

Public Buildings

The public buildings and plant of Battersea Vestry and its successors, Battersea and Wandsworth Borough Councils, are the chief subject of this chapter. There follows an account of similar buildings in Battersea for which other authorities were responsible, notably fire stations, police stations, courts, post offices and telephone exchanges. Workhouses, hospitals and dispensaries are covered in Chapter 2, schools and colleges in Chapter 4, while public housing is discussed in volume 50.

The history of Battersea's municipal government can only be sketched here, but aspects that affected building programmes are set out in this introductory section. This volume's introduction offers a perspective on local politics in the years after 1888, when Battersea's radical administrations commanded national attention.

Battersea's small population and village character meant that it had little need for public buildings until the 1860s. It was administered by the churchwardens, overseers of the poor, surveyors of the highways and inspectors of lighting elected by an open vestry consisting of, in theory, all ratepayers. Battersea's were held in the church or, after its rebuilding of 1775–7, in its small vestry room, supplemented when needed by the old infant school in Green Lane from 1841 to 1863, and occasionally Althorpe House, almost opposite the church.¹

In the early Victorian period little sign of a fuller structure or permanent staffing for the increasing parish was yet discernible. A surveyor

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(Thomas Tow) was employed in 1841, but he was replaced by the usual unpaid highways board four years later.² Then under the London-wide Metropolis Management Act of 1855, Battersea's administrative inertia was summarily addressed. The Vestry's powers for sewers, roads, lighting, watering, scraping and paving passed from 1856 to the new Wandsworth District Board of Works, which took in also the surrounding parishes. The Vestry selected from their own members to serve on the District Board and Metropolitan Board of Works, created by the same legislation.³ Over and above its various rights of nomination to these and other bodies, the Battersea Vestry itself retained some powers of its own, which it wielded with increasing effect from the 1870s in relation to baths and then to libraries. But it was a weak body. P. H. Thomas, on resigning as a vestryman in 1886, gave as his reason: 'I have found that a member of the Vestry, unless he is also a member of the District Board, has responsibility without power and labour without fruit'.⁴

It was during the years of the Wandsworth Board (1856–88) that most of Victorian Battersea was built up. When it was created, the Board needed office accommodation, which it duly built in Battersea Rise, since Battersea was the most central, populous and fast-growing of its constituent parishes. Its burgeoning industrial base and transport links also made it the natural centre for distributing and storing materials. Land was leased in 1861 off Westbridge Road for a depot and stone yard and for an office for the Board's Battersea surveyor. Later the Board sited a small depot behind 283 Battersea Park Road and a larger one in Culvert Road between railway lines, which housed the Board's 'dust destructor' and remained a local authority depot until 1977. In 1885 the Board acquired properties in Lombard Road for use as a wharf.⁵

Like the parallel Metropolitan Board, the Wandsworth Board was concerned with keeping the rates down, and came to be derided as

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ineffectual – perhaps unfairly. After local agitation, Battersea regained its independence in March 1888 under the Metropolis Management Act of 1887.⁶ The reformed Vestry now took over the Board's Battersea property and set about furnishing the parish with accommodation and facilities suitable to its new status. Plans already afoot for baths, wash-houses and libraries acquired new vigour. Latchmere Baths and the Central Library were both open by the spring of 1890, while stalled initiatives for a town hall came to fruition in the shape of E. W. Mountford's magnificent municipal offices on Lavender Hill, opened in 1893.

The stimulus of independence, allied with Battersea's exceptional working-class growth, its political radicalism and its trade unionism, led to a flowering of municipal building activity in the 1890s and early 1900s, remarkable both in quantity and for its manner of execution. When in 1906 the Incorporated Association of Municipal and County Engineers held its meeting at Battersea, it was told that 'in works interesting from the standpoint of the municipal engineer Battersea stands easily first among the metropolitan boroughs'.⁷

Fundamental to this campaign was the policy of building by direct labour. That had been an ambition of many vestrymen even before the renewal of parochial independence. In 1886 a mass meeting in Battersea Park urged the Vestry to help find work for the unemployed; the Vestry determined that it was not empowered to do this but urged the Wandsworth Board to do so.⁸ After independence, a connection was promptly established between employment policy and building works. From 1888 the Vestry directly employed men to scavenge and water the streets, slowly increasing the scope of work to include such activities as making artificial flagstones at Culvert Road. In 1893 a labour exchange was established: 3,487 unemployed were registered during 1895, of whom 762 were found work, 281 engaged by the Vestry itself. To accommodate the policy, the Vestry delayed building a

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sewer in Lavender Hill for nine months in order to provide work to alleviate 'distress caused by want of work' in the winter months.⁹

The tempo quickened after the election of a Progressive majority in 1894. They duly appointed 'a Special Committee to consider the steps needed to enable the Vestry to carry out the whole of their works without the intervention of a contractor'. The principle of direct labour was adopted next year as desirable, fair and efficient, with hours limited to 48 per week and trade-union rates paid. The committee reviewed the Vestry's existing depots, visited those at Kensington and Lambeth, and decided in favour of retaining small depots on several sites.¹⁰

By 1906 Battersea Borough Council had 'more than 14' depots in various parts of the borough.¹¹ Most were just for storing building materials, carts and vans, some in railway arches, others on empty sites awaiting development.¹² But the key event in the development of Battersea Vestry's direct labour policy was the opening of the municipal workshops. After vacant ground behind the town hall was rejected as too valuable, the depot behind 283 Battersea Park Road was adapted at a cost of over £4,600 and opened in 1898. **By then** the Works Department had already undertaken 26 major projects by direct labour, mostly road-building, paving and sewer-building, to a value of £22,000.¹³ In 1906 the department employed 850 men, and its workshops had been augmented by acquiring Falcon Wharf and Grove Wharf in Lombard Road and building large stables adjoining. Works to the value of £500,000 had now been executed, including Nine Elms Baths, Lombard Road Power Station and the prestigious municipal housing of the Latchmere and Town Hall estates.

