Walter’s Way, Honor Oak Park, South London

The first group self-build project to use the Segal method of construction -

By Ian White, Walter’s Way resident

Background to Lewisham Phase One and Two: the first group Segal schemes

Lewisham council, at a time when there was a housing boom, bought up every vacant site in the market for future housing. However in reality only large flat sites were viable for council house building, thus unfortunately Lewisham Council had bought itself apparently unbuildable pieces of land that were small, sloping, soft-soiled, and covered in trees. However Walter Segal loved them!

Colin Ward of the Lewisham Council's Architectural Department, having read and studied Walter Segal's ideas for the timber framed house, devised a plan where they would offer to those on the Councils waiting list for accommodation a chance to build their own house.

The first project - known as Phase One, started in 1979, not far short of five years after they got the approval to go ahead. Due to the success of this Phase Two went ahead in 1984.

All in all twenty-seven houses were completed in the two Lewisham self-build schemes, providing detached houses with gardens for local people. They are now groups of delightful, light and airy, comfortable houses built with great economy on small sites scattered throughout the borough that would otherwise remain unused. These two schemes have now realised over fifty Segal method self-build houses in the borough of Lewisham alone!

In memory of Walter Segal, he has two streets named after him in Lewisham and is the only architect ever to receive this honour in Britain. Walters Way (Phase two) is one of them - the other is Segal Close, site of the first self-build scheme. Thirteen traditional Segal method two storey houses: Phase two of Lewisham Council's self-build scheme.

This is a steeply sloping site near One Tree Hill, which two houses and their gardens had once occupied. It is believed that during the Second World War bombing raids destroyed these houses and the site became derelict for some years, when it was later purchased by Lewisham council.

This second phase was bolder in house design and Walter Segal allowed a great deal of individual choice to be given to each household, choosing whatever interior layout they wanted. It also allowed optional extensions to be added onto the basic house design. Subsequently one house has increased in size by about half as much again and another has had a large conservatory added on one side! Many mature trees on this site, including a Wellingtonia Redwood, where retained due to the Walter Segal method of building, using piles instead of traditional foundations.

Unfortunately Walter Segal did not live to see this second project completed. He died unexpectedly one Sunday at the end of October 1985 at the age of 78 and Walters Way has been named in his honour.

Today we have architectural students visiting our street, studying, photographing and taking notes about these Segal houses. We have a residents association and a social environment, holding a yearly street party. Normally one house is open to the public one day each year as part of the Civic Trust Open House Scheme.