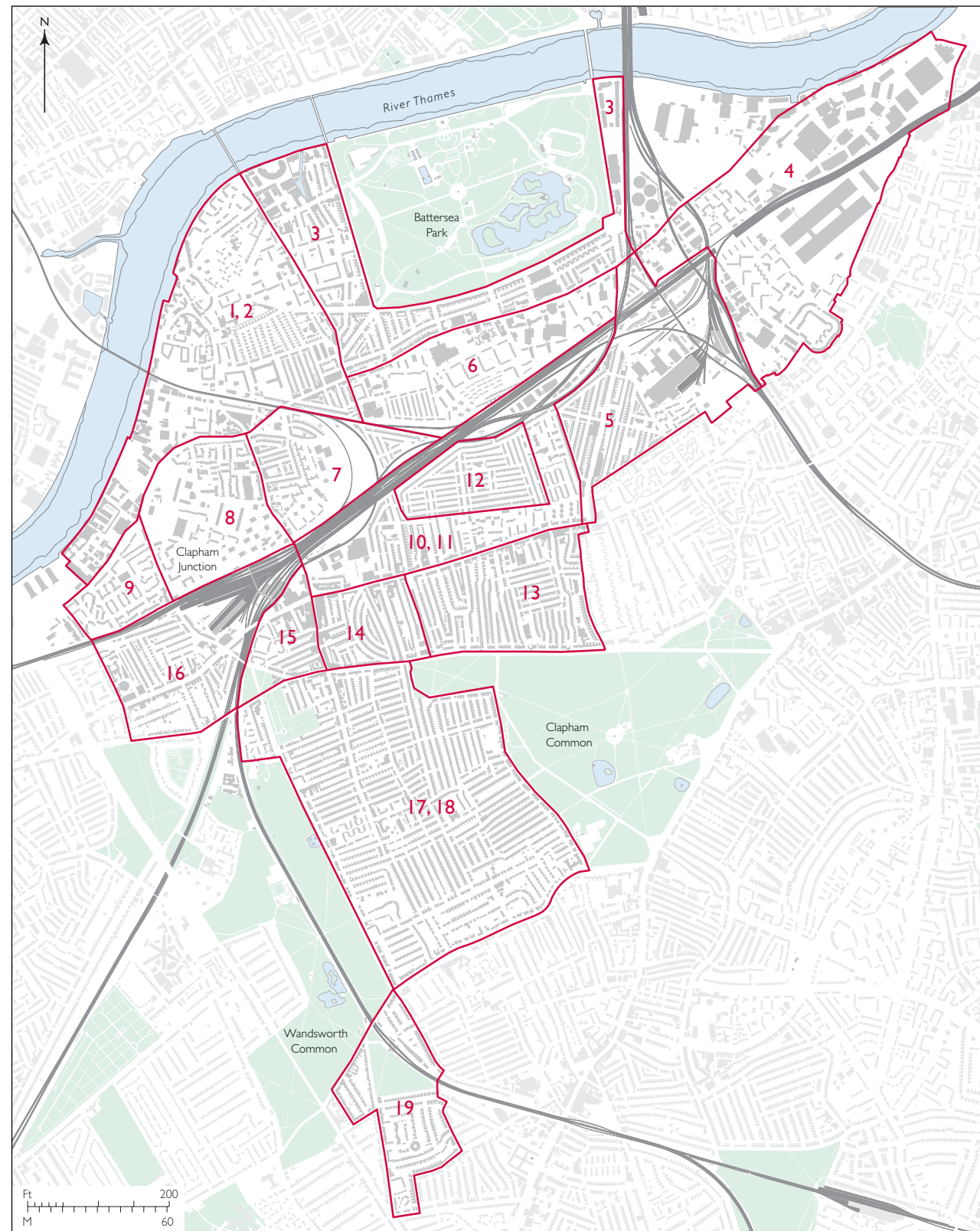


Introduction



1. Battersea, showing the area described in this volume and its constituent chapters outlined in red

Nowhere was London's Victorian growth more dramatic and transformative than in Battersea. In 1841 most of the parish was still given over to market gardens, field strips and open farmland. Its population barely exceeded 6,500, spread among some thousand houses concentrated near the Thames in the old village or in the accumulating industrial quarter of Nine Elms. Yet within thirty years the number had swollen to 54,000 in around 8,000 houses (another 1,800 or so were either uninhabited or unfinished), and only ten years later, in 1881, had almost doubled to 107,000 people in 14,500 houses. A peak of 170,000 residents came in the early 1900s, an increase of more than 2,500 per cent over sixty years. By then all of Battersea's open land other than the commons and Battersea Park had been built over.¹

The record of effort and organization represented by this phenomenal growth, and its diverse results, take centre stage in the present volume, whose focus is housing. Since that is the constant of Battersea's built fabric, the book follows the topographical arrangement traditional to *Survey of London* volumes, in contrast to the thematic treatment allotted to other aspects of its development in Volume 49 (III. 1). A broad overview of the parish's history is given in the introduction to that volume, whereas the following pages draw out themes and currents of particular importance to Battersea's housing.

As in Volume 49, the area covered here is the old parish and later metropolitan borough of Battersea, comprising around 2,164 acres, bounded on the north by the Thames, and including all the low-lying ground beside the river from Nine Elms in the east almost as far as Wandsworth Bridge in the west. It extends south a considerable distance, climbing on to higher ground and taking in parts of Clapham and Wandsworth Commons before coming to a halt only a few hundred yards short of Balham High Road. Since the local government reorganizations of 1965, all these Battersea territories have been subsumed within the London Borough of Wandsworth.

EARLY SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING BEFORE 1840

The pattern of Battersea's built fabric before the middle of the eighteenth century can be dealt with here briefly, as the original nucleus – the 'Town' as it was usually referred to – is considered as an entity in Chapter 1. It evolved as a typical riverside village, with a church, manor house, undulating high street with taverns and small houses, and a ferry close by to the east. Some distance to the south-west lay the important house or group of houses known in medieval times as Bridgecourt, which rose to the status of a 'palace' after it came into the hands of the archbishops of York in the 1470s. Later known as York House, it can be understood as the precursor of the many houses built by wealthy commuters all over Battersea, at first near the river and on the fringes of the village, later and more consistently on the higher ground to the south.

Among other early areas of settlement, the biggest was the riverside industrial hamlet of Nine Elms, essentially a westward continuation of Vauxhall. Here too by the middle of the eighteenth century were some substantial houses, mostly built by local manufacturers and traders. Next down in scale was the community of St John's Place, comprising twenty to thirty houses grouped at the meeting of two main routes through north-west Battersea (St John's Hill and Plough Road). Originally populated in the years after 1700 by gardeners and farmers, St John's Place by the mid eighteenth century was attracting London merchants. Other than some ribbon development in the vicinity of Battersea Bridge, following its construction in 1771–2, this was almost the sum of concerted settlement, as opposed to scattered farmhouses and cottages, up to 1800.

The first attempt to urbanize Battersea indeed proved a failure. This was Battersea New Town, a grid of minor streets south of what is now Battersea Park Road in the low-lying fields at the western end of Nine Elms. Work began in the 1790s but hardly took off, and building continued sporadically, well into the nineteenth century. Of around 800 new dwellings added to Battersea's housing stock between 1790 and 1840, almost a third can be accounted for by Battersea New Town. The rest were mostly small rows of houses for workers close to the burgeoning riverside industries, off the High Street and in the Church Road and York Place areas.

Villas

Wealthy Londoners were building second homes in Battersea long before the emergence of the suburban villa as a recognized architectural type in England. Most were in the ancient village centre and along the riverside, but by around 1700 they were spreading further inland. By the middle of the eighteenth century London merchants had begun to colonize the high ground along the turnpike road – St John's Hill and Lavender Hill – and more especially the fringes of the commons. The open, healthy environment and easy communication with London and the villages of Wandsworth and Clapham (itself already favoured for houses of the type) made this the ideal villa location.

The phenomenon was closely connected to changes in landownership. Until the 1760s most of the land in Battersea where these houses were to be built, especially around the two commons, formed part of the freehold estate of the St John family, latterly Viscounts Bolingbroke, as lords of the manor. As the interest among City men for land here took off, the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke began offering longer leases than hitherto. But Bolingbroke's lavish spending habits had left him heavily in debt, and in 1761–3 he sold the family's Surrey estates to his wife's cousin John (later 1st Earl) Spencer. As the *European Magazine* observed at the time of Bolingbroke's death, it was this sale and the subsequent decision by Spencer and his trustees to sell off the freeholds around the commons in parcels that opened the way for villa development on a large scale:

The distresses of individuals frequently contribute to public good, and this truth is perhaps no where more exemplified than in the neighbourhood of Clapham, Wandsworth, Battersea, &c. At all these places the improvidence of a late noble Lord, which occasioned him to alinate [sic] such part of his property as he had the dominion over, has been the means of creating some of the most elegant villas in the environs of the metropolis. Whoever recollects Clapham Common thirty years ago, will subscribe to the truth of this assertion.²

Among the first adventurers to penetrate westwards beyond Clapham was John Akerman, a City glass and china merchant of German extraction. By 1751 he had settled on a farm 'cottage' on Clapham Common's west side as his principal home, which he, his son and later occupants, notably the evangelical merchant Henry Thornton, would transform into the famous Battersea Rise House. Akerman's son Isaac and other early villa-dwellers were among the purchasers from Spencer; indeed, five of them formed a cabal in 1763 to divide between them the land north and west of Clapham Common. The top end of Wandsworth Common, less confined than it is today, underwent similar colonization on a smaller scale. Here the Blakesley family, City haberdashers, began turning the St John's Place district into an enclave of City men's houses from the 1750s, with Thomas Vardon's Spencer Lodge in fifteen acres of grounds emerging as the largest holding.

Early recruits to the Battersea–Clapham area included some City bankers and merchants considered the most 'opulent' in the world.³ Wealth from West Indian sugar plantations was prominent from the start and remained so for as long as that trade persisted. The district's counter-association with the abolition of slavery via Thornton, William Wilberforce and their circle – the so-called 'Clapham saints' – dated only from the 1790s. Not all would have regarded a house here as a year-round residence. For some it was a weekend or summer haven; for others, who also owned country mansions and estates further afield, a villa near Clapham or Wandsworth Common offered a retreat midway between town and country.

A major factor in the area's popularity with the mercantile gentry was the growing ease of daily communication with the City or West End by carriage, horse or stagecoach. As Christopher Baldwin, who owned a large tract of land on the west side of Clapham Common, put it in the 1780s: 'Inhabitants can go over



2. Central and south Battersea in 1838

London Bridge & transact business from thence to the upper liberties of Westminster, without being a jot further from home; owing to the accommodation of the several Bridges'.⁴ Sales notices in the press stressed the proximity of houses here to 'the three bridges' (London, Blackfriars and Westminster). After further bridges followed in 1816–19 at Vauxhall, Waterloo and Southwark, short-stage coaches from the City and West End were making nearly 2,000 journeys daily, mostly to suburbs like Clapham and Camberwell.⁵ This change brought better roads. During her childhood, around 1810, Marianne Thornton recalled that there were 'not so many conveyances as there are now . . . If the roads were heavy it was thought cruel to drive even to town with only a pair', so a coach and four were used instead.⁶

As transport improved, the upper tier of villa-dwelling society was bolstered by second-rank professionals seeking permanent suburban homes: lawyers, attorneys and stockbrokers, later followed by clergymen and retired soldiers, who also found the district equally congenial. At the time of Corris's map (1787) the villas were still few in number. Fifty years later the tithe map shows them at their peak, spread out along Lavender Hill and St John's Hill as well as round the two commons (III. 2).

This déclassément was evident in the evolving architecture of the villa type. Battersea Rise House, at the west end of Clapham Common, as extended for Thornton in the 1790s, was essentially a mansion,



3. A Battersea villa: Broomfield (later Broomwood) House, Clapham Common West Side, garden front in 1843. *Demolished*

rambling and luxurious. The banker Robert Lovelace's house, alongside, was similarly expansive and costly. But the villas built during the rash of development between 1790 and 1820 were more concise in scale and style. Most were of just two storeys over a basement and quite plain, in brick or stucco, with decoration limited to bow or bay windows for views and perhaps a porticoed entrance. Soon enough the independence and individuality supposed to be the hallmark of the villa began to be lost. Semi-detached and speculative examples were appearing as early as the 1790s, in Lavender Sweep and at the surviving 81 & 82 Clapham Common West Side – the first of a long line of semis stretching as far as the 1870s. The Battersea 'villa' was already on the production line before the nineteenth century.