This ambitious expenditure did not go unchallenged. The Nine Elms Baths, for instance, were to be paid for by a loan from the Local Government Board, which held a public enquiry in 1896-7 to determine whether it should

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be made. On behalf of the Vestry, the local sanitary inspector claimed to have visited every house in the district, stating that there was only one house with a bath in the whole ward, and that swimming baths were also urgently needed, as children had drowned in the Thames and the water company's neighbouring reservoirs. But opponents alleged that baths cost too much, that working men would not use them, and that the Vestry was 'extravagant' in employing nine staff at Latchmere Baths in the winter months when takings were minimal. Almost all these opponents were members of the Bolingbroke Club representing the respectable area 'between the Commons'. The Board sanctioned the loan reluctantly, with the proviso that something be done about the extravagance in running the Latchmere Baths.¹⁴

The strongest attack on Battersea's direct-labour policy came in an article in *The Times* in 1902, to which John Burns responded stoutly (page xxx).¹⁵ By the time the municipal engineers visited Battersea in 1906, the glory days of direct labour were over. The Vestry and Council had built most of the accommodation they needed, and the Progressives lost office in 1909. Yet direct labour in Battersea proved tenacious, contributing once more to housing and other building programmes from the 1920s and gaining renewed strength in the last years of the borough's independent life. The organization was taken over by Wandsworth Borough Council as its buildings works department in 1965 and seven years later still employed 280. By 1975 the council had adopted a policy of awarding half of its new construction and 85% of its maintenance to the department, with a generous ceiling below which building work was not offered to outside tender. The department was based at the Culvert Road depot until 1977 when it transferred to Falcon Wharf, Lombard Road. Shortly thereafter, however, its performance was found 'highly unsatisfactory' because of poor cost control by the District Auditor, who registered alarm at the growth of the department which numbered 968, including administrators. The construction department was

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run down from 1979, at first gradually and then more sharply, until by the end of 1985 it had been wound up completely.¹⁶

Battersea Town Hall and predecessors

The building in 1892–3 of Battersea Town Hall on Lavender Hill, now the Battersea Arts Centre, represented the culmination of several previous efforts to build a vestry or town hall in the parish. The history of these projects reflects Battersea's particular character and the changing shape of London government.

Wandsworth District Board of Works Offices, 68A Battersea Rise

From 1856 to 1888 the municipal masters in Battersea were the Wandsworth District Board of Works, whose empire covered a large swath of south-west London (page xxx). During its first months the Board met in the Vestry Room at Clapham, and then in the boardroom of the Clapham and Wandsworth Union Workhouse. Meanwhile a committee considered the accommodation needed for a boardroom and offices, and the best location. At this stage the Board's only employees were the clerk, Arthur Alexander Corsellis, a solicitor whose family were involved in building development in Battersea and who was to retain the post for nearly 30 years, and David William Young, the surveyor. Young drew up plans for a boardroom behind the Railway Tavern on Battersea Rise, but instead the Board moved temporarily to Bolingbroke House, a large house on Bolingbroke Grove, in July 1856.¹⁷

The committee finally recommended in May 1858 premises facing Battersea Rise east of the corner with St John's Road, near the centre of the

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Board's district. These consisted of a two-storey house of Georgian origins (now 68A Battersea Rise) which, following a rebuilding of 1815, had been occupied for years by the Mellersh family, with some land to its west. These were taken on a renewable 21-year lease. On the west side of the house, which was for the offices, the owner, Joseph Cable, agreed to erect a boardroom, 25ft by 35ft, and to cover in the yard for carriages.¹⁸ The portico of No. 68A appears to have belonged to the pre-existing house, while the balustraded parapet may date from the creation of the boardroom, along with the amateurish embellishments around the windows and the peculiar rusticated stucco pediment outlined over the ground-floor windows and portico.

The Board first met in its new boardroom and offices on 10 November 1858, when the building was referred to as 'Mellish House, Battersea'.¹⁹ In 1873 further accommodation was needed when the District Board's total membership grew from 57 to 81. A new top-lit rectangular boardroom was added behind the offices, with a public on its west side. It was designed by Thomas Buckham, who had succeeded Young as surveyor in 1863, and built by John McLachlan. During the work Buckham, his assistant and three foremen were sacked for financial impropriety. In 1876 the old boardroom, which had been redeployed as a committee room, was extended westwards over the yard with a clerks' office.²⁰

When Battersea Vestry regained its independence in 1888 it took over the Wandsworth Board's offices and boardroom, until a new town hall could be built, while the Board moved to new offices on East Hill (now Book House), Wandsworth.²¹ In 1894, with its staff now in its new municipal offices, the Vestry sold its interest in the old premises, which were subdivided.²² A shop was built over the forecourt in front of the 1858 boardroom, which was used latterly as a billiard hall, then demolished in the 1930s and replaced by further shops. The Board's former offices and 1873 boardroom were used by the YMCA until 1915 when they were acquired by the International Holiness

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Mission, which still occupies the building as the Thomas Memorial Church of the Nazarene. The mission was founded in 1906 by John and David Thomas, Battersea drapers and pentecostalists, as a break-away movement from Richard Reader Harris's Pentecostal League at Speke Hall (page xxx).²³

Lammas Hall (demolished)

Battersea's first public hall was built in 1858–9 as a consequence of the creation of Battersea Park. In 1853 a parochial committee was appointed to consider how to spend the £1,500 received by the churchwardens from the Battersea Park Commissioners as compensation for the 'extinguishment' of Lammas rights – the traditional grazing or crop-growing rights – under the Battersea Park Act of 1851. The terms of the Act were vague – that the money should be used for 'general and public purposes'.²⁴ Suggested uses included a boys' school in the St George's district, almshouses, highway repair, subsidising the Sir Walter St John charity, building gas works or a vestry hall, creating a new burial ground, or purchasing Althorpe House, the former private asylum in Battersea Church Road occasionally used as a vestry room.²⁵ But the Vestry decided on a 'building for the general and public purposes of the parishioners, to be called Battersea Lammas Hall'. Trustees were promptly appointed; local opposition, however, saw the project delayed until 1858, when a Chancery judgement decided that the hall was a lawful use of the money.²⁶

By then a plot at the angle of Bridge Road West (Westbridge Road) and Surrey Lane had been chosen. This site, previously market gardens, contained a building at its west end, apparently new and intended as a beerhouse.²⁷ It was acquired for £750 and the trustees advertised for plans to add a hall to the site either abutting the rear of the existing house or independent of it, for £500. Perhaps because of the low budget and mere £5 premium only five

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designs were sent in, one by E. C. Robins, the rest by the young or obscure, including Stephen Stedman who later extended the hall. The chosen design was by Thomas W. Horn, although his associate Henry Hall dealt with most of the work. Nicholson and Son's modest tender of £527 was accepted and the building was complete by March 1859.²⁸

The Lammas Hall was an unpretending building. The only obviously new embellishment to the existing house was the inscription 'BATTERSEA LAMMAS HALL ERECTED 1858' cut into the cornice. The hall behind was lit by round-headed windows either side, separated by giant pilasters. A central corridor led from the main entrance through to the hall, 48ft 6in deep and 33ft wide, with a platform occupying most of its east end and a single-storey ante-room at the south-east corner. A stair within the house rose to a west gallery.²⁹

