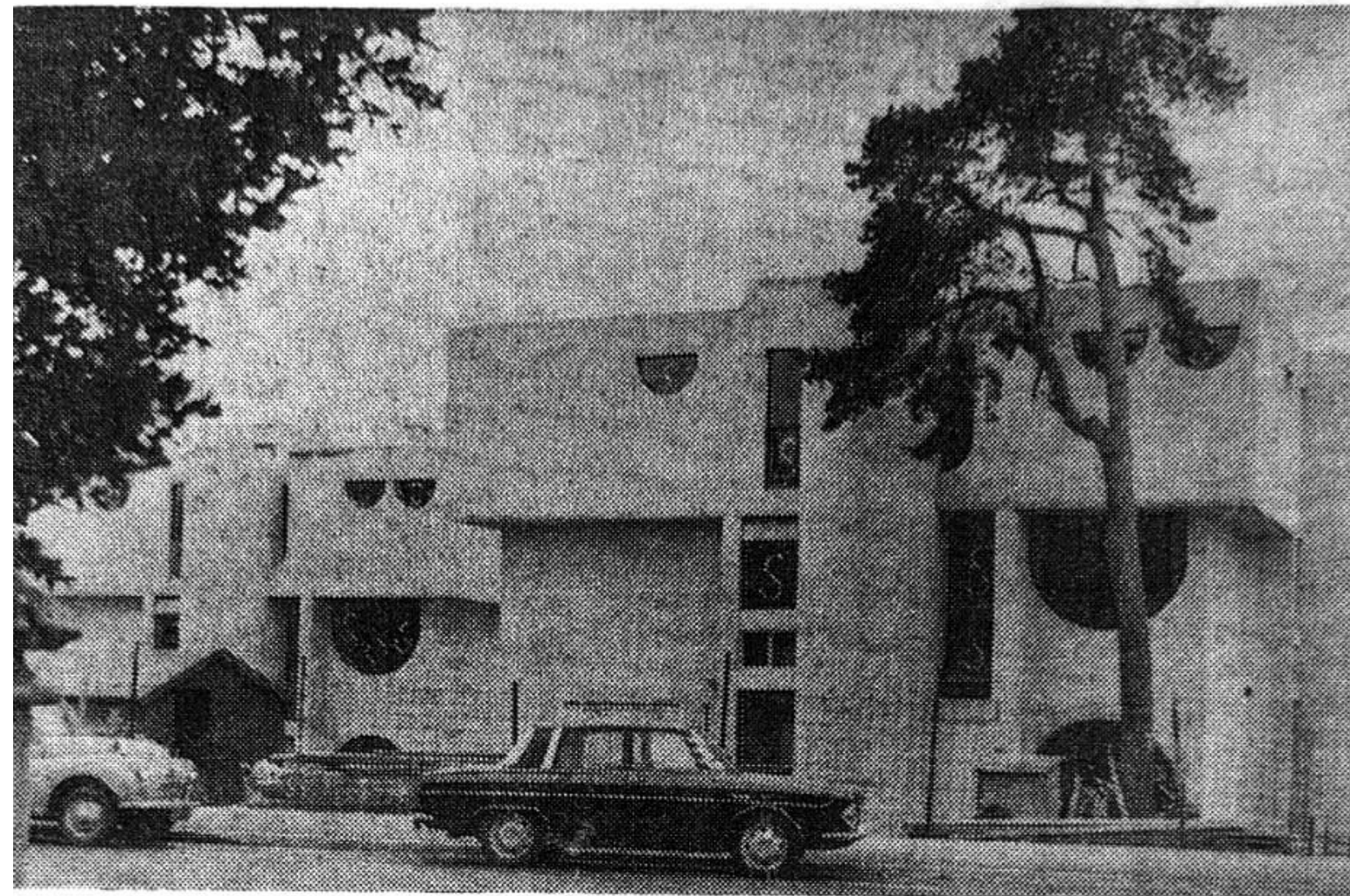
A view from the tower of St. Peters church, taken in the 1970's looking across Apex Drive, with Burleigh Road beyond. The mature trees were planted in the grounds of the former Manor House.



The entrance to Apex Drive, in the mid eighties



Ultra-modern houses pass the 'water test'



THE building snag on the controversial houses with the half-moon windows at Frimley has been completely cleared up.

Experts at the building research station in London have given the £145,000, 32 house development a clean bill of health after studying results of a simple water test carried out on the buildings.

The houses, owned by the Manor Housing Society, have been criticised by local councillors because of their unusual design.