In the hands of better architects such houses relied for effect on subtle variations in rhythm and proportion. Often the plainness was taken to extremes. Lavender Hill and its eastward continuation, Wandsworth Road, was disparaged by a Victorian commentator as 'once a semi-country road, with . . . here and there a gaunt brick house built in the ugly style of which the architects at the beginning of the present century have left us so many specimens'.⁷ The limitations of many villas were reflected in their internal planning, the standard form being a compact but often inconvenient arrangement of rooms grouped around a central hall or staircase.

Naturally, there were exceptions. Perhaps the most eccentric was the flat-roofed villa built around 1790 for the publisher John Sewell on a promontory just north of Lavender Hill ('Sewell's Folly'). Fanciful styles appeared here and there: Woodham Lodge of c.1808 on Lavender Hill was castellated; Broxash of similar date on Clapham Common West Side was in a Chinese style; Northside near by had the look of a large Swiss chalet. One of the rare survivals, the Shrubbery in Altenburg Gardens, shows how additions made by a succession of wealthy occupants could transform a modest villa-box into a substantial Italianate mansion.

Most of the houses in the Battersea–Clapham villa nexus have resisted firm attribution to well-known architects. Robert Taylor almost certainly designed the Sister Houses, Clapham Common North Side, but that is not proved; Humphry Repton perhaps rebuilt West Lodge near by. John Soane suggested alterations to one of the so-called 'Five Houses' fronting Wandsworth Common along what is now Bolingbroke Grove, but may or may not have carried them out. We are on better ground with lesser figures. J. T. Groves can be credited with the two neo-classical houses built for Henry Thornton of Battersea Rise for his bosom friends Wilberforce and Grant (Broomfield and Glenelg, c.1792). David Laing produced an unassuming classical villa on Lavender Hill (the Chestnuts, 1812). Prevalent among those designers who can be traced are competent City surveyors and entrepreneurial builder-architects. Richard Norris the younger of Holborn, holder of several London surveyorships, designed Old Park House, off Nightingale

Lane, for the banker Robert Dent in the 1770s, as well as most of the Five Houses. When the aristocratic scientist Henry Cavendish was planning to build himself a very large house on the west side of Clapham Common in the 1780s (never realized), he entrusted its design not to an eminent architect but to two local builders.

Fitting that mould but in a league of his own was James Burton, the foremost London builder-architect of the era. Around 1792–6 four stock-brick houses (including the pioneering semi-detached pair at 81 & 82 Clapham Common West Side) were erected by him and a partner as a speculation on the west side of the common. For Burton and his clientele, location and amenities came first; a well-proportioned façade without overt architecture sufficed. A later North Side house built by Burton as a private commission (Springwell, c.1808–9) displays more individuality but is still restrained. This side of his work seeped into the villa architecture of his son, Decimus Burton.

The earlier villas generally came with copious grounds to guarantee privacy, shade and a measure of seclusion, space for exercise and recreation, and also a variety of gardens, yards and conservatories for cultivating plants, fruit and vegetables, and for raising livestock. Such surroundings offered a nuance of country-squire status. Those with more space and money went further: between the commons, Christopher Baldwin, the brothers Robert and William Dent, and Henry Thornton all ran true farms. This elite world of a suburban gentry persisted in a few select retreats into the early Victorian age, indeed in the Thornton compound till its end. But long before then a completely different style of housing had overrun the rest of the parish. The result was that many Battersea villas had a life of only fifty years, while few exceeded a hundred.

HOUSING AFTER 1840

'If you wanted to create something dreary and wretched, it would be difficult to create anything more dreary or more wretched, than Clapham – the Clapham of the Junction and the miles of silly little dirty houses between the Wandsworth Road and Battersea'.⁸ That was how the sculptor Eric Gill looked back in later life on a district he knew well around 1900, when as a teenager and young married man he would travel from lodgings in Clapham and Battersea Bridge Road to an architectural office in Westminster.

The housing endured and then dismissed by Gill was spawned by the building boom that accompanied Battersea's population explosion. It began in the poorer north, beside the industry and railways. Then, when the land there had been exhausted, it invaded more select areas, gradually replacing the villas. This section charts the chronology of that process and considers the types of houses built, their creators, and the mass of people who came to live in them.

Fragmented landholdings: causes and effects

Battersea's landownership pattern on the eve of urbanization was highly fragmented. Of 165 owners recorded in the tithe apportionment of 1838, a hundred held less than five acres. By then the manorial estate had been partly dismantled by the Spencer family for sales in the 1760s and 1830s, whereas the Archbishop of York's estate, the only other major historic landholding, was simply an agglomeration of disconnected plots, mostly dotted about the north of the parish. And still conspicuous at the heart of north Battersea was the great Common Field, with its myriad, individually owned field strips, the complexity of which had defied attempts at enclosure. Indeed, the failure of an enclosure bill promoted by the Spencers in the 1820s (as well as financial necessity) encouraged them to sell much of their estate at auction in the 1830s, often to tenants, thus further subdividing landownership.

Then came the railways. The tithe map captures the gash of the first of these railways, the London & Southampton line, slicing through the fields from Nine Elms (III. 2). Despite the Thames-side industries and the villas dotted round the commons, most of the parish was then still rural, and remained so till the 1860s. Railways were able to proliferate and make havoc in Battersea because land there was still cheap. The consequence of the fickle pattern of overlapping lines and railway yards that ensued was to Balkanize further the already fragmented landownership pattern and thwart orderly planning for development, often as it was on the brink of taking place.

Also, as the railways multiplied and thickened they became physical barriers, accentuating the differences between the low-lying, damp north Battersea landscape and the higher, more salubrious ground to the south, so reinforcing social divisions. Where lines converged or crossed, small surplus pockets of land were created, with awkward shape and poor access. Many of these 'twilight zones' found railway or industrial use; but when the building mania finally began, such was the speculative appetite for low-cost housing that even the most unprepossessing sites were filled with cheap, shabby houses. The little streets and dead ends in and around Sheepcote Lane (later 'Shitpot Lane' to locals), Culvert Road, Latchmere Road and Latchmere Grove were the worst affected, but even a large, well-managed estate could fall foul of the railways' power and ubiquity. The history of Park Town (recounted in Chapter 5) is the clearest demonstration of the catastrophic effects that overweening railway construction could have on an evolving residential neighbourhood.

For all these reasons, development when it came tended to be piecemeal – fractured into small, disconnected parcels and built in fits and starts, with no firm guiding hand or vision. Just three big freehold estates bucked the general trend. Two had been brought together only in the early Victorian period: the Crown estate, sixty acres of building land around Battersea Park, amassed in the 1840s and 50s; and Park Town, nearly seventy acres south of the park, acquired by Philip Flower and his partners in the 1860s. Though both enjoyed the benefits of unified ownership, they were troubled by the same vagaries of trade cycles and local demand that affected smaller holdings, and above all by north Battersea's failure to sustain a middle-class base. The third large freehold estate, Shaftesbury Park, was exceptional: former market-garden ground sold by the Spencers for a speculative development that never happened, then acquired by a dwellings company for a pioneering 'Workmen's City' of small houses.

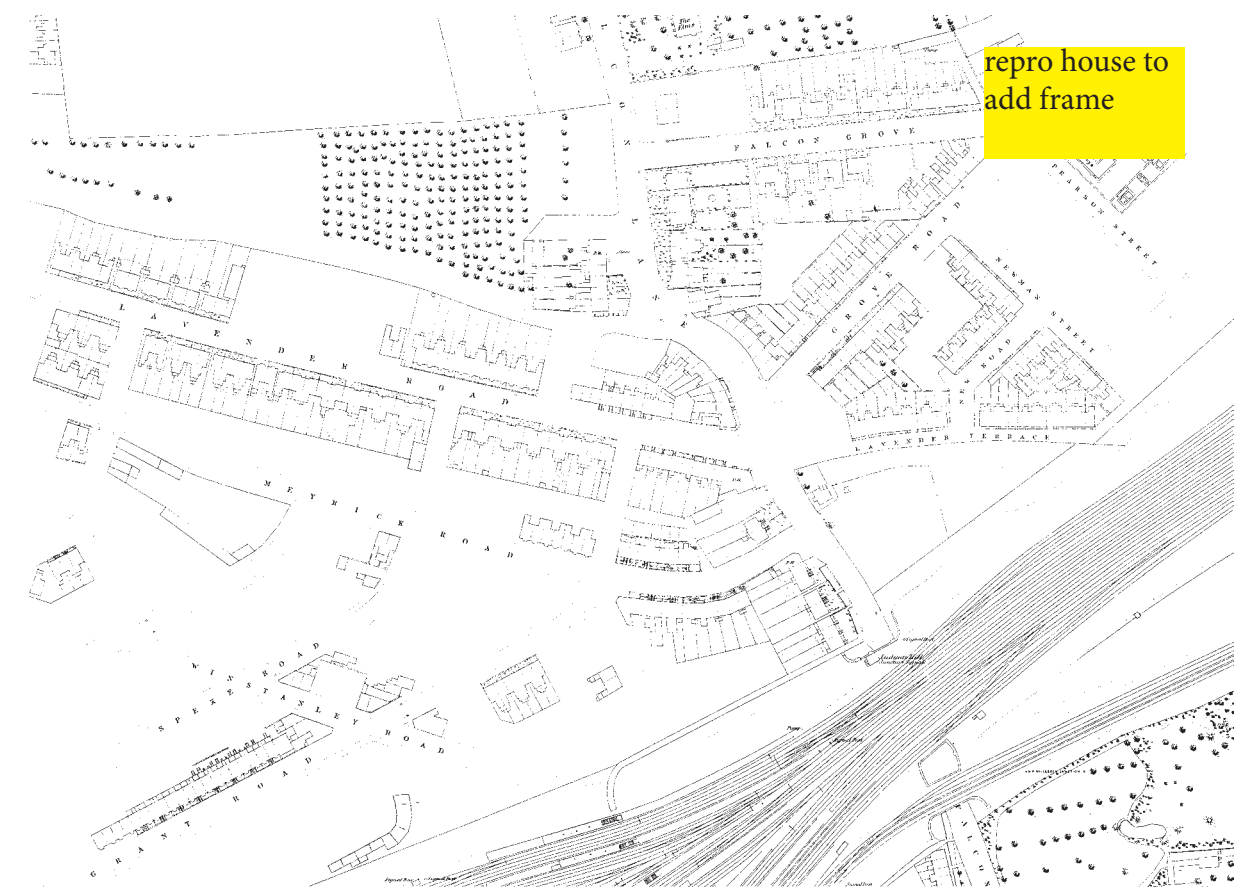
Progress of development

The 1840s witnessed the first sustained upturn in house-building since the inception of Battersea New Town in the 1790s, and marked the start of the area's suburbanization. For the first time more than a hundred houses were being erected yearly in Battersea in the late 40s and early 50s. Most of this took place east of the old village, in and around Battersea Bridge Road, Battersea Church Road, Westbridge Road and Surrey Lane. Battersea New Town and Nine Elms also saw further expansion, while shoots of growth appeared south and west of the village along Falcon Lane, in Lavender Road, York Road and portions of St John's Hill.

Most districts suffered a lull in building in the later 1850s and early 60s. An exception was the St John's Hill–Wandsworth Common North Side area, where sizeable houses went up on the grounds of Spencer Lodge, bought by the National Freehold Land Society. Building then picked up again. Now the first big Battersea boom took place, with houses being run up at a rate of around 500 a year by the mid 1860s, followed by a sudden jump to a peak of over 1,000 in 1868, after which things tailed off into the early 1870s slump.