The hall was hired by various organisations including the Battersea Literary and Scientific Institute, which used two rooms on the ground floor as a library and reading room, and another as a committee room. Other early users were the Battersea Institution Cricket Club, the Ratepayers' Protection Society, and John Nickinson, 'the blind organist of St Mary's', who gave a concert in June 1859. That month J. A. Jackson, 'an American fugitive slave', applied for the use of the hall but did not take up the Trustees' offer of it for £2 10s – the money to be paid 'in advance', perhaps in apprehension of his fugitive habits.³⁰

Battersea Vestry first used the upper-floor committee room in 1859. The Lammas Hall became the de facto vestry hall when the overseers took a 21-year lease from Christmas 1863 of three first-floor rooms that they had been using with the main hall, when required.³¹ In 1871 the surveyor-architect Stephen Stedman railed in the strip of land along the south side of the building and added a new room, reached by a spiral staircase, above the ante-room. A music and dancing licence was also obtained that year.³²

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Although Lammas Hall was considered ‘a strangely difficult room for the voice’, its consolidation as the vestry hall continued after the first attempts to build a new one failed (see below).³³ In 1882 it was transferred to the churchwardens and overseers. Plans for alterations were secured from H. G. Gribble of St John’s Hill to provide ‘proper and convenient offices for the transaction of parish business’, but the scheme became mired in legal difficulties. Ultimately few changes were made, as the Vestry thought it prudent to delay until the future of London-wide government and the possibility of Battersea achieving independence from the Wandsworth Board of Works had been decided.³⁴

In 1888, with the Vestry reconstituted as the single local authority, now meeting in the former Board of Works offices in Battersea Rise, the Lammas Hall became a branch library for Battersea until 1926. After that it continued in use as a public hall until the late 1970s, when it was demolished. Part of Bowstead Court on the Surrey Lane Estate occupies the site.

Vestry and public hall projects, 1878–84

Despite its loss of powers in 1856, the Battersea Vestry grew more vocal and influential over the following three decades because of the explosion in local population.

In 1878 it proposed to build itself a new vestry hall in place of the Lammas Hall.³⁵ Two sites were earmarked: one on Lavender Hill, the other with frontages to Battersea Park Road and Falcon Lane. The former was initially favoured as ‘geographically the centre of the parish’, the committee predicting that Lavender Hill would soon become ‘more generally convenient’, and provide better income from letting because of the site’s

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'higher ground and wealthier associations'. The building was to include a vestry hall to hold 1,000 people and to cost around £18,000. But the ratepayers were divided. One group declared that the Lavender Hill site 'is not or ever can be the centre of the population', while the Lavender Hill Tradesmen's Club asserted that building the hall near them would be 'only just to the portion of parish which supplied the largest amount of rates'.³⁶

In April 1879 the Vestry voted in favour of a Battersea Park Road site, the cost including the building not to exceed £10,000.³⁷ Seven sites along the road's course were considered along the road's course, soon narrowed down to two, at the corners with Albert Bridge Road and with Falcon Lane; but the latter's owner, Alfred Heaver, declined to sell.³⁸ The project was then shelved on the motion of Andrew Cameron that 'the present system of government by Parish Vestry will at no very distant date be numbered amongst the things that were', and the Vestry returned to tinkering with the Lammas Hall.³⁹

The continued absence of a spacious hall for hire in Battersea prompted the foundation in 1882 of the private Battersea and New Wandsworth Public Halls Company; its directors included North Battersea's district surveyor, H. J. Hansom, and the builder Thomas Spearing. Their chosen site, at the corner of St John's Road and Lavender Hill, had already been leased by Spearing from Heaver in order to build shops.⁴⁰ Plans by Morris & Stallwood of Reading were chosen from six sets submitted in limited competition, and a tender was accepted from William Smith.⁴¹

The ambitious design provided for two frontages, with shops on the ground floor, a well-appointed social club behind and a winter garden on the east side.⁴² Kitchens, cellars and servants' offices occupied the basement. Above was to be a public hall 106ft long, 40ft wide and 32ft high. The frontage was fairly stolid rectilinear Queen Anne up to the roof-line, with pilasters framing the hall windows facing St John's Road. Above this it erupted into

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shaped gables, especially rich towards Lavender Hill. It was to be expensively finished in steel-coloured bricks with dressings of red brick, carved rubbers and terracotta.⁴³

By the time the foundation stone was laid in November 1882 by the banker and local Liberal, Sydney Stern (later Lord Wandsworth), it was being described as a 'town hall'. But financial difficulties and arguments with the Wandsworth Board over the frontage line halted the building when only the basement was complete. Following legal proceedings, the firm was wound up in November 1883 with Smith considerably out of pocket. The site was quickly acquired by Arding & Hobbs, who went on to erect their well-known drapery store on the building's basement (pages xxx).⁴⁴

Battersea Town Hall

The decision to build what was referred to variously as a town hall or public hall, with municipal or parochial offices, was made as soon as the newly independent Battersea Vestry took office in March 1888. The main spur was the inadequacy of the Battersea Rise premises for the Vestry's officers, 120 members and public meetings.⁴⁵ A committee of 24 members was promptly appointed to look into the question. It solicited information from various London and provincial local authorities, and got as far as deciding on the accommodation required (a public hall for 1,500, a secondary hall for 300, a vestry hall, committee rooms, and offices for vestrymen, churchwardens and overseers) as well as considering a range of sites before being dissolved that November.⁴⁶

There the matter rested until 1891, when a new Parochial Offices Committee of 20 members, of whom seven had served in 1888, was appointed. This committee picked up where its predecessor left off. The

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Vestry Clerk supplemented the information he had culled in 1888 with details about new town halls in Sheffield, Glasgow and Portsmouth – a measure of the Vestry's ambitions, as was its decision to expend £42,000 on the site and allocate 42,000 sq ft to the buildings.⁴⁷ None of the sites now considered lay north of the east–west railway lines, as the focus of Battersea's development had been drifting ever southwards. Most were on St John's Hill or Lavender Hill, reflecting the increasing centrality of that route, by then also serviced by trams.