The snag arose because of a difficulty over a new-type damp roof course used in the houses.

Camberley's chief building inspector Reginald Munday insisted that tests be carried out because he was not convinced the method used would be effective.

Mr. Derek Sharp, head of the firm of architects dealing with the development, said: "I have verbal confirmation from the building research station that the tests were satisfactory. I expect that their written report will follow shortly."

He added: "We did not expect anything different. We have already used the same methods in other parts of the country."

CRITICISM

The report is to be sent to Mr. Munday as soon as it is ready. He has already said that he will accept the research station's verdict.

The tests carried out were very simple—they involved sprinkling water from a hose on the buildings for 24 hours.

Commenting about the criticism on the houses, situated on

the corner of Frimley Green Road and Church Road, Frimley, Mr. Sharp said: "When the site has been tidied up a bit more I shall invite the councillors to have a look inside these houses."

"I should not think that they have had the opportunity to take a good look inside them. I should imagine they will be pretty surprised when they see how nice they are."

"A lot of interest has already been shown in the development—students and lecturers in architecture have been there to have a look at them."

"We are using our imagination in building new houses, and this is something that no one else seems to be doing."

"Residents of Frimley are going to be proud of the houses one day."

ORLD

by LYNETTE COBB

YOU EITHER love or hate the ultra-modern houses opposite St. Peter's Church at Frimley.

They are certainly a remarkable conversation point, for people don't seem able to walk past them without voicing an opinion.

The average housewife would probably have a fit if people stopped her in the street to condemn her choice of housing as ugly, unsightly, an eyesore, and an affront to the community.

Yet this is the treatment the residents of these houses meet almost daily, plus the odd blatant request to have a look round the house—"Just to see if it's as bad inside as it looks from the outside."

One who is sick of other people's criticisms is Annette Allender, who lives at No. 2, Brian, her husband, is drummer with the Wishful Thinking pop group, and this is their first home. They were married only a few weeks ago.

"We could have settled for a two-up, two-down semi, but when we saw this we wanted it from the very start," said Annette.

"I am sick of people making nasty comments about the look of the place. They obviously have conservative views, but we don't. The design is exciting and different—and the people who live here like to be different."

The houses certainly are different though it is difficult to explain just how different they are in layman's language.

Open planning on a three and a half floor level is the secret. The ground-floor room (the lounge) is split into two areas by two ceiling levels. The ceiling drops from 18 feet to a normal living room height, and the whole area divides into interesting roomy alcoves.

ATTRACTIVE

A staircase leads to the kitchen, a woman's dream with waste disposal unit and plenty of working surfaces.

The bathroom, on the same floor, has no windows, which gave me a claustrophobic feeling but I am assured it's genuine Scandinavian style.

There are two more staircases and three bedrooms, one of them at the top of the house with half the ceiling formed by a window looking out to the sky.

"The object was to build 32 attractive houses, and keep the scenery of the chosen site, at a cost which would be financially viable. This is what we did."

"People don't realise that to build a house at low cost entails much more effort than a normal conventional house at a higher cost."

Perhaps the most important thing about these houses is that they were financed by a co-ownership scheme. Briefly, this cuts out speculative selling at high prices. By means of this scheme the property is sold at cost price, with no speculative profit.

Householders can pay for



Inside the houses you either love or hate



● ARCHITECT Laurence Abbott . . . the houses are his brainchild

The design is unusual and personally I found it attractive and full of potential for home decorators.

A house like this could definitely be rendered uncomfortable and ugly by bad taste in decoration. No room here for Welsh dressers or granny's old oak heirlooms.

The man responsible for the design, architect Laurence Abbott, lives at No. 12 with his wife and baby daughter.

COST

Of the many criticisms, he said: "It's very sad that these people can't realise we have done the best job we can on a very nice site."

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"It's not bad going," added the architect. "When I lived in Highgate I paid £8 a week for



their houses over 40 years, instead of the usual 25, without making a deposit. The householder (in this case) pays about £9 a week, which includes a garage, external maintenance, and gardener.

"It's not bad going," added the architect. "When I lived in Highgate I paid £8 a week for one room and sharing a bath. Meanwhile, the people who live in the houses seem content. One resident, Mr. Ernest Southgate, who has moved in with his wife and four children, told me: "I believe the people who make nasty comments about us are just jealous that we live somewhere a little different." He's probably right."

● ANNETTE and Brian Allender in their modern balcony-style kitchen . . . the living room is a floor below, over the rail

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