The effects of this burst of activity are revealed by the first Ordnance Survey of c.1867–70 (III. 4). Most of it was confined to areas in the north of the parish: in all parts of Nine Elms, now fully built up; north of Clapham Junction (opened in 1863) around York Road, Plough Road and Falcon Road; in a plethora of poor streets running south from Battersea Park Road; and, east of this, in Park Town, bisected by Queenstown Road. Further streets appeared north of St John's Hill around Louvaine Road, and the first terraces began to cover the steep slopes north of Lavender Hill, elbowing out more villas. Most of these developments stuttered on after the trade depression. Even in the deeper, verdant reaches around the commons freehold land societies had acquired ground by 1870, allowing fingers of terraced-house development to extend between the villas in their grounds. There were then over 9,000 houses in Battersea, as compared to around 3,000 only ten years earlier. So quick had been the pace that supply now exceeded demand, with a glut of around 1,500 empty houses in Battersea by 1871.⁹

Despite the drop in house-building, several developments took off in the early to mid 1870s. The Artizans', Labourers', & General Dwellings Company's Shaftesbury Park was much the most notable, with over a thousand workers' cottages built successfully on a 42-acre site between the railways and Lavender Hill in the midst of a depression so bad that some Battersea builders were reported as considering pulling down their unlet houses 'for the sake of the bricks and timber'.¹⁰ Building also at last gained



4. Map of the area around Falcon Lane (now Road), just north of Clapham Junction rail tracks, c.1868–70, when house-building was under way

momentum on the Crown estate around Battersea Park; and more of the small, former villa properties off Lavender Hill and between the commons began to sprout terraces. Eventually, another, even bigger boom hit Battersea in the late 1870s and early 80s. The central districts were now completely built over with small artisan houses. Examples include streets off Surrey Lane and the west end of Battersea Park Road; Alfred Heaver's Falcon Park development, off Falcon Road; housing around the Beaufoy family's chemical works north of Lavender Hill; and the eastern extremity of Park Town south and east of Dickens Street. Almost all of the remaining Crown estate was covered with housing, save for the strips of prime land facing the park. For a time this building mania resulted, once again, in overbuilding and empty, unfinished properties. Samuel Walker, a City surveyor, was alluding to houses built expressly for the working classes in areas like Battersea when he told the Select Committee on Artizans' and Labourers' Dwellings in 1882: 'I never remember so many empty houses in the suburbs of London as there are now'.¹¹

Thereafter, it was south of the Lavender Hill–St John's Hill line that any new building tended to take place. The developments that had begun between the two commons in the 1860s–70s around Nightingale Lane and Bolingbroke Grove continued and intensified. Further streets, now mostly in terraces, spread eastwards towards Clapham Common, gobbling up the villas. The same process was also under way north of the same common. By 1900 very few Georgian villas remained and south Battersea had become a Victorian lower middle-class suburb in its own right. Also in the 1880s the district south of Clapham Junction crossroads took on the built form we know today; and in the 1890s the last strips of vacant ground around Battersea Park were finally built up with long rows of red-brick mansion flats, forming one of the biggest concentrations of this building type in London.

Builders and developers

Victorian Battersea was a stronghold of the small-scale local builder. More than 1,400 individuals or firms were active there in the period 1840–1914, between them accounting for around 25,000 houses – an average of eighteen apiece. But nearly a third of these builders erected only one or two houses, and more than half built no more than six.¹² The small scale of their operations is fairly typical for London, especially before the big upturn in building in the late 1870s. The leasing of house plots to builders in ones and twos was still the *modus operandi* on most estates, while the small size of Battersea holdings encouraged this pattern.¹³

Thus, despite the numbers of smaller builders, their overall contribution in terms of bricks and mortar was fairly limited. More significant were the middling sort of builders able to maintain a steady output over several years: the hundred-odd who ran to over fifty houses, for example, were responsible for more than half the area's housing stock. Some accounted for more than a hundred houses: John Dickeson and Edward Newman in the 1860s–70s; William Steer, the Holloway brothers and John Rowe in the 1870s–80s; James George, George Lower, John Statham and George Stringer in the 1880s–90s.¹⁴

A marked change took place after the late-1870s boom. The number of firms involved at all levels of the trade had continued to rise during the good times. But when things tailed off in the mid 1880s and dipped towards another trough, many of the smaller concerns went under; and in the streets then under construction around Clapham Common, a tendency for speculative builders to operate in fewer numbers and take on longer runs of houses came into focus in Battersea for the first time. By the 1890s the average tally was around thirty houses per builder. But such a figure belies the speed and scale of output of the biggest operators: men like John Stanbury, one of a West Country family of tradesmen, whose share included more than 200 houses for the developer H. N. Corsellis in and around Mysore and Elspeth Roads, off Lavender Hill, erected in little over a year in 1892–4. Again, such a trend was not peculiar to Battersea, though it occurred here slightly earlier perhaps than in the further reaches of suburban south London. By the next boom of the 1890s it was the really large contractors who blossomed: in 1899 over forty per cent of London's new houses were in the hands of less than three per cent of its builders (i.e. just seventeen firms). Other big players of this later period in Battersea included John Smith (*c.*400 houses, 1882–1908); William Henry George (*c.*320, 1891–1914); Abel Playle (*c.*220, 1880–1910); and Walter E. Kerven (*c.*210, 1885–1914).¹⁵

Turning to the developers responsible for this growth, it is the builders themselves who come first. Most of Battersea's landowners, typically small, preferred to sell rather than develop themselves. In this way about a fifth of all Battersea estates were snapped up and developed by builders.¹⁶ Many, having made a modest living constructing houses in the booms of the 1850s–60s, moved into development in the later upturn of the 1870s–80s, the disjointed landownership enabling them to acquire holdings of a manageable size. A few then successfully made the jump to large-scale development.

The foremost was Thomas Ingram, a Cambridgeshire man who had come to London by the mid 1860s, when he took on several houses in Kensington. He later made Brixton his base, operating generally in partnership, mostly with Henry Bragg, another builder, and also James John Brown, a Brixton timber merchant, among others. Between his first appearance in Battersea in 1873 and his death in 1901, Ingram had a hand in eight estates, amounting to some 2,200 houses, all of them in the more lucrative lower middle-class uplands south of Lavender Hill. At probate his worth was valued at over £180,000.¹⁷

Next in line was Alfred Heaver, a well-known figure in south London, particularly in Balham, Tooting and Fulham. Having followed his father into the carpentry trade, Heaver was a general builder by the 1860s, first appearing in Battersea in 1869 in partnership with Edward Coates, erecting houses on the Conservative Land Society's Bolingbroke Grove estate. Small-scale jobs like this remained his meat and drink into the mid 1870s, by which time he had concocted, presumably with the help of architects and estate surveyors, a particular style of simply decorated, stock-brick terraced house (described below). Then in 1878 he bought the last vacant four acres on the Bolingbroke Grove estate, where he completed Belleville and Wakehurst Roads as a developer. Thereafter his undertakings grew progressively larger, and under his direction more than 1,200 houses were built on a half-dozen or so Battersea estates in the late 1870s–90s. Latterly, his centre of activity was Clapham Junction, around Lavender Hill and St John's Road. His ambitions here took him beyond the residential streets to the main-road frontages, nearly all

of which were rebuilt under his guidance in a red-brick style with touches of Gothic; though he seems to have shunned publicity, it is to Heaver that this crossroads owes its emergence as Battersea's prime shopping district. Balham then dominated his interests until his murder in 1901 en route to church in Dorking at the hands of a jealous brother-in-law. By then Heaver was worth around £625,000.¹⁸

(Sir) Charles James Freake and Thomas Cubitt, two of London's greatest speculative builders, invested in land in Battersea in the 1840s, but only on a small scale, and neither made much impact locally. Freake built a few houses in and around Battersea Bridge Road in the 1840s, and oversaw more building near by in the 1860s and 70s, while Cubitt's piecemeal acquisitions lay dormant until developed or disposed of by trustees after his death. Architects were also actively engaged in development, predominantly in the 1850s–70s. The most prominent were W. W. Pocock, who ran a brickfield on his land east of Falcon Road prior to covering it with housing, and Edward I'Anson, District Surveyor for Clapham, who owned and developed an estate on the north side of Lavender Hill.

One family involved in most aspects of Battersea's development were the Todds, principally Christopher William Todd and George Todd junior, sons of George Todd senior (d.1872), a successful Chelsea builder, originally from Bishop Auckland. C. W. Todd (d.1892) had participated with other brothers in a large speculation in Kent in the 1850s–60s, before shifting his interests to Battersea as a developer. He oversaw two estates in the Battersea Rise–Wandsworth Common area. George junior (b.1832) had his own building business in Chelsea by his late twenties, but in Battersea branched out into house design, surveying, auctioneering and estate agency, and had irons in fires all over the parish. His speciality was to sell small estates, often of surplus railway land, with ready-made plans for street layouts, and to retain an interest as the developer's agent.¹⁹

Lawyers were prominent developers in Battersea, as elsewhere. Of these, Henry Nicholas Corsellis stands out, overseeing from the 1880s onwards ten estates comprising around 1,700 houses. Son of the clerk to the Wandsworth District Board of Works, he inherited his father's solicitor's practice and eye for a speculation. His first development, Orville Road, off the High Street, was singled out by Charles Booth's survey as 'unduly crowded' and a moral 'plague-spot'. After this his involvement was exclusively in the emerging middle-class streets of central and south Battersea, around Lavender Hill and between the commons. Even here, as time wore on, Corsellis had no qualms about reducing house sizes, increasing densities and raising rents. He died in 1910, worth £190,000.²⁰ Jesse Nickinson, a Lincolnshire-born solicitor practising in Chancery Lane by the 1860s, was the driving force behind a loose consortium of investors, mostly merchants and leading citizens of Rochester, which took on several estates across Battersea in the 1860s–80s.²¹ Other notable developers from a legal background included: Edward Pain, solicitor, involved on several small estates from the 1840s through to the 1870s; James Lord, barrister, who enjoyed chequered fortunes (see page ###); and Evan Hare, another solicitor.

Freehold land societies were big buyers in south London's mid Victorian land market.²² The two most active in the metropolis – the Liberal-backed National Freehold Land Society and the Conservative Land Society, both with subsidiaries – made a big impact in Battersea, acquiring about ten per cent of the land in the parish, in the form of seven separate estates. Nearly all were broken up into small plots and filled with cheap suburban housing. As for the rest, the diverse types of Battersea developer are too numerous to list here.²³ The only two places where development was attempted in what could be described as a concerted manner by freehold ground landlords were the Crown's Battersea Park estate and the Park Town estate. In both cases, despite close supervision and management, the process was difficult and drawn out, and at Park Town the leasehold system was abandoned altogether for a period in preference for direct building.

Builders and architects

Assigning responsibility for the design and production of Victorian speculative housing is always hard, since practices varied, roles were fluid and documentation seldom explains the full process. But the evidence for Battersea suggests that, contrary to common opinion, architects or surveyors were fully engaged in house design and development. This chimes with recent findings in other areas of modest, low-cost workers' housing.²⁴ The reasons have largely to do with the requirements from local authorities for plans of new streets, buildings and drainage, already quite onerous by the time of Battersea's peak years from the mid 1870s. This created an increased demand for accurate drawings and dossiers.

Many instances could be given. A row of ordinary houses built in 1877 for James Lord as part of his development at the corner of Chatham Road and Bolingbroke Grove was designed by the architect W. B. Brown – who may have had a connection with the builders involved, Warren, Smith & Company of Chelsea, later Brown & Smith. Also, four houses at 94–100 Shelgate Road, constructed in 1885 by the builder John B. Gerrans of Lee in Kent, are ascribed to an architect, Frederick Lea, who worked for Gerrans on other jobs. And George Todd, in his capacity as a surveyor, charged five per cent commission to builders for supplying plans and elevations of standard terraced houses for a modest estate at Lombard Road, also belonging to Lord, for whom Todd was acting as agent.

In the Shelgate Road case the houses were part of an estate (West Side) being laid out for two of Battersea's biggest developers, Thomas Ingram and Henry Bragg, on a street pattern drawn up for them by the architect William Newton Dunn, as estate surveyor. Typically at this time, developers would employ an architect or surveyor to devise a street plan and fix the distribution of plots and frontages, leaving the individual house plans and elevations to the various builders and their architects – hence the variety in size and style of the housing within many estates. On the Chestnuts estate, for example, at the corner of Lavender Hill with Falcon Road, acquired by Alfred Heaver in the late 1880s, one of his architects, C. J. Bentley, produced several plans showing main-road commercial plots with a new residential street behind (now Mossbury Road). One plan states that the dividing of the land was 'subject to possible revision by the builders to whom it is being let, who will deposit detailed plans in due course'. In the event several tradesmen went to work in Mossbury Road, taking leases from Heaver; the designers of their houses are not known. But it was the south London architect Frederick Wheeler who designed the characteristically lively red-brick shops on Lavender Hill (Queen's Parade) for George Darby, an entrepreneurial ironmonger who had taken the land from Heaver. Darby's builders were Thomas & Company, with whom Wheeler worked elsewhere, adding further weight to the notion that, at this level of the industry, it was often the builders who employed architects to design the houses, not the landowner-developers or head lessees. Nevertheless, Queen's Parade shares its first-floor 'Gothic' fenestration with other local Heaver developments not designed by Wheeler, suggesting that Heaver or Bentley had made certain stipulations as to the elevation.