Out of eight sites investigated, three made the cut, all on Lavender Hill: the Highbury House estate (part of the present Asda site); the land between Battersea Library and Altenburg Gardens; and the Elm House estate, east of Latchmere Road. Elm House, the largest and (at £8,450) cheapest of the three, was chosen.⁴⁸ This conspicuous and **wooded** site, occupied by a villa with outbuildings, offered a frontage of 160ft to Lavender Hill and stretched north as far as the gardens of houses in Elsley Road, giving room for the building which J. T. Pilditch, the Vestry's surveyor, now calculated as needing 56,000 sq ft. The committee also recommended buying the adjacent 55 and 57 Eland Road, to be demolished for access to the rear of the site.⁴⁹

There was no suggestion that Pilditch would design the building. Instead a limited competition was held. In the democratic but amateurish spirit of the reformed Vestry, each of the committee members was invited to supply an architect's name. Fourteen complied, ten further names being supplied by the Vestry Clerk and surveyor in consultation with members. This process threw up a ragbag of 24 architects of varying ability and experience: in full, T. W. Aldwinckle; A. J. Bolton; Henry Branch; W. E. & F. Brown; J. M. Brydon; R. Burr; H. A. Cheers; Horace Cheston; G. R. Crickmay; H. J. Hansom; W. J. Hardcastle; Zephaniah King; F. G. Knight; E. W. Mountford; Rowland Plumbe; T. E. Pryce; Read & Macdonald; Francis J. Smith; T. Roger Smith; A. Spice; R. Walker; Frederick Wheeler; R. Williams;

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and T.W. Willis.⁵⁰ Most were perhaps suggested because they were known locally, and only 12 ultimately submitted designs.⁵¹ Only three, J. M. Brydon, Henry Cheers and E. W. Mountford, were evidently equipped to design a building that met the Vestry's practical and psychological requirements. Cheers was the architect of several public buildings including Oswestry Town Hall.⁵² Brydon had won the Chelsea Vestry Hall competition of 1884 with a design that set a new standard of ambition and Renaissance display among local authority buildings in London. But top of the list in every sense was E. W. Mountford. His was the first name suggested – by Andrew Cameron, the leading campaigner for 'Battersea Home Rule' in the 1880s and of the Progressive group which was to control the Vestry and the Borough for nearly 20 years.

Mountford was, perhaps, the ideal candidate. He lived locally, and was familiar as the architect of Battersea's earliest manifestations of civic pride, the Lavender Hill Library and Battersea Polytechnic, both chosen in competitions by invitation, suggesting he was already in local favour.⁵³ Mountford was also then at work on the Sheffield Municipal Buildings, an £80,000 project that dwarfed Battersea's.

To judge the entries the Vestry appointed as assessor William Young, architect of Glasgow's municipal buildings and a Putney resident. The amount allocated was £25,000, which the *Building News* thought inadequate for the requirements. Young indeed rejected all but four submissions on grounds of excessive cost. Mountford was the winner, followed by Henry Cheers, then Read & Macdonald. All three designs responded to the vestry surveyor's suggestions by facing the municipal offices towards Lavender Hill, with the public hall behind served by its own entrance.⁵⁴

Cheers' design was in a flamboyant French Renaissance idiom, exhibiting a grand imperial staircase carried up to first-floor level beneath

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double-height arches. Read and Macdonald's entry (known only from a description) was also Renaissance in style, with a recessed centre enriched to mark the first-floor council chamber.⁵⁵

Mountford described his design as 'essentially English Renaissance, though perhaps treated somewhat freely'.⁵⁶ The main front, faced in Suffolk red bricks with Bath stone dressings, is rectilinear, but softened by curve-cornered pavilions and enriched with pairs of engaged columns, ample pediments, Venetian windows to the upper windows, Gibbs surrounds below, and figurative carving in the lunettes and spandrels. The side elevations shift inventively from the ceremonial front block to the offices and hall behind.⁵⁷

Mountford's plan followed many of Pilditch's recommendations.⁵⁸ The Lavender Hill block, with a 112ft frontage housing the vestry offices, is largely symmetrical, arranged around a spacious top-lit staircase hall and beyond that a courtyard lighting corridors.⁵⁹ A semi-circular portico leads into a lobby flanked by waiting rooms and hence to a low entrance hall opening through an arched screen into the staircase compartment. The stair itself rises centrally and divides into two flights returning to a gallery round three sides. As completed, the main front was largely taken up by the council chamber, 55ft by 30ft, with a public gallery at its east end, flanked by a grand committee room and members' library. The first floor extended only along the east side, the west side being left for future expansion: it had been a condition of the competition that designs provide for such an expansion 'without injury to the lights or architectural effects'.⁶⁰ A further storey was tucked in above the east wing giving access to the council chamber's public gallery. There was a proliferation of entrances; a separate one for the rates office, for instance, allowed that department to be open in the evening for payments, but shut off from the rest of the building.⁶¹

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The public section at the rear was entered from a new side road to the east (the future Town Hall Road), a feature admired on Mountford's plan. A porte cochère and vestibule leads into an octagonal, glass-domed lobby which links southwards with the parochial offices' east corridor and northwards with the great hall. This is set lengthwise to the new road, with a raised stage at its north end partly beneath a domed niche, and a gallery across its south end. Like the council chamber, the hall features an elliptical barrel-vaulted ceiling, punctured on each side by seven large windows which alternate externally with the tops of flying buttresses. Because the ground slopes steeply, Mountford was able to tuck the smaller second hall and service rooms beneath the great hall's northern end.⁶²

The Vestry's own workforce undertook the preparatory work of site-clearance, roads and sewers during the winter of 1891-2.⁶³ Despite entreaties from the Social Democratic Federation and the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers, the Vestry shrank from using direct labour to build the town hall itself.⁶⁴ The lowest tender received, £25,750 from Walter Wallis of Balham, was accepted pending an application for a loan from the London County Council. The LCC was not empowered to lend for public halls, only parochial offices and sites, but with help from John Burns, Battersea's voluble member on that body, the Vestry was able to benefit from a clause specially inserted in the LCC (General Powers) Act, 1894, extending the building-types for which vestries could borrow to include those for public meetings.⁶⁵

The foundation stones, either side of the main staircase, were laid on 7 November 1892 by Edward Wood, chairman of the parochial offices committee and a key figure in the creation of an 'independent' Battersea. Building proceeded reasonably smoothly.⁶⁶ Various alterations to the plan were made during this time, several to satisfy the conditions for licensing the great hall for music, dancing and drama. The most intrusive was an extra staircase connecting the gallery at the hall's south end with Town Hall Road,

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entailing an ingenious composition entered from a tiny buttressed porch with shaped gables.⁶⁷

The specification for the town hall was luxurious. Most of the flooring and woodwork in public and municipal areas, including a high dado in the council chamber, was of oak. Fibrous plasterwork by Gilbert Seale of Camberwell decorated the ceilings and friezes in the council chamber, grand hall (also the proscenium), staircase hall and octagonal lobby (incorporating a quotation from *Richard II* on a ground of oak and vine leaves). For the staircase hall a more lavish curved frieze, with cartouches, putti and swags was preferred to that originally designed.⁶⁸

Many fittings were specially made to Mountford's designs, notably in the grand committee room, offices and council chamber. The council chamber was arranged in the customary manner, with a raised and panelled dais along the south wall facing a semi-circle with curved desks for the 120 vestrymen. All these fittings were made by Wallis, excepting the vestrymen's oak and pigskin chairs, supplied by Hampton & Sons. Mountford also designed chimneypieces of mahogany and basswood (a type of limewood) in the offices, as well as fireplaces of russet marble and Hopton Wood stone in other major rooms.⁶⁹

Mountford was relentless in entreating his committee to stump up for additional enrichments. He persuaded them to front the whole of the Lavender Hill ground-floor elevation in stone, and to substitute Devonshire marble for Portland stone columns in the octagonal lobby and for the main staircase strings and handrail, as well as Devonshire spar for the balusters and Sicilian marble for the steps.⁷⁰ He was also able to secure mosaic flooring to his designs in the entrance hall (a busy municipal bee motif) and octagonal lobby as the supplier, Rust's Vitreous Mosaic Company of Battersea, agreed to make 'savings in less important parts'. Occasionally Mountford volunteered

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economies: Bangor slate was substituted for green Westmorland on the low west wing of the offices, invisible from the street and intended for extension. He failed to persuade the Vestry to wire the building for electric light.⁷¹ This mistake soon had to be remedied. In 1896–7 a 100-volt system was installed, originally dependent on a single fuse and supplied by a generator station built to Pilditch's design just to the north. This was in turn replaced in 1901–2 with a higher-volt system connected to the mains supplied by the Vestry's new electricity generating station in Lombard Road (see below).⁷²

Money was generously spent on relief sculpture, a feature of Mountford's buildings throughout his career. At this stage he was employing a young sculptor named Paul Montford, then living with his sculptor father Horace in Winders Road, Battersea.⁷³ Though Montford spent his latter years in Australia, he was said at his death to have been 'largely identified not only by his training and residence but also by his work with South London'.⁷⁴ He was also politically in tune with the Progressives and a friend of John Burns. In later life 'he frequently used the daily press to air avant-garde opinions about the social and environmental role of sculpture in modern cities'.⁷⁵

This progressive flavour is evident in the reliefs Montford, assisted by his father, carved on the main front at Battersea. The three pediments included, to the east, 'the young borough supported by Labour and Progress', to the west 'the young borough instructed by Art and Literature' and in the centre the parish crest and coat of arms supported by figures of Justice and Prudence; in the spandrels of the central Venetian window beneath are figures of Authority and Relaxation (confirming the town hall's role as a recreational venue).⁷⁶ There are putti in the spandrels above the main entrance, and in lunettes of various windows and doorheads.

The building was opened in November 1893 by Lord Rosebery, first chairman of the LCC.⁷⁷ To illustrate the programme Mountford recommended

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T. Raffles Davison of the *British Architect*, offering to meet half the cost. The quid pro quo was an appreciative article and lavish display of Davison's drawings in the issue following the opening. The event was celebrated with a choir of 290, the band of the Coldstream Guards and a guard of honour. The National Telephone Company connected the building for the occasion to 'several west end theatres' and 'one of Edison's phonographs was also engaged for the evening'.⁷⁸

Embellishment continued for some years.⁷⁹ In April 1894 the Vestry accepted from the son of the sculptor William Calder Marshall full-size plaster maquettes of three of his father's sculptures: *Eurydice*, *Zephyr and Aurora*, and *Dancing Girl Reposing*. These were installed by the sculptor shortly before he died that June – *Eurydice* on the main staircase landing and the others in the octagonal lobby. *Zephyr and Aurora* and *Dancing Girl Reposing* remain in situ; *Eurydice*, later transferred to Wandsworth Town Hall, appears now to be lost.⁸⁰

A small addition was made in 1895 when an iron and glass porch in front of the entrance to the public hall was erected by W. Macfarlane & Company. It was soon extended to the sides to provide better weather protection.⁸¹ This porch replaced the stone porte cochère of Mountford's winning design, thought too intrusive upon Town Hall Road.

Such had been the haste to get the **town hall** opened that full decoration was delayed until 1897, when the building was closed for three months and painted by direct labour. The specification included gilding and picking out the fibrous plaster friezes, ceilings and inscription in the octagonal lobby. A combination of light and dark green was followed in several of the secondary rooms, but the frieze in the octagon was painted terracotta, the grand staircase in 'cream and orange tints', and the council chamber in two shades of blue with a cream ceiling.⁸²

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From the start the Lavender Hill portico was inscribed 'Municipal Buildings', although strictly they were only parochial offices. This grander designation anticipated the day when the town hall would become 'the official home of a Mayor and Aldermen of Battersea'.⁸³ The change from vestry to metropolitan borough duly took place in 1900. Battersea Council continued the Vestry's radical policies; indeed during the transition, at the height of the Boer War, a motion to fly the Union Jack 'as public events may dictate' was trumped by an amendment: 'That, seeing that the Union Jack has of late years become the symbol of a grasping, unscrupulous commercialism, this vestry decline to place a flag staff on the Town Hall, believing that the true interest of an industrial population lies, not in the display of bunting, but in the steadfast adherence to the principles of social and economic freedom'.⁸⁴

To accommodate the borough's enlarged functions, in 1899–1901 the west wing was twice extended to Pilditch's designs. First came a refreshment room for 300–400 people over the rates department and a three-storey block adjoining, which partly encroached on the central courtyard; offices for the town clerk's department followed behind the Grand Committee Room.⁸⁵ Although Mountford had anticipated extension, he had not given enough thought to access, so each addition had its own cramped staircase.⁸⁶ Behind the town hall, part of the land bought in 1891 was developed in 1900 as municipal housing, having been rejected as the site for a police station or sorting office.⁸⁷

A magnificent addition in 1900–1 was the organ in the main hall, a token of the Borough's commitment to musical entertainments for its ratepayers. In 1893 the Vestry had turned down the offer of the Bryceson organ from the defunct Albert Palace near Battersea Park as it was too large.⁸⁸ The new instrument was built by Norman & Beard, supervised by the Borough's organist and director of music, Hugh Blair, and housed in an oak