A strong-minded developer such as Heaver could, it seems, insist on uniformity from his lessees. His estates of the 1880s either side of St John's Road, though built by the usual methods, show remarkable consistency in terms of house style and brick colour, and especially in their profuse decorative elements. This suggests not only closer involvement by Heaver's architects (Dunn and Bentley were his favourites), but also the likelihood that he supplied builders with some of their materials directly, as had occurred on the Park Town estate.

In Park Town, as on the Crown estate at Battersea Park, planning, house design and construction were carefully controlled, in line with their social aspirations. So smarter architects could be found at work there beyond the reach of the speculative builder and his humble surveyor. James Knowles junior was the originator of Park Town, and therefore dictated the style that it first took in the 1860s under Philip Flower. To revive the stalled venture, the next generation of Flowers tried out a designer of extreme Aesthetic tastes, Thomas Jeckyll, but ended up having to make do with his assistants. Queen Anne Revivalists were also to be found among designers of some fine houses erected around Battersea Park in the 1870s–90s, under the eye of Charles Reeks, architect to the Park Commissioners (in succession to James Pennethorne): John S. Quilter, J. Oldrid Scott, H. E. Coe & Stephen Robinson (who had worked at Bedford Park), and Frederick Wheeler. The documentation left behind by both estates has facilitated attributions and sheds light on working practices: for example, the remarkable degree to which Jeckyll's former assistant J. S. Cooper laboured with the minutiae of design for modest rented housing in Park Town, making detailed drawings of basic fixtures and fittings, and prescribing paint finishes and wallpapers (page ###).

Many of Battersea's leading building dynasties of the period included sons who were groomed as architects to handle that side of the family business. William Stanbury, a former sawyer from Devon and an important figure in the construction industry in Battersea and neighbouring Wandsworth, had two sons, John and William Henry, who from their teens were helping out as joiners. John later became a builder in his own right, but William Henry trained as an architect in order to assist his self-taught father, and later joined the civil staff of the Royal Engineers. Others included Edgar J. George (architect son of the builder

W. H. George) and William G. Ingram (Thomas Ingram's son). Before the First World War a more recognizably modern pattern had emerged, with large firms like Edwin Evans & Sons taking on virtually all aspects of the development process, from land acquisition to street layout and house design. Evans had come to the area in the early 1890s and was to be heavily engaged in property development locally, as well as more widely across outer London, earning him the sobriquet 'the Napoleon of suburban development'. He was knighted in the early 1920s.²⁵

Style and planning

More than 5,000 houses were run up during Battersea's first major waves of construction in the 1840s–60s. From the start many of those built near the river in the industrial north of the parish were small and severely plain terraced houses, never likely to be occupied other than by the working or 'labouring' classes. Flat-fronted, narrow, typically with old-fashioned parapets and often built flush to the pavement, they were usually of two storeys, offering one or two rooms per floor. Heavily used and poorly maintained, nearly all were swept away during later clearances; a few survive, for example on the south side of Battersea Church Road. This was the characteristic house type of north Battersea (III. 5). Further south, it can be seen in the earliest rows built off Wandsworth Common in the 1850s–60s, in and around Chatham Road.

Nevertheless, there was more than this to Battersea's early Victorian housing. Small detached and, more especially, semi-detached Italianate or occasionally Gothic 'villas' were also built in fair numbers at this time in the hope of luring the middle classes, as still seemed possible until the 1860s. Westbridge Road, Falcon Road and St John's Hill Grove all retain modest examples; and there are white-brick semis ranged gable-end on to Bridge Lane. A flagrantly picturesque, variant pair survives as Shakspeare and Byron Villas on Battersea Park Road. Today the best place to see this grade of housing en masse around 1860 is south of St John's Hill: in Elsyng, Spencer and Vardens Road and along Wandsworth Common North Side.

After that the villa idiom struggled on only in a few favoured locations. In Italianate form it made episodic showings on the parish's wealthier southern fringes around Nightingale Lane, and in more coherent array along Altenburg Gardens north of Clapham Common. In two places the Battersea villa even experienced a renaissance during the Queen Anne Revival of the 1870s. E. R. Robson was behind a group of big, detached, upper middle-class residences built on Bolingbroke Grove, reproducing the two-tone brickwork, shaped gables and tall chimneys of his London board schools. Exactly contemporary are two sparkling pairs of red-brick houses on Queenstown Road by the Aesthetic designer



5. Characteristic north Battersea housing of the 1840s–60s: the Mendip Close and Mendip Road area, north of York Road, in 1938. *Demolished*



6. Shaftesbury Park, Morrison Street, typical paired entrance porch, 2012

Thomas Jeckyll, to be followed by three further pairs by T. J. Bailey, Robson's assistant and successor at the school board. But not all of Robson's villas were realized, while in Park Town Jeckyll's signally failed to let, whereas the equally remarkable artisans' cottages he built behind in St Philip Street were successful and soon repeated.

By then it had become brutally clear that a north Battersea of middle-class villas was a pipe dream, even in the land around Battersea Park, where they had been anticipated. In their stead, all the way from Nine Elms to York Road, sprang up street after street of monotonous stock-brick terraces in the 1860s, grey both in colour and demeanour (see Ills 5, 209). These were the houses that Eric Gill remembered. They predominated because this was what the market tended to dictate – houses with four or six main rooms, tenanted by families often occupying two rooms each at modest rents. Charles Booth noted later, in 1898, that small dwellings like these were still very popular, and their rents were rising.²⁶

The high point of the small workers' house in north Battersea comes with the building of Shaftesbury Park in the 1870s by the Artizans' Company. Its sturdy little dwellings were in a simple, occasionally varied but coherent architectural style, with basic decorative touches such as Gothic-type porches and company monograms (Ill. 6). This gave the houses and the estate an identity, which its residents seem to have welcomed alongside its well-kept streets and diminutive front gardens. The Artizans' Company was more commercial than it liked to appear, but the scale of its buildings and its ethos in providing for the working man had a broad appeal and revealed a ready market for this kind of housing among the better-off working classes, who flooded here at a time when Battersea was suffering from overbuilding. Shaftesbury Park's influence was to be felt further afield in ensuing decades, in the evolution of cottage estates, municipal and private. Later small-scale housing of a similar pattern in north Battersea is seen at its best on the Crown estate south of Battersea Park, in and around Beechmore, Kassala and Soudan Roads. Here houses of the



7, 8. Battersea terraced houses and flats: Latchmere Road, looking south in 2012; and Broomwood Road in the early 1900s, looking east to Clapham Common

1880s, many erected by the local builder-developer Alfred Boon to designs by the architect Ernest Turner, took on a faint Queen Anne Revival flavour.

Elsewhere, notably in the streets off both sides of Lavender Hill and the districts around the two commons, it is the standard late-Victorian terraced house of the late 1870s to the early 1900s that predominates: everywhere solid, bay-windowed stock or red-brick house fronts line up in ranks (Ills 7, 8). At its best this low-grade architecture could exhibit a hearty energy. Alfred Heaver and his designers learned in the 1870s to leaven the stock bricks of their terraces with plentiful dressings of contrasting red or malm bricks, as well as bands of nailhead, egg-and-dart or other decoration in compo, moulded brick or terracotta. These precast or incised ornaments, probably acquired via catalogues from builders' merchants or architectural ceramics suppliers, are ubiquitous. Even very basic houses could be lifted by adding moulded panels and spandrels, cast capitals, tilework on the forecourts or porch flanks, and stained glass within or over the doors (Ills 9, 10). The climax of this decorative trend came between about 1880 and 1895. The Edwardian era brought a subtle change to Battersea's terrace fronts, with lighter wooden porches, some roughcast, and even the occasional Vernacular Revival touch such as half-timbering, pargetting or tile-hanging. In one exceptional end-of-terrace house at 90 Alfriston Road, designed by an architect for his own use, the idiom of Voysey put in a fairly pure appearance (see Ill. 427).

The standard plan for such houses was two main rooms per floor, with a kitchen, scullery and WC in a back extension, and increasingly a bathroom and second WC upstairs. In principle this accommodation was intended for a single family, and indeed many houses were so occupied. But in practice houses in Battersea, as in other poor inner London suburbs, were very often 'tenement houses', as the term went, tenanted by one family per floor. By the late 1880s many such houses were evidently being built with multiple occupation in mind. Charles Booth thought Battersea enjoyed a 'great advantage' in having houses that had been 'specially built to suit the classes that have occupied them... Great ingenuity has been shown, and a type of house has been produced which can be arranged for either one or two families'.²⁷ The type Booth was discussing can be found among the late-1880s terraces built on a Heaver development in Comyn, Eckstein and Severus Roads, where deep back extensions suggest rear kitchens and bathrooms on all floors were anticipated – in other words 'tenement house' occupation. In well-documented Park Town, two-storey houses of 1888 in Montefiore Street and Ingelow Road were certainly designed in that specific way. But as yet the exteriors, with only one front door, still presented a veneer of respectable single-family occupation.

Such was the demand for this sort of property that by a natural progression from around 1890 purpose-built tenement houses started to appear with separate front doors to each apartment – now more generally referred to as 'half-houses', 'cottage flats' or sometimes 'maisonette flats'. Park Town again provides some good examples, its owners by then having given in to the wave of working-class occupation. From the 1890s the area was peppered with streets of cottage flats with coupled front doors in porches. Further



a



b



c



d



e

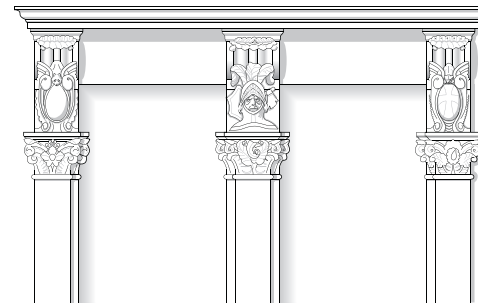


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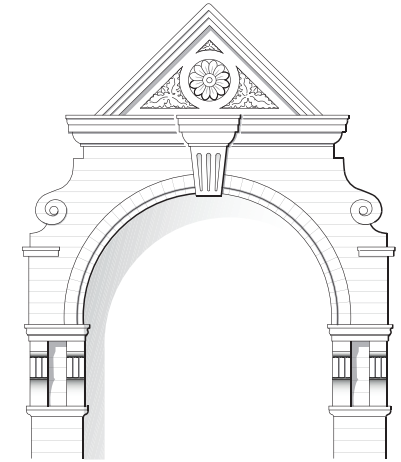
9. Moulded decoration, 1870s–90s:
a Ursula Street, b, c, e Octavia Street,
d Forthbridge Road, f Salcott Road

10 (opposite). Decorative door surrounds of
the 1880s

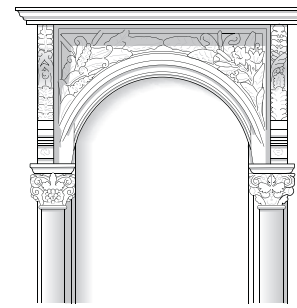
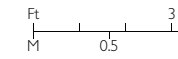
HOUSE DECORATION, c. 1870–90