Draft

case of five sections, with a console that fitted into the front of the stage and could be drawn out on rails, the casing designed by Pilditch and expensively made by the Borough's own workshops.⁸⁹ It has been suggested that the instrument was devised by the pioneer of the electrical theatre organ, Robert Hope-Jones, and is the largest and most surviving example of his work in Britain. Hope-Jones was certainly employed by Norman & Beard when the Battersea organ was built, while his own firm, the Hope-Jones Electric Organ Company, had been based in Battersea just previously. Soon afterwards he made a 'hasty departure for America in the wake of a sexual scandal'.⁹⁰

The main hall was also used for showing films from 1899, using temporary equipment mounted on the gallery.⁹¹ A permanent 'lantern house' and associated rooms were built behind the gallery by the borough surveyor T. W. A. Hayward in 1920 and later extended; these structures survive. In 1936 the gallery to the hall was rebuilt to a greater depth and given a clumsy curved front in place of the pierced straight balcony; this was the responsibility of H. Burleigh, Hayward's successor. Beneath, the lower hall was reconstructed in 1926, with steel girders spanning the full width to allow the removal of existing columns, and Art Deco or **quasi-Celtic** embellishments by Hayward's assistant Henry Hyams.⁹²

In 1958–9 the Borough proposed developing a grand new civic centre either side of Lavender Hill incorporating the town hall. A new building for the borough treasurer, engineer and surveyor, public health and housing departments, registrars and staff canteen, was to be built on the Shakespeare Theatre site and connected to the Grand Hall across Theatre Street, which was to be closed to through traffic.⁹³ Further accommodation and housing were to be built on the opposite side of the road on a bomb site at 207–217 Lavender Hill, previously designated just for housing. In the event, with the reform of London government imminent, this last was the only development to proceed (see below).

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After the reorganization of London government in 1964–5 saw Battersea absorbed into the London Borough of Wandsworth, many of the town hall's functions were transferred to Wandsworth Town Hall. With the building now largely redundant, the new borough in 1966–7 proposed replacing the front block with a large building to cover this and the adjoining Shakespeare Theatre site, to include a central public library, swimming bath and car park, all to be designed by Wandsworth's borough architect, Leonard Phillips.⁹⁴ The newly formed Battersea Society fought the destruction of 'one of the most beautiful municipal buildings in London'.⁹⁵ Against the odds, the combination of a lack of funds and a concerted conservation campaign involving John Betjeman (who thought the building 'much much better than Wandsworth Town Hall'), Nikolaus Pevsner and the Victorian Society saw the threat warded off and the building listed in 1970.

Like many redundant town halls, Battersea's struggled after 1965 to find a role. The grand and lower halls continued to be used for community entertainments, and in September 1968 housed people evacuated from the Thames Valley following flooding.⁹⁶ In 1970 Wandsworth Council sought to let the building long-term. Interest was shown by the Department of the Environment, which wanted to convert the accommodation into criminal courts, and by the Institution of Production Engineers, but none of this came to anything. In 1972 a working group set up to consider a proposal by Councillor Martin Linton, later Battersea's MP, to adapt the town hall for social, community and artistic purposes recommended this course as it would 'excite the interest and the involvement of many people in the borough'.⁹⁷ It came to fruition in November 1974, when Hugh Jenkins, Minister for the Arts, opened the centre on the 81st anniversary of the opening of Battersea Town Hall. The centre offered various classes, and performance and rehearsal spaces for local groups. Julian Bicknell & Associates, architects, allocated spaces within the building and supervised the consequent alterations. These

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included fitting out the ground-floor east room as a cafeteria, and the two rooms above as a single exhibition space. Here the uprights of the fireplace surrounds were ingeniously lengthened by chopping them up and alternating the original moulded portions with plain blocks in homage to the Gibbs surrounds of Mountford's windows – an unusual gesture for the 1970s. Gantries and a projection booth were installed in the council chamber for theatre or cinema use.⁹⁸

The centre closed due to spending cuts in 1979, but reopened next year as Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), run by an independent trust but funded largely by grants from Wandsworth Council.⁹⁹ It has earned a reputation for experimental theatre and performance. At this stage the old council chamber and two of the other main spaces were painted black for ease of theatrical, film and studio use. Various alterations including the installation of retractable seating within the main house were made by Tim Ronalds Architects in 1987.¹⁰⁰

In 1992–4 BAC took over responsibility for the grand and lower halls, and some restoration was undertaken by Wandsworth Council. Illuminated red cube lights spelling out 'BAC' in three directions were installed in 2004 on the Lavender Hill frontage – an intrusive eye-catcher illustrating the difficulty of signalling such a building's purpose without detracting from its qualities. In 2007 BAC fought off a threat to its future and secured a long lease from Wandsworth Council, a works programme and further external funding. The organisation has committed itself to creating 'a 21st-century theatre in a 19th-century town hall', and in 2011 the former council chamber regained something of its original aspect when it was stripped of its blackout paint and curtains, revealing Mountford's plaster and woodwork once again.¹⁰¹

Council Offices, 207–217 Lavender Hill

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By 1951 Battersea Borough Council had taken over the houses east of the town hall at 1 & 3 Eland Road and 158–166 Lavender Hill as surveyor's and housing departments.¹⁰² In 1959, having scaled back plans for a civic centre on the site of the Shakespeare Theatre, the Council secured plans from Howes & Jackman, architects, for a five-storey block of plain brick offices on a bomb-damaged site occupying the opposite side of Lavender Hill between Elspeth and Mysore Roads. Lower housing blocks facing the side roads were part of the same scheme. The offices were converted in 2003–4 into 23 flats with shops, and a council cash office on the ground floor, to designs by Colwyn Foulkes & Partners, architects. The exterior windows were replaced with larger steel-framed units and the brown brick was coated in white render for slicker effect, and balconies to the end walls and a penthouse level added.¹⁰³

Libraries and museums

As early as 1859, Battersea Vestry held an open meeting which considered (and rejected) adopting the 1850 Public Libraries and Museum Act that permitted local authorities to build and maintain libraries. So slow was the Act's uptake in London that the Vestry did not reconsider the matter until 1882. Had it implemented the Act then, it would have been only the second authority in the metropolis to do so.¹⁰⁴

The eventual adoption of the Act in 1887 followed just after a decision by the Metropolitan Board of Works making it easier for local authorities to borrow money for building libraries.¹⁰⁵ By July commissioners had been chosen and had appointed a secretary and librarian, Laurence Inkster, the former South Shields Librarian. A temporary reading room was opened at 346 Battersea Park Road in September, along with a 'Latchmere Reading Room',

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rented from the Wandsworth and Clapham Guardians and presumably at the dispensary and relief station opposite the Latchmere Baths.¹⁰⁶

Battersea Central Library, Lavender Hill

An L-shaped site, part of the West Lodge estate, was secured for £3,000 for a main library in 1888. It wrapped around the western half of Altenburg Terrace (now 255–263 Lavender Hill) and had frontages to both the main road and Altenburg Gardens. Less than half the site – the portion fronting Lavender Hill – was designated for the library. The rest was retained for a future museum and for science, art and technical schools (a want superseded by the opening of Battersea Polytechnic in 1894).¹⁰⁷

A design competition was promptly held, according to detailed instructions specifying the rooms required and their size. Ten invited architects submitted drawings in May 1888. The first four premiums went to E. W. Mountford, T. Chatfeild Clarke, Rowland Plumbe and Charles Jones. Mountford was just then completing the Northcote Road Baptist Church, but this was the first of his municipal successes in Battersea; Plumbe and Jones were co-authors of the Latchmere Baths designs. The architectural press agreed Mountford's entry to be the best. Chatfeild Clarke's design was thought 'well suited to a Parisian boulevard' but 'much too grandiose' for Lavender Hill. An unplaced design by J. W. Hanson was thought 'an ideal plan from a librarian's point of view', having an unusual oval top-lit reference library and reading room with bookstores in the spandrels; but the press thought the elevations 'overwindowed' and 'commonplace'. As Hanson was from South Shields, his invitation probably came via the new Librarian.¹⁰⁸

Mountford's winning design had a three-storey frontage to Lavender Hill, animated with shallow bays topped by shaped gables. Embellishments

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were restricted to the arch and frieze of the main entrance doorway, and front window surrounds. The mildly Flemish Renaissance style, in the spirit of Ernest George, was thought 'inexpensively devised and designed to not needlessly clash with the adjoining houses which are of the speculating builders' type of work'.¹⁰⁹ The plan featured an off-centre entrance leading into a lobby and corridor flanked by a newsroom and a magazine room. Beyond the staircase was a librarian's office overlooking the newsroom, and a lending library at the back. Upstairs came a further magazine room, a galleried top-lit reference library, a ladies' reading room and a librarian's flat with its own entrance from the flank. A dwarf wall with wrought-iron railing and piers topped with stone finials enclosed the front area, which lit a basement with accommodation for a caretaker.

The results were not announced until November, so that the selected design could be costed and submitted to tender to ensure it could be built for £6,000.¹¹⁰ Mountford improved his main elevation by introducing an octagonal bay at the western angle, which in execution was extended up to create a steep-roofed tourelle, a feature in several competition entries. The Battersea builder James Holloway's tender of £5,600 was accepted.¹¹¹ The library commissioners sanctioned a few extra carved brick panels of garlands and putti to the main front bays, perhaps made by Gilbert Seale of Camberwell. Sir John Lubbock laid the foundation stone on 2 May 1889 and another reforming Liberal politician, A. J. Mundella, opened the library on 26 March 1890.¹¹²

Despite a want of the public donations which sustained comparable institutions, Battersea's libraries proved popular and in 1890 the Vestry donated £2,500 from the sale of parish land to support them. After Lavender Hill opened, 'the fair sex' was reported to be the majority among borrowers, not least 'dressmakers and milliners'. In acknowledgement, Inkster unusually

Draft

employed women assistants at the central and branch libraries from the start.¹¹³

Alterations began almost immediately. A large bookstore on the second floor above the magazine room was soon adapted as a lecture room. In 1895–6 the front wall was removed for road-widening. This made the basement uninhabitable, so in 1897–8 a rear extension was built, doubling the lending library and providing a caretaker's flat above. In 1900–1 the floor between the upper magazine room and the lecture room above was removed to create a double-height magazine room with gallery, the ground-floor magazine room becoming an 'auxiliary newsroom'. A further top-lit single-storey extension was also added to the rear as a children's library. All these alterations were built by direct labour to designs by the borough surveyor, J. T. Pilditch.¹¹⁴

In 1924 the lending library was converted to open-access shelves, and next year the old first-floor reference library became a museum after the new reference library (see below) opened (Ills 1.17, 18). Various changes of use have happened since. In 1949 a music library lending records and scores opened in the former ladies' library on the first floor, later moving downstairs to the former magazine room. The children's library became an annexe to the reference library in the 1970s and was opened up towards the main lending library in 1994, as part of a major refurbishment. The museum became first a lecture room, art gallery, and since 1997 has been a computer room, while the 1901 magazine room became an exhibition room and later the local studies library.¹¹⁵

Reference Library, Altenburg Gardens

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The largest addition to Battersea Library was the semi-separate reference library extension, built in 1924–5 on ground east of the children’s library with a frontage towards Altenburg Gardens. The site had been used since 1898 as a vestry depot.

A new reference library had long been wanted. Funding only became possible after the 1919 Libraries Act abolished the limitation of the library rate to a penny. Special permission to build was needed from the Board of Education, because post-war regulations discouraged the diversion of labour from housing. A deputation from the Council urged the merits of the collection of reference books and the inadequacy of the existing room, adding that ‘in the bad housing conditions in many parts of Battersea, boys and girls who were studying for scholarships or in other ways trying to improve themselves, found it very difficult in the evenings to carry on their studies’.¹¹⁶

T. W. A. Hayward, the Borough Surveyor, is credited on the foundation stone, and may be responsible for an unexciting design for a smaller two-storey extension on the same site, entered from the existing library, not Altenburg Gardens. The true designer of the outstanding reference library as built, however, was Henry Hyams, an obscure but intriguing figure, who had spent time in central Europe in the Edwardian decade before settling in Devon. He had advanced views - Esperanto, theosophy - perhaps atypical of a Hackney publican’s son, and had spent time in Wandsworth jail during the First World War for his trenchant pacifism. Given Battersea Council’s radical leanings, it is perhaps not surprising that Hyams was appointed Hayward’s architectural assistant in January 1924, aged 44.¹¹⁷ As drawings for the library are dated March 1924, this assured if eccentric design must have been his first work for the Borough Council.