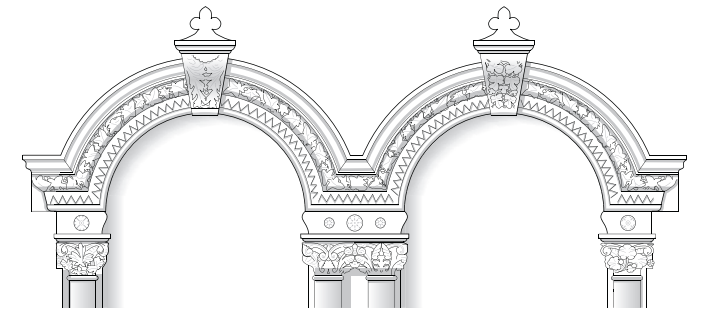
12–14 Limburg Road



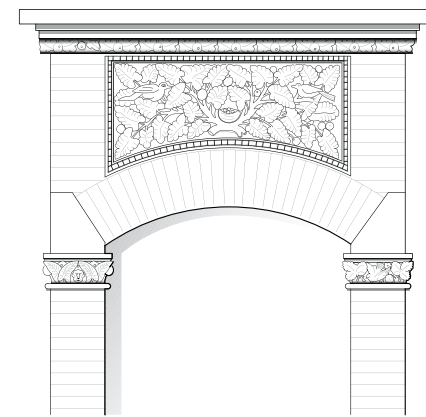
29 Lavender Gardens



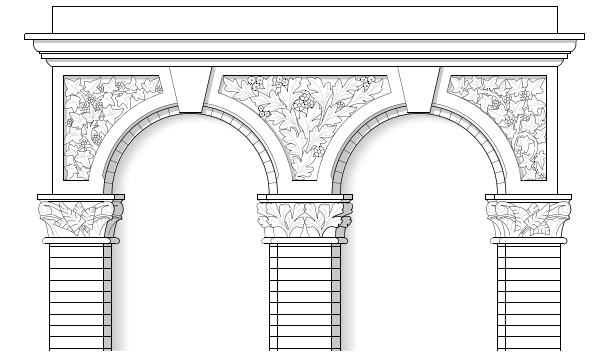
29 Beauchamp Road



14–16 Beauchamp Road



40 Lavender Gardens



29–31 Eckstein Road



11. Cottage flats at 220–226 Boundaries Road in 2013

cottage flats appeared in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, for example in Wix's Lane, Boundaries Road (Ill. 11), Latchmere Road and Barnard Road; and they dominated Battersea Borough Council's early forays into municipal housing, for example at the Latchmere Estate (see below). Rows of taller, three-storey workmen's flats on a similar model populated the frontages of Queenstown Road from the 1890s, some designed by the local architect Herbert Bignold, who also designed two miniature blocks of mansion-style flats for Bolingbroke Grove. But by far the greatest concentration of flat-building in Battersea was the long sequence of tall mansion blocks that went up overlooking Battersea Park at this time. Their eclectic red-brick styles, horizontal emphasis, and profusion of gables, cast-iron balconies and other decorative features, designed for a higher class of tenant than the cottage flats, created a suitable architectural backdrop to the attractive parkland.

Housing conditions and social character

The helter-skelter increase in population brought with it several chronic problems. One was shoddy construction. Builders were apt to cut corners when it came to materials and, according to J. T. Pilditch, surveyor for Battersea to the Wandsworth District Board of Works, often made do with 'any rubbish' they could find. He claimed it was rare to see any whole bricks among the piles of bats ('the waste of the brick-field half burnt') heaped up on building sites. As for their 'so-called' mortar, Pilditch complained that builders would use garden mould and road scrapings, and anything else that came to hand, often without a trace of lime.²⁸

Foundations especially were skimped, a hostage to fortune given north Battersea's dampness. Builders regularly laid the floors too close to the earth, to save the expense of raising them up on a few extra courses of bricks. Often they filled the excavated ground beneath with rubbish and 'filth of every description' – a mix

of household refuse, vegetable and animal matter which would then decompose beneath the buildings. In 1878 Pilditch listed housing in several streets north of Clapham Junction among examples of this trend, but reserved his ire for housing in and around Eland Road, off Lavender Hill, where the builders had used the worst combination of materials possible and the smell was 'abominable'. Complaints of disease in such houses, hitherto attributed to poor drains, were now ascribed to the 'effluvium' arising from the rotting rubbish beneath. In 1879 byelaws were introduced requiring builders to cover such sites with a six-inch layer of concrete.²⁹

The poor drainage and endemic flooding of north Battersea and the remedies taken to relieve them are covered in the introduction to Volume 49. Suffice to say here that despite the new main sewers constructed by the Metropolitan Board of Works in the 1860s and the storm-water pumping stations added by the same body a decade later, many Battersea basements or ground floors continued to be regularly awash. One resident remembered the local drains failing to cope with high tides and heavy rainfall in the 1920s, forcing the extra water back into the roadways and flooding dwellings in Falcon Terrace and Newman Street. Black water rats came with it.³⁰

Traces of Battersea's agricultural past clung to it during the rampant urbanization. Till the last the large houses around Lavender Hill and the commons held on to their kitchen gardens, cow-houses, meadows and paddocks. But the lower classes also had their own livestock in back yards. Pig-keeping in particular was thought by the district board to exacerbate insanitary conditions in the poorest streets. Seventy-seven pigs were being kept behind the thirty-nine small cottages of Ford's Buildings, at the west end of York Road, in 1857. At the time, scarlet fever was raging, and it brought death 'with great violence' to the children there and in other pig-keeping districts, suggesting a connection. In Latchmere Grove, another notorious hotspot, mounds of pig feed were kept exposed and 'in an advanced stage of decomposition'. Hounded by the local authorities, Battersea's pig-keepers in 1872 lobbied the Home Office, only to reveal in so doing the existence of 232 separate piggeries. Despite support from many local inhabitants, the pig-keepers' days were numbered, and in the early 1880s the board proudly announced that the Battersea 'pig nuisance' had been eradicated.³¹

But overcrowding of people was always the chief concern. In 1882 the local Medical Officer of Health discovered a mother and father with five daughters, two sons and two grandchildren sharing two small basement rooms in Gladstone Street (about 1800 cu. ft); and in the same year five families, comprising 28 people, were found sharing a six-room house on Stockdale Road. Battersea's density had officially risen from 6 persons per acre in 1841 to 64 persons in 1881, but as this calculation included large open areas the true figure in the worst streets was thought to be double that.³² The powers enjoyed by local authorities to combat overcrowding were inadequate and remained so. As house-building declined after 1900 for want of building land, the problem intensified. By the 1930s density stood at 73.8 persons per acre, as against 58.7 for the County of London as a whole.³³ Only after 1945 did a combination of slum clearance, rebuilding and population decline reverse this trend.

With such a rapid population increase, it is no surprise that few of Victorian and Edwardian Battersea's residents were born locally.³⁴ Nearly half originated from extra-urban Surrey or Middlesex, with the remaining Home Counties providing about another fifth of the population. Immigrants from more distant parts of Britain were never many, even among the Irish, despite a concentration at Nine Elms. Some Londoners naturally moved out to Battersea from older central areas, but less than might have been expected. The intensive railway building of the 1850s and 60s opened up new connections: Booth's assistant Graham Balfour noted numbers of poor people from the West Country, especially Devon, who had made their way to Battersea via the London & South Western Railway. And a decreasing birth rate from the mid 1870s to the mid 1880s at a time of general population increase suggested that many immigrants had been young couples, who as they grew older tended to produce fewer children.³⁵

Among these migrants, the gypsies formed a discrete class, categorized by Booth as a 'stream within a stream'. Battersea was popular for gypsy encampments, especially during the winter months.³⁶ Any patch of waste ground could be commandeered: for instance, the vacant north-east corner of Victoria (now Queen's) Circus, where gypsy vans were hidden behind a hoarding. Other favoured sites were behind the Washington Music Hall off York Road, and railway arches close to Clapham Junction and Lavender Hill. But the biggest and best-known camp was Donovan's Yard, near the railway lines off Cabul Road. Here in the early 1900s long rows of vans were lined up, their wheels and axles removed (the gypsies having sold



12. Gypsy encampment at Donovan's Yard in the early 1900s

their horses to save on feed over the winter), offering a 'curious air of domesticity', with the women bent over tubs washing, at needlework, or 'merely gossiping' (Ill. 12).³⁷ Today two or three fixed caravans can still be seen beside the scrap-metal yards close to the railway at Culvert Place.

Battersea was always mixed socially – as it still is. Booth and his colleagues were struck by the 'more than usual' assortment of the respectable and the squalid: 'side by side, the newly prosperous with the old wealthy conditions of life; new, as well as old poverty; new, as well as old slums'.³⁸ The merchant classes were still to be found clinging on near to Clapham, and there had been a tremendous growth in what was known as the 'Clerk class' – the white-collar officials of all sorts employed in growing numbers in the City and West End – widely seen at the time as the main channel for social mobility; only building trades exceeded this group in number among the Battersea occupations listed by Booth in the 1890s. Yet he concluded that Battersea's population was in the midst of rapid moral and material decline. Change was all around, but in his opinion it was change for the worse, with each class as it moved on being replaced by a lower one. He cited the fact that the area had been chosen recently as an ideal 'practising ground' for deaconesses as proof of its descent.³⁹ Many parts of late-Victorian Battersea were certainly grim. Joseph Hocking's 1895 novel, *All Men Are Liars*, draws a picture of almost universal drunkenness, coarseness and despair along Battersea Park Road on a Saturday evening, to which the various local chapels and teetotal clubs offered an all-too-unattractive alternative.

These impressions were supported by other statistics. Greater numbers than ever were receiving poor relief in Battersea in 1891, swollen partly by an influx of the underprivileged driven out by improvements in Chelsea.⁴⁰ By 1903 Wandsworth Council wanted Battersea separated from the Wandsworth & Clapham Poor Law Union because of its high rates and levels of pauperism, which, a councillor told a local government inquiry, were likely to increase. Clearances north of the Thames certainly exacerbated this trend. Whereas the authorities in other neighbouring districts were reluctant to accommodate the dispossessed, radical Battersea was content to take them. J. C. Chown, a local guardian, when quizzed on the subject, waxed poetically of Battersea: 'It is the land of the free and brave, and... they know Battersea will cater for them somehow and fight for them'.⁴¹

PHILANTHROPIC AND COUNCIL HOUSING

Charitable and municipal housing before 1918

The earliest-known examples of social housing in Battersea were the half-dozen or so almshouses at the bottom of Battersea High Street, opposite the parish pound. Given by Sir Walter St John to the parish for the use of the 'very antient, past labour, bed-ridden and lame', they were pulled down in the late

eighteenth century and replaced by another row near the centre of the village. Further almshouses were established around 1840 by Amelia Tritton, widow of the banker Henry Tritton, on the east side of Plough Lane opposite their house, but these did not last long. The only ones in the parish to survive are the contemporary Dovedale Cottages in Battersea Park Road, founded by a Balham mother and daughter in 1841 for 'persons in reduced circumstances professing godliness', and still run as a charity (see Vol. 49).⁴²

Philanthropic housing arrived only after Battersea's population explosion. Shaftesbury Park is often cited as its first great expression in the 1870s. But, as explained in Chapter 12, the Artizans' Company that built this famous 'workmen's city' was a commercial venture. Its residents were a fairly standard mix of the upper-working and lower-middle classes. Such were the conditions of investment at the time that few housing providers attempted to cater for the poorer labourer. One that did in a limited way was the Victoria Dwellings Association, a classic *de haut en bas* enterprise whose executive council was almost exclusively composed of Tory plutocrats. Its three blocks of flats on Battersea Park Road, opened in 1877 by Disraeli (by then Lord Beaconsfield), squared the circle of remunerative dwellings for the poor by offering a mix of flats for the skilled and unskilled.

A scheme of a different complexion that came to nothing in the end was the Artizans' Progressive Dwelling-House and Land Society, led by the co-operator Hodgson Pratt. It aimed 'to enable prudent and saving working men to turn their rent into capital'. In 1875 the Society secured tenders for schemes at Homerton, East Ham, Forest Hill and Battersea (where is not known). This registered 'friendly society' offered the working man the chance 'to turn his rent into savings, or capital, by means of combination'. Had the Artizans' Progressive succeeded, it would have been the first tenant co-operative in Britain by more than a decade.⁴³

Battersea made a premature effort to build municipal housing in the 1880s. Even before it achieved independence from the Wandsworth District Board, the Vestry explored the possibility of developing an estate at the Latchmere allotments, on former common land. Over a heady four-year period in 1884–8, with the encouragement of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), it attempted to persuade the Local Government Board that it was entitled to build, and then presented Parliament with a bill, withdrawn in the face of insurmountable opposition.

The enthusiasm among the Progressive vestrymen to build housing did not abate. But even after Battersea achieved independence in 1888, and the seminal Housing of the Working Classes Act was passed in 1890, the reformed Vestry found itself still unable to build. In 1898, encouraged by the Battersea Trades and Labour Council, it appointed a special committee to reconsider the issue. It concluded that London vestries could only adopt the 1890 Act in order to build dwellings where small insanitary areas were being cleared (and the Medical Officer of Health could find none in Battersea); otherwise such powers lay only with the London County Council.⁴⁴

The leading figure in the next phase of the campaign to build was Fred Knee (1868–1914), a Somerset composer and sometime SDF activist who arrived in Battersea in 1898. That year Knee founded the Workmen's National Housing Council, which aimed to apply the 'squeezing process' to legislators and administrators, and to secure 'good houses for all' by inducing public authorities to build on a non-profit basis. At Knee's suggestion in 1899, the Vestry provided the LCC with a list of suitable sites for municipal housing.⁴⁵ It was consequently the LCC, on which John Burns championed Battersea's interests, that built the parish's first public housing: Battersea Bridge Buildings, beside the LCC depot there, opened in 1901 (Ill. 13); and Durham Buildings on York Road, opened in two stages in 1903–4. Both were rather dour five-storey flats destined for people displaced by improvements, so were traditional reactive projects.

Battersea Borough Council finally received powers to build housing through the Local Government Act of 1899 that brought it into being. In 1902–5 it constructed 340 cottage flats and fourteen houses on the low-rise Latchmere and Town Hall Estates (Ill. 14). Knee's persistence and pragmatism had been justified, and have been vindicated by the enduring quality of these conservative-looking schemes. Battersea already knew that it wanted to build cottages when it first considered the Latchmere site in the 1880s, and this chimed with the views of Knee's Workmen's National Housing Council, which favoured cottages over block dwellings.

Like many working-class activists, Knee was suspicious of the town-planning movement, which he saw as 'philanthropic do-goodism' and a distraction from the business of getting houses on the ground and working people out of their overcrowded conditions. When he returned to Battersea for the opening of



13, 14. Early municipal housing: Battersea Bridge Buildings in 1907; Sheepcote Lane on Battersea Council's Latchmere Estate in 2011

the Town Hall Estate in 1905, Knee's main criticism was of the pride with which the Council spoke of the surplus generated by rents at Latchmere: in his view the rents should have been lower.⁴⁶

In the period 1900–14, Battersea came third among metropolitan boroughs for the amount spent on housing, and second (behind Camberwell) in terms of numbers of rooms. It would have been first if a £500,000 scheme of 1905 by the Borough Surveyor to build either 2,500 houses or 1,144 tenement blocks on 29 acres of the former Southwark & Vauxhall Company waterworks – later the site of Battersea Power Station – had gone ahead. That scheme faded away, probably because the expense of preparing the site would have raised costs to a prohibitive £890 per house. Smaller sites near by off Cringle and Kirtling Streets, opposite the Dovedale Almshouses on Battersea Park Road and adjoining the LCC's Durham Buildings on York Road, were all considered and rejected.⁴⁷

The Latchmere and Town Hall Estates, with their well-made, well-fitted two-storey houses built by direct labour, went beyond a piecemeal reaction to rehousing or overcrowding needs. They combined Fred Knee's vision of securing 'good houses for all' with the Progressive-controlled Council's programme for a wider civic enterprise. That Battersea had done something special and ambitious was reflected in visits to the estates by foreign planners, and the request for the borough to take part in a city-planning exhibition in New York in 1909.⁴⁸ A hundred years later these estates are victims of their own success. Whereas the LCC blocks have long since been demolished, Battersea Borough Council's cottage estates maintain their popularity, and in the years since council tenants have had the right to buy, the majority here have exercised that right. While the estates still offer good houses, they are now hardly 'for all': to buy a flat on either would require an income several times the London average.

Public housing after 1918

The 'Homes Fit for Heroes' era after the First World War saw Battersea Council as eager to build municipal housing as before, but hamstrung for sites and subject to the directives that accompanied government subsidies under the 1919 Housing Act. In 1920 it was told by the London Housing Board that it ought to be thinking about building 600 or 700 houses, half on grounds of public health alone. The Council's Housing Committee had hoped for 200 dwellings. But it soon reduced the number to 110, because some of the largest sites had been sold at prohibitively high prices. The land hunger also forced the Council to rethink its housing typologies. It was proud of having hitherto built only houses or two-storey cottage flats, popular with tenants. Continuing along those lines proved impossible. On the first site that looked practicable for building, beside Nine Elms Baths, the Committee recorded: 'Although generally speaking we are greatly averse from block dwellings, we think that the scarcity of vacant land in Battersea, together with the probable cost of this site, justifies their erection in this case'.⁴⁹

Throughout the inter-war years the Council scabbled for sites. Apart from modest additions to the Town Hall and Latchmere Estates, it was reduced to operating through small slum-clearance schemes. Six 'insanitary areas' were submitted to the Ministry of Health in 1920, but they totalled one puny acre in size. Britannia Place off Plough Road was the most urgent and became the priority. Once again the Housing Committee was torn between maintaining its two-storey rule or building three-storey tenements so as to rehouse as many people as were displaced.⁵⁰ The latter prevailed. Holgate Avenue, as the new street was named, enjoyed the talents of Henry Hyams, the one architect whose work within the Council can be traced. Hyams gave this street (1924–31) a tang of the garden suburb and probably also designed the blocks adjacent along York Road. But the official author of the project, as of all housing schemes up to 1965, was the Borough Engineer and Surveyor.

The other major Battersea housing project of the inter-war years was the St John's Estate (1931–4). Here 272 dwellings were jam-packed together in walk-up flats with balcony access. The history of this estate's design is peculiar and was bound up with the campaign to save Old Battersea House. It was devised by an LCC architect, Minton Taylor, but the detailed design work, at least in the early stages, seems to have been by Henry Hyams, who produced the drawings. Three further clearance projects – Stevenson (formerly Latchmere) House on Latchmere Road (1927), the four-block Stewart's Lane Estate (1934–6, demolished), and Darien House, Darien Road (1934) – make up the remainder of Battersea Council's inter-war housing. With the keener strategy for slum clearance that prevailed after Labour won the LCC in 1934, it had hoped to do more. A ten-storey scheme – Viennese in scale – was mooted in 1934 for Nine Elms. But, lacking the LCC's reach and personnel, Battersea came to rely on the metropolitan authority for the machinery of site assembly. In 1935 Lewis Silkin of the LCC pointed to twenty-three possible clearance areas in the borough, yet Battersea felt it could tackle only two – Stewart's Lane and Sheepcote Lane. Even at the latter the LCC agreed to declare the area 'unfit' and negotiate the purchases, then hand it back to the Borough Council for clearance and building. Such arrangements continued after 1945.⁵¹

The LCC's own inter-war housing efforts in Battersea were curiously thin. Its only development, the Savona Estate, came over thirty years after the LCC had last built there. Some additions were also made within the borough to its East Hill Estate (now demolished), preponderantly over the Wandsworth boundary. A further project, the Wilberforce Estate, was planned from 1937 but delayed by hostilities.

As the wartime standstill in housing showed signs of ending, Battersea Council was typical in calling for faster direction from government and in concocting ambitious plans. Its keynote reconstruction project, the Battersea Park Road scheme of over 1,200 dwellings, emerged in 1944. Once again the Housing Committee repeated its 'undoubted preference for houses or maisonettes rather than block dwellings'. It was soon won over to multi-storey flats and the mixed development adumbrated in the County of London Plan. But the Council was still unequipped for grand layouts or large clearances. Its day-to-day concern had to be with rebuilding bomb sites and ensuring that permanent homes took the place of the prefabs (built by government agencies, not the Council) which were scattered across the borough for years (III. 16). The toll of bomb damage amounted to 2,296 dwellings demolished, 6,784 badly damaged, 18,952 less severely so (III. 15). As against that, Battersea owned 1,041 dwellings and had about 400 in forward planning in November 1946.⁵²

The strategy that emerged was to employ the in-house team under the Borough Engineer on the street sites that needed infilling after bombing, usually with plain houses and low-rise flats, while allotting larger schemes to private architects. In 1946 the Borough Engineer had an engineering staff of six and an architectural staff of eight, due to be raised to seven and thirteen respectively, plus two quantity surveyors.⁵³ So there was fair in-house capacity. Around 1949–52 this team built a series of low-rise blocks of flats with ample gardens, mostly in the south of the borough and generally of good, solid quality.

A single private firm emerged as the Council's favourite housing architects from a shortlist supplied in 1947 by the RIBA.⁵⁴ This was Howes & Jackman, then already working for Lambeth and the LCC. They were first entrusted with the middle-sized Tyneham Close and Rollo Street, the first element in the Battersea Park Road redevelopment. For the next twenty-five years Howes & Jackman, efficient but uninspired, were never without housing work in Battersea. Tyneham Close (1948–50) is their one job for the borough with a flicker of liveliness. Their architecture changed after James F. Howes's death in 1961 from plain brick finishes to a tougher but equally dour idiom. Little more could be said for other private



15. Bomb damage at the south end of Tennyson Street looking north, 1943



16. Prefabs at Nine Elms, built by Calders Ltd of Washington, County Durham, around 1962–4, photographed in the 1960s

architects employed for housing by Battersea Council. Within the prescribed parameters of the numbers to be housed and the distribution of dwelling types, they probably enjoyed modest freedom in layout as well as style.

During the 1950s the pace of rehousing Battersea was agonizingly slow. Apart from gap-site jobs, the Council had only two major projects in hand: Battersea Park Road, whose second phase between Dagnall and Blondel Streets (1954–61) introduced blocks of up to eleven storeys, upping the scale of redevelopment; and the Winstanley Estate, where some humdrum flats were the prelude to the transformation in store north of Clapham Junction. An alternative to slum clearance was to demolish middle-class villas and/or build on their gardens, but those few that were left were hard to acquire. At 82–85 Clapham Common West Side, listing blocked the Council's plans, while its efforts to buy up houses in Thurleigh

Avenue were stymied by petition. After Battersea South's Conservative MP protested at length in the House against the Council's heavy-handed attempts at compulsory purchase, the tally of council housing built in the south of the borough was tiny.⁵⁵

Once again Battersea never commanded the LCC's full attention as pre-1965 Wandsworth did with its grand compositions at Ackroyden, Roehampton and Trinity Road. The LCC's first post-war housing estates for Battersea both lay on the north-west fringes of the borough and were outsourced to private architects. The Wilberforce Estate, by Sir John Burnet, Tait & Partners (1946–8), was unrevised from the pre-war design, while some blocks off Usk Road were given to Collcutt & Hamp (1950–1). Both belong to the years when the LCC's housing was procured via its Valuer, not its Architect. The bigger Patmore Estate, Nine Elms (1951–60), fell likewise to another private firm, De Metz & Birks. If the planning of this estate of over 850 dwellings was fresher, its design philosophy soon looked outdated. The LCC's in-house architects took over for the reticent but skilful Falcon Road Estate (1958–61), followed by the bigger, somewhat insipid Ethelburga Estate off Battersea Bridge Road (1963–5). Then came the tough Somerset Estate (1962–7), and two unusual projects realized for the Greater London Council under the same job architect, Nicholas Wood: Carey Gardens, an essay in perimeter planning round a big open court, and the petite, almost post-modern Althorpe Grove.

Meanwhile Sidney Sporle (1920–81) had become chairman of Battersea's Housing Committee. The dynamo of the post-war Battersea Council, Sporle was a typical yet tragic figure in the housing politics of the 1960s. The son of a local railway porter, he left school at fourteen and became a fitter-welder, living in a house in Latchmere Road long condemned for slum clearance before marrying his wife Mabel, latterly a fellow councillor. They subsequently had a flat on the Peabody Estate, St John's Hill. Sporle developed gifts of effectiveness, indeed ruthlessness, but he was impatient and ultimately naive. Having joined the Council in 1945, he became Battersea's youngest mayor in 1954, witnessing the snail's pace of early reconstruction. Faster progress in housing became an obsession.

Under Sporle the tempo of housing in Battersea changed. Internal standards recommended in the Parker Morris Report of 1961 were embraced. Clearance projects took off faster, and private architects with a productive cast of mind came in. Renewed efforts were made to collar extra sites, notably railway land, as British Railways tried to shed surplus property. The main targets were the Falcon Lane and Stewart's Lane goods yards, but so lumbering was the railway bureaucracy that nothing matured.⁵⁶

The first and best development to bear the Sporle imprint was the second stage of the Winstanley Estate (George, Trew & Dunn, architects). This high-density plan for the triangle north of Grant Road, an essay in well-landscaped, mixed-development Modernism, thrilled Sporle: 'New Battersea Estate Will Be Paradise for Children' ran the banner headline in the *South Western Star*.⁵⁷ But from 1963 the Winstanley project became entangled in the national quest for faster housing production by means of industrialized building. Neither Sporle's committee nor the Battersea officers had the capacity or expertise to probe the systems dangled before them. They found themselves beguiled by national politicians and experts, who bade them embark on a heady adventure in mass production.

Battersea's first experiment in systems-built housing was in fact undertaken by the LCC at Aegis Grove (1960–4, mostly demolished) – a collaboration on equal terms between the LCC's architects and Reema Construction. Battersea, technically weaker, was beholden to the engineers and contractors. In the low-rise elements of Winstanley Stage II, the Council's first venture into industrialized methods, things worked out well, because the chosen system, sponsored by the builders Wates, did not depart far from traditional methods. Speaking to Battersea Young Socialists after Labour's Bob Mellish had opened the first of the Winstanley Estate towers in 1965, Sporle was ebullient. 'This is Socialism,' he pronounced. 'Three years ago we were building 250 new homes each year, now we shall build a thousand or more a year'.⁵⁸

By then Sporle and his committee had pledged themselves to industrialized building for two further large projects: the final phases of the Battersea Park Road redevelopment, at Doddington and Newtown Roads; and York Road Stage I, next in Sporle's vision of erasing the slums between Clapham Junction and the Thames. For both projects Joseph Capo Bianco came in as technical consultant. At that time Battersea Council was about to merge into the London Borough of Wandsworth with potentially far greater resources. In the new dispensation Battersea personnel would dominate housing and construction at member and officer level. Sporle became the designated chairman of the Housing Committee and his deputy, Sam Dougherty, stayed in place.⁵⁹

When the committee reported to the new Council in April 1965, it could claim that 1,354 dwellings were in construction, of which 1,120 would be complete in a year's time, most of them in Battersea. The same report stated that 'the Council will be very much concerned with industrialized building' and promoted the idea of a study tour of sites in Denmark and Sweden at Capo Bianco's suggestion. This was taken up by a big delegation that included the new Council's leader. When Mellish, the junior Housing Minister, pressed the new boroughs to corral themselves into larger consortia to ease design and bulk-ordering, Wandsworth took up the idea keenly. The upshot was the abortive London Housing Consortium, Sporle chairing its South Group.⁶⁰

Of Battersea's three big ventures in industrialized building, the Doddington Estate (planned and built between 1964 and 1971) became notorious because of its overweening size and visibility, the corruption underlying its procurement, and its technical and social failings. It was not a typical Battersea endeavour. Its planning was largely outsourced to its technicians and builders: principally to Capo Bianco, consultant for the structure and services, and to John Laing Ltd, sponsors of the ministry-approved Jespersen 12M system. Sporle admitted at his subsequent trial that he never read the paperwork for the meeting at which the contract was awarded to Laings.⁶¹ Even the architects, Emberton, Tardrew & Partners, were dragged along by the technical momentum.

York Road Stage I sheds greater light on housing procurement in Battersea and Wandsworth, notably on the overlapping authorities' commitment to building by direct labour. On Winstanley Stage II, Wates's on-site casting factory for the components of their system together with their site-assembly methods had elicited excitement. It became the ambition of Battersea's politicians and its Borough Engineer, W. J. Huitt, to reshape the in-house Building Works Department into a modern outfit able to construct housing by similar methods. The only parallel in London was Edmonton, where a direct-labour force was transformed into a systems-building operation for the enlarged borough of Enfield.

Until the Second World War the Works Department, founded under the Progressives, had built all Battersea Council's housing. Direct labour was seldom as cheap or quick as contract work, but it claimed superior quality and better labour relations. The scale of post-war housing tasks broke that tradition. But many small gap sites were still entrusted to direct labour, and there was some political will to extend the department's scope. Following a review of 1948–9, it was reorganized under a building works manager so that it could compete for jobs. The first attempt to employ the post-war Works Department on a larger job misfired, when the LCC insisted that the Rollo Street contract should go out to tender. Most of Battersea's larger estates of the 1950s were indeed built by private firms. But after Huitt became Borough Engineer in 1961, the Works Department got the bit between its teeth. When a Battersea High Street housing scheme came up in 1962–3, the Council this time beat off complaints of favouring its own employees.⁶²

Under Wandsworth Council, Huitt became Director of Building Works, drawing together 56 officers and 291 building tradesmen, largely inherited from the Battersea direct-labour force. In the authority's first year, 1965–6, its Building Works Department handled £595,000 of new construction. Wandsworth assigned to it the York Road development and through Capo Bianco negotiated a unique arrangement whereby Bovis Ltd would lend personnel to help the department set up a site factory for concrete components. A trial casting site was set up in 1965 at the Wilditch Estate. The York Road factory followed in 1967, making concrete panels for the estate's dour towers. Though not a complete 'system', it was unique for a local authority to invest so much plant and labour in industrialized building, and rare for a direct-labour organization to build tower blocks. In recognition of this effort, Mellish came to top out the first tower in 1968.⁶³

By then almost fabulous numbers of new dwellings were being promised. Under a ten-year plan of 1967 the targets for the next two years in Wandsworth as a whole were 2,697 for the first year and 2,440 for the second, later revised upwards. An opposition motion alluding to 'fear and anxiety' over this programme was brushed aside. Sporle now announced that some 6,400 dwellings were to be replaced by 8,760 new ones, rejecting contemptuously the option of improving existing stock: 'Patching up, I call it'.⁶⁴

On the ground things looked different. For private tenants rehousing might be disruptive, but for owner-occupiers, not uncommon by now, it could be worse. When the LCC was clearing an area near the river in 1956, among the objectors were a retired couple who had sunk all their savings into a small house, but as freeholders were ineligible for rehousing.⁶⁵ Worse, in 1965 the Greater London Council told Charles Grew of Usk Road that his house was to be requisitioned. He had been there only two years, his



17. Public housing transforms north Battersea: looking south from near the York Road–Falcon Road junction, 1977, towards (left to right) the Livingstone, York Road Stage I and Winstanley Estates, with the Kambala Estate under construction in the middle ground

previous home in Newcomen Road having been compulsorily purchased by Battersea Council – 'and the claims have not been settled yet', Grew burst out.

Because I stood firm on the treat of £2000 the Council applied vandalism... The terrorism carried out by the firm of Waites [sic] & Co had been unbelievable. Their staff had teenagers to help them. Their lorries had the firm's name painted out... The next day I was going to collect a gas cooker but all 3 gas cookers had already vanished... Everything got flattened and danger to lives to any former owner to pick up anything he or she had left behind. The removal people left my coal, coke and wood behind and linoleum and mats... The vandals were weeks ahead with their smashing, stealing, burning and breaking due to connivance of the Battersea Borough Council... Through these events my health has suffered to a considerable degree resulting in great loss of earnings.⁶⁶

In the summer of 1968 Sporle's edifice of municipal enterprise in housing construction tottered and fell. Five days after he unveiled a plaque on the Doddington Estate, the Conservatives captured Wandsworth by a landslide of 48 to 12. A week later came the partial collapse of Ronan Point, followed by an orgy of recrimination about building systems and high-rise housing. Then in late June police arrived at Wandsworth Town Hall to investigate an alleged corrupt promise of planning permission by Sporle for a hotel in return for favours. That could not be made to stick, but other irregularities surfaced, leading to formal charges against him in 1970 and his resignation as leader of Wandsworth's Labour rump. Charges were also laid against Capo Bianco and T. Dan Smith, Newcastle's housing baron, who had no involvement in Wandsworth but counted Sporle among his many consultants. They were tried separately and acquitted. Sporle's trial, on seven counts of corruption, took place in 1971. He cut a poor figure in court and received six years, reduced on appeal to four, largely because 600 residents of Battersea and Wandsworth signed a petition praising the energy he had put into rehousing.⁶⁷

As regards Battersea's housing, the main revelation of the Sporle trial was that the Doddington Estate contract had been offered to Laings without competition, through the corrupt solicitation of an agent. It also emerged that Sporle was retained by two heating firms – one of whom worked on council contracts including the Doddington – to advise them on clients' requirements. The Parker Morris Report had advocated central heating as standard in all council housing, setting up a scramble of competition between rival heating firms. That goes some way to explain the disaster of the heating system installed at the Doddington.⁶⁸

Wandsworth's Conservative administration of 1968–71 inherited the fallout from these events, including the exasperation of tenants with defects and anti-social behaviour not only on the Doddington but also on the much prized Winstanley Estate, not least the eponymous Sporle Court. Several large contracts were still in play and could not be changed. But the reaction after Ronan Point soon made itself felt. On the Surrey Lane Estate, then on the drawing board, a hasty reversion to traditional construction took place but no basic change in plan. The GLC too beat a retreat from its ambitions of 1967 to brace up the fringe of the Patmore Estate with 26-storey towers and industrialized low-rise concomitants, and approved a wiser scheme – the eventual Carey Gardens.

Low-rise flats and family houses now returned to favour. A section of the Battersea Park Road development, Weybridge Street, had indeed been devoted to semi-detached pairs as early as 1965–7. This was now enshrined in policy, as at Wycliffe Road and Chatham Road West, where two-storey houses were described as 'the speediest and least costly form of redevelopment... by far the most popular with tenants'.⁶⁹ But in many locations high-density flats or maisonettes were inevitable. At Wayland Road, a development designed by George, Trew & Dunn just west of their Winstanley Estate and approved just before the change of regime, the familiar 1970s jumble of red-brick ranges packed round 'closes' or 'walks' had already appeared.

On taking office, the Conservatives slowed down municipal house-building and clipped the Building Works Department's wings. The targets for starting new dwellings in Wandsworth dropped to an average of 785 per year for 1971–4. Even so, it was expected that some 2,335 would be completed in 1973 – the final legacy of the Sporle boom. If the Conservatives had any stomach for further clearances, they were soon knocked back by a government decision concerning the so-called Home Road site. Yet another grand Sporlite scheme, this threatened to raze a slew of streets south of Shuttleworth Road as far as Battersea Park Road and beyond, substituting six-storey blocks in Jespersen 12M. After an enquiry in 1968 the inspector sat on his decision for most of the election year before announcing to general surprise that some six blocks of streets would be excluded from the compulsory purchase area. The Council had to make do with building the substantial Goulden House and the smaller McCarthy Court. Most of the spared streets were offered to a housing trust – a precedent for the future. The Shuttleworth Road district became Wandsworth's first General Improvement Area. Small measures like shutting off through traffic and planting trees, the Housing Committee came in time to feel, would result in an enhanced life for the properties in the area. To its south the Abercrombie Street triangle waited longer for reprieve. Redevelopment there was still in play in 1974–5, but eventually the Council complied with the Government's preference for rehabilitation.⁷⁰

In 1971 Labour returned to power in Wandsworth, maintaining control till 1978. These years saw the last gasp of the clearance programmes, especially off Falcon and Plough Roads, as at the Kambala, Maysoule Road and Wayford Street Estates. There was scant pretence that the substandard areas being cleared were slums; the job had been started, Labour felt, and so should be finished. A high proportion of the replacements were now designed by in-house architects under Wandsworth's Director of Development, and some were still built by the Building Works Department: the Kambala Estate (1976–9) is an example of both. In the early 1970s Wandsworth like other authorities experienced difficulties over housing contracts in a period of inflation in building costs. Often firms proved unwilling to tender. Sometimes, as at Gideon Road and Wycliffe Road, they had to be given long time extensions and offered extra payments.

A few poorer parts of Battersea survived the Sporle onslaught. Here, as redevelopment receded, a nurturing touch began to be applied. The Louvaine Road district north of St John's Hill, for instance, became one of the first Housing Action Areas under the Housing Act of 1974. The policy now was to press landlords to improve their houses. Yet in the first instance Wandsworth Council often found it necessary to purchase, renovate and let them itself. A next-door neighbourhood, round Strathblaine Road, received a lighter treatment, being declared in 1976 a 'Priority Neighbourhood'.⁷¹

Thereafter much of the work on council estates had to do with improvement. The Savona Estate, one of several LCC projects passed to Wandsworth in 1971, was replanned and modernized. Battersea's own Stewart's Lane near by was demolished and replaced with commercial and industrial buildings in about 1974 – under Labour. Also destroyed was the LCC's inter-war East Hill Estate (mostly just outside Battersea), to be replaced by low-rise housing that Wandsworth's incoming Conservative administration decided in 1978 would be built for sale.⁷²

The big estates of the 1960s, hardly less blighted than earlier ones, could not simply be erased. In that connection something close to political consensus over housing in Wandsworth broke down after 1978. Early attempts to improve estates like the Doddington had made little impression, and by the mid 1980s the reputation of public housing in Battersea was at its nadir.⁷³ But the right-to-buy legislation enshrined in the Thatcherite 1980 Housing Act plus government subsidies for urban renewal dealt councils a powerful hand, if they were willing to take it. Wandsworth's Conservatives did so without compunction. Despite bitter opposition, they encouraged privatization in every way, while also taking drastic steps to change the character of the large council estates, to which they had an aversion blending experience with ideology. At the Doddington this took the shape of selling off dwellings cheap, while simultaneously promoting a refurbishment that did its utmost to deny the preceding architecture, creating an aesthetic almost comic in its contrasts. Another policy was to decant the population of an estate, modernize it, then sell it off – the first and perhaps most notable instance was the sale in 1981 of the between-the-wars St John's Estate to Regalian Properties, which took pride in the 'social implications' of its transformation of a run-down council estate into a new 'village' of owner-occupied homes.⁷⁴ The same also happened at Jay Court, Battersea Park Road (1984), and on a larger scale at the Livingstone Estate (1985).

Selling off council estates by individual units or as a whole, or delegating their management to private firms or co-operatives, has been going on in Wandsworth for over twenty-five years at the time of writing. Yet the green signs of Wandsworth Council management are still often encountered. That so much council property remains is partly a signal that an enduringly high proportion of people in inner London cannot afford, or find, other tenure. It is also a reminder of the determination and effectiveness of public building in Battersea.

MODERN BATTERSEA

Battersea by the 1960s was 'a byword for decrepitude'.⁷⁵ John Walsh, who grew up in Battersea Rise, pronounced it 'a dump, a service area for Clapham Junction... a stridently working-class and immigrant neighbourhood... a tough, coarse-grained part of inner suburbia'. At the junction itself 'skinheads would congregate before marauding across the Common in search of homosexuals, hippies and (later on) Asian youths to bash up'.⁷⁶ Other memories of the *Up the Junction* era, from locals and visitors alike, are equally far from rose-tinted. Michael de Larrabeiti's post-war memories of Battersea focus on hanging around, family rows, scraps outside scruffy pubs and general fecklessness. John Betjeman found its northern streets in 1966 a 'terrifying district' marked by wrecked phone boxes and padlocked churches.⁷⁷

Yet within just twenty-five years Battersea was riding the crest of a wave of gentrification and steeply rising house prices as a favoured dormitory of the affluent young. In retrospect that transformation now seems as sudden and dramatic as the urbanization of Victorian times, and few saw it coming.⁷⁸ Tradition has it that the process began with young professionals priced out of expensive west London areas like Chelsea and Fulham venturing south of the river in search of cheaper housing within striking distance of the City – hence the early 1980s nickname, 'South Chelsea'. But the background to this upturn is many-layered and its influence varies from district to district. The trend continues today and, though not peculiar to Battersea, is worthy of investigation.

Although there were pockets of gentrification soon after the war – for example in Shaftesbury Park, where strict rent controls encouraged the owners to sell off houses freehold – it was in the old village centre near the river that post-war regeneration and improvement first really took hold.⁷⁹ Given the war-time losses, the immediate focus there was on rehousing. As recounted above, Battersea Council took the lead in the 1950s with several council-flat schemes in and around the High Street, which brought further demolitions. But by the late 1960s the loss of so much older fabric, coupled with the first effects



18. Foster & Partners' Riverside and Albion Riverside around 2003

of de-industrialization, prompted their successors Wandsworth Council and the GLC to reconsider their policies. Battersea was by then beginning to attract incomers as a residential area. In 1969 the GLC engaged the husband-and-wife architects Alan and Sylvia Blanc (then in great demand among London local authorities as planning advisers) to give a 'facelift' to the Battersea riverfront either side of St Mary's Church and to suggest further long-term improvements. At the time much of this district was still gripped by industry, albeit failing, and so the focus of the Blancs' scheme was limited to a riverside walkway from Battersea Bridge to the church. However, their proposal was soon overtaken by events, for within just two years industry evanesced and some 95 per cent of the land in question became available. Private property speculation and conservation then proceeded hand in hand, both contributing to the area's rising popularity and prosperity.

Several sites were acquired by the Hill Group of Wembley, already a leading player in the regeneration of London's riverside, for example at Wapping and Hammersmith. The Hill Group's architects, Stefan Zins Associates (also to be heavily engaged locally), designed Valiant House, a luxury apartment block in dark-brown brick at Vicarage Crescent, begun in 1971 and intended as part of a 'heady' scheme for a 'new Mayfair' of studios, penthouses and town houses. The threat from redevelopment on such a scale to surviving historic fabric was recognized in 1972 when Battersea Square became the parish's second Conservation Area (after Clapham Common), to be followed a few years later by two districts of distinctive working-class housing (the Shaftesbury Park and Latchmere Estates).

The 1970s saw Battersea in transition. Pressure for change grew rapidly, as developers realized the potential offered by London's post-industrial riverfront, and blew away the concerns of local councillors and residents that such schemes neglected the native working-class population. A great planning



19. Richard Rogers Partnership's Montevetro beside St Mary's Church in 2012

battle over high-class housing and offices intended for the extensive Morgan Crucible factory site took most of the decade to resolve, Wandsworth Council's initial refusal eventually being overturned as out of step with GLC and government policies.⁸⁰ Approval of revised Morgan plans in 1978 was followed by a surge of new housing developments, and the 'luxury' apartment block became the predominant building type, especially along the river, attracting their own kind 'like limpets': Riverside Court (1978) at Nine Elms, Waterside Point (1987–9) near Albert Bridge, and Groveside Court (1986–8) at Lombard Road. The decayed warehouses around Ransome's Dock were given a Docklands-style makeover. Only the Morgan's site bucked the trend, Wates's Morgan's Walk (of 1983–4) taking the unexpected form of a 'Yuppie Brookside' of small houses and flats.⁸¹

After the property boom of the 1980s the developers' ambitions grew bigger and bolder. Such flats are at their brashiest on the upper end of Queenstown Road or along the stretch of riverfront between Battersea village and Wandsworth Bridge, where the sweep of blocks of the 1990s and early 2000s with their quasi-nautical balconies stack up ever higher, to climax in the pomposity of Battersea Reach (see [Ill. 93](#)). Only a few of these recent creations have been able to shake off the narcotic aura of what the designer Stephen Bayley has branded 'developers' development... the equivalent of barrow boys doing fashion'.⁸² The classiest by far are further down river: Foster Associates' Riverside Apartments (1986–90), an innovative blend of flats and offices for the famous architectural practice itself; and the Richard Rogers Partnership's Montevetro (1994–2000), a catslide in glass not without its own brashness, yet so sleek in contour and colour that it overtops St Mary's Church with panache rather than disdain ([Ills 18, 19](#)). The neighbouring development by the Foster firm, Albion Riverside (1999–2003), is a more wilful performance in shape-making.



20, 21. Modern Battersea houses in 2012: 124–128 Battersea High Street (Walter Menteth Architects, 1998) and 66 & 68 Orbel Street (Loates–Taylor Shannon, 2003–4)

The office element in Riverside Apartments was still rare at its date in Battersea. Offices as an independent building type were seldom found in the borough till the 1960s, and even after that only sporadically. Among early examples, Albert Bridge House (1960s) has been demolished, as has the later and more remarkable Stationery Office in Nine Elms Lane (1980–2), linked to a warehouse. Also scheduled for destruction at the time of writing is Battersea's most egregious office block, the post-modern Marco Polo House, Queenstown Road (1987). When this goes, only Michael Lyell Associates' Glassmill at 1 Battersea Bridge Road (1982–5) will survive of this clutch of big, bold office developments in the north. Clapham Junction too attracted some offices in the late 1980s, but like most of the small new blocks of flats built here and there in central and south Battersea, these were fairly anonymous. A hotel at Clapham Junction, Battersea's first for many years, was also close to completion as this book went to press. The massive developments heralded for Nine Elms will bring mainly more of the same mixture: some offices, a few hotels, but mostly housing for the better off – some 16,000 units in all, if the current schedule and promises are maintained.

In the more solidly residential south of Battersea, regeneration took a different course, reaching its zenith during the 1980s boom. Here the chief attraction was the large stock of good-sized Victorian properties, characterful and flexible enough to appeal to middle-class buyers and lenders. Added to this were the amenities of nearby open spaces and good rail links to central London. For many newcomers the potential to renovate and move on, and in so doing profit from Battersea's resurgence, was an added attraction. Pushing up prices in this way took much housing from the private rented sector, with rapid socio-economic consequences.

Such forces transformed south Battersea's streets and houses. More and larger cars jammed gutters; Victorian details meant to be stone-coloured were larded over with white paint, sometimes spilling assertively over brick façades in the quest for freedom and brightness; competing roof-lit attics shot up like weeds over cornices. In the now affluent belt around and between the commons, the eventual designation of generous Conservation Areas at Wandsworth Common (1986), Clapham Common and Nightingale Lane (extended 1988–9) inhibited the most anti-social of external changes like parking in front gardens. But interiors, back extensions and gardens were fair game for personal taste and expenditure. The epicentre of this piecemeal refurbishment of older property, house by house and street by street, oft-repeated as one owner gave way to the next, was in the Victorian terraces around Northcote Road, an area known widely from its high birth rate in recent years as 'Nappy Valley'. Here, in the words of the writer Will Self, 'everyone is rich *and* knocked up', with 'jolly young French bankers' wives wandering, fully gravid, from one upmarket café to the next'.⁸³ In these streets the credit crisis and housing-market crash of 2007–8 registered as only a temporary blip and prices have continued to escalate. These days big houses in the most sought-after roads towards Wandsworth Common, such as Dents, Gorst and Blenkarne Roads, easily fetch over £2m, £3m, even £4m.⁸⁴



22. Queenstown Road looking north in 2012

Recent private houses of note are few and far between south of Lavender Hill, where the architectural flavour is still strongly Victorian–Edwardian. But several are to be found in north Battersea, especially in and around the old village centre, as, for example, a small but eye-catching white-rendered block of flats at 124–128 Battersea High Street at the corner with Gwynne Road (III. 20; Walter Menteth Architects, 1998); the converted and extended neo-Modernist Katrine Baird Hall near by at 2 Orville Road; and an unusual pair of 'Japanese inspired' two-bedroom roundhouses at 165 Battersea High Street (Parritt Leng, architects, 2008), squeezed into a tiny gap between the properties in Battersea High Street and Winders Road. Modernist in style again is the cement-rendered pair at 66 & 68 Orbel Street (III. 21; LTS Architects, 2004), slotted into place amid semi-detacheds of the 1880s. And off St John's Hill at 2 Vardens Road is a well-hidden house of glass, steel and timber, tucked behind a row of three contemporary houses at Nos 6–8 (HM2 Architects for Thirlstone Homes, 2001).

This last house was purchased and extended by the French master pâtissier Eric Lanlard, cake-maker to Madonna and other stars of stage and screen. Since the 1970s Battersea has been popular with actors, writers and musicians; Lanlard is typical of the latest wave of 'media celebrities' who now find the area a congenial place to live. During the 1990s Viscount Linley owned a duplex loft apartment with a 69ft living room, part of the residential conversion of the Latchmere board schools. He is rumoured to have sold up in 1999 for £1m profit, and was later succeeded there by the designer Kelly Hoppen.⁸⁵

But despite the evident wealth and investment, modern Battersea, like so many areas of inner London, has its poverty too. The influx of middle-class professionals was matched by the emigration of most of the area's skilled manual workforce, leaving behind in places a rump of the old, the unemployed, single-parent families and large ethnic minority groups, many with special housing and social needs. A study carried out in 2006 showed that northern districts around Battersea Park Road were in a state of serious social deprivation. The worst problems centre on the swathes of public housing – the Patmore, Doddington, Winstanley and York Road Estates and their environs, areas that had been poor in the nineteenth century and remain so.⁸⁶ Charles Booth would recognize in Battersea today the same, 'more than usual' mix of wealth and poverty, the respectable and the squalid, that he found over a hundred years ago.