The reference library was built by direct labour.¹¹⁸ Its style is distinctively late Arts and Crafts (Ills 1.19, 20). The front is an assemblage of red brick, low

Draft

mullioned windows, triangular roofs and stone-dressed gables, with a swooping boundary wall filled with iron railings (replaced since the war). The library behind was designed to carry an extra floor above that never materialized. The room features robust oak gallery fronts and doors and is top-lit with a shallow, glazed barrel vault supported on cast-iron columns. These columns have quasi-Celtic capitals like those Hyams used in the lower hall of Battersea Town Hall the following year. Other lavish details include sweeping door-handles which follow a design Hyams had used for Deller's café in Paignton, decorated downpipes with dates, copper lamps, and the Council's motto 'NON MIHI, NON TIBI, SED NOBIS' carved over the entrance. The reference room is the least-altered part of Battersea Central Library, whose strength in architecture and design books still reflects Inkster's acquisition policy of the 1890s, influenced by the number of building workers in Battersea.¹¹⁹

Lammas Hall and Southlands Branch Libraries

When Battersea adopted the Public Libraries and Museum Act, the idea was to create a main library and two branch libraries. First to open, in 1888, was the Lammas Hall Branch Library, formed in the front portion of that building when it was vacated by the Vestry (above). Of the 4,654 books, nearly a quarter came from the defunct Battersea Literary and Scientific Institution, the Lammas Hall's first occupant. In 1897 the main hall was taken over from the Lammas Hall trustees and opened as a reading room by John Burns. In 1906 the ground floor contained a newsroom and lending library in the main hall, with a children's room adjacent.¹²⁰

The Lammas Hall library was closed as inadequate and its stock and functions transferred in 1928 to the west wing of Southlands College, Battersea High Street, which had been acquired by Battersea Council when

Draft

the college departed. The new premises offered reference and lending departments and a children's library, alongside a public hall, slipper baths and registry office in adjacent buildings.¹²¹ All but the library section of Southlands was demolished in the early 1960s. The latter survived until the 1990s when it was sold and converted to small business units and flats, known variously as The Old Library and the Biblio Building.¹²²

Lurline Gardens Branch Library (demolished)

The opening of the second branch library was held up until September 1890 by wrangling over the site, which adjoined All Saints' Church and the defunct Albert Palace. The Commissioners of Works were prepared to sell the ground for £340, despite a valuation of £429, but the Treasury vetoed this, not seeing 'any good reason for giving, in effect, a donation of £90 from the exchequer to the Parish of Battersea'.¹²³ The library commissioners appointed the local Henry Branch, a competitor in the central library competition, as architect, and he produced a single-storey design dominated by its roof. This was duly built by Oliver & Richardson of Southgate. The palette of red brick and tile echoed Mountford's Central Library. Carved brick decoration by Gilbert Seale featuring a riot of putti and garlands around the inscription 'BATTERSEA PUBLIC LIBRARY' filled the pediment to the broad left-hand gable. The reading room to the right was slightly set back, the lending library occupied the centre to the rear, while to the left were work room, magazine room and ladies' room. A children's reading room opened within the existing space in 1898.¹²⁴ In 1901 the gardens behind were 'tastefully laid out' and opened to the public 'who are allowed to read books or periodicals in the open air if they care to do so'.¹²⁵ The library was extended to the rear over the gardens in 1950. Closure was anticipated from 1966 when Battersea Park Library was planned as part of the Doddington Estate. The library was finally demolished in 1976 as part

Draft

of the redevelopment of the site of All Saints' Church with flats and houses.¹²⁶

The site is now occupied by 14–24 Lurline Gardens.¹²⁷

Plough Road Institute (demolished)

In 1901 Battersea Borough Council had under consideration the provision of baths and a branch library north of Clapham Junction. The idea of combining the functions was mooted and the scope of the project enlarged when next year Battersea became the first London borough to adopt the 1891 Museums and Gymnasiums Act, recently extended to London. The Act enabled councils to levy a halfpenny rate to pay for museums and gymnasia.

A site at the corner of Plough Road and Benham Street, including the former British Girls school, was acquired in 1904. Plans by the borough surveyor T. W. A. Hayward for a building, to be known as an institute, were approved early next year. On two storeys towards Plough Road and a single storey to the rear, this was built by the Council's Works Department and opened in September 1906.¹²⁸

The red-brick front to Plough Road was parsimoniously ornamented but had a central shaped gable with four brick pilasters. Entrances on both frontages led to a large room, used as a reading room by day and a recreation room in the evening, and to men's baths. Above were a museum room and children's reading room, effectively a branch library, reached by a 'spacious staircase, its walls ornamented with a most interesting series of photographs of Continental and Oriental life'. The lower block behind housed a top-lit gymnasium, nine women's baths and seven further men's baths.¹²⁹ The museum contained small loan collections mostly from local residents, 'casts and replicas of some of the treasures of the British Museum and also exhibits relating to local manufactures and industries', as well as paintings lent from

Draft

municipal art galleries by supportive corporations; Lord Aberdare lent among other works his Reynolds study for *Lady Hamilton as a Bacchante*.¹³⁰

Controversy attended the Plough Road Institute. The radical press applauded its social-reforming aims, providing entertainment and non-alcoholic refreshment in a 'squalid and unlovely' part of Battersea, with 'upwards of 80 public houses' within a half-mile radius.¹³¹ But it outraged the British Constitutional Association, which voted to report Battersea Council to the President of the Local Government Board for providing 'billiard tables, bagatelles ... and other games' out of the rates. The President of the Board, however, was John Burns, Battersea MP and supporter of the Council's tax-and-spend policies. Burns found, conveniently, that it was not within his remit to comment on this expenditure. The Council's response was to vote £57 5s on an additional billiard table.¹³²

The museum's displays were remodelled in 1910–11 as a facility for local elementary schools with donations from local industries explaining their technology.¹³³ But it was already considered unsatisfactory because of its location and its limited lighting for displays. When in 1925 the new reference library opened in Altenburg Gardens, the museum contents were moved to the better-lit former reference library in Lavender Hill. The Plough Road Institute's museum became an assembly room and the baths continued in use until 1968.¹³⁴ The building was demolished to make way for the Wayland Road Estate

Northcote Road Library

As early as 1899 the Vestry's Library Committee recommended levying a higher rate than a penny in the pound to establish a branch for south Battersea, remote from the central library in Lavender Hill. The need for an

Draft

Act of Parliament led to the notion being dropped and a branch library was not established in south Battersea until 1948, when shops at 81 & 83 Northcote Road were recast as a lending library with children's corner.¹³⁵ In 1966 Wandsworth Council decided to build a larger library, at the corner of Northcote and Chatham Roads. Opened in 1970 and designed by the Borough Architect Leonard Phillips, it is a building of unsurpassed municipal grimness, clad in pre-cast concrete panels finished in a dark grey aggregate. The inside is cheerier. Glazed entrance doors open into a full-height entrance hall giving access to a mezzanine floor across the rear of the building housing the children's library. A display area leads to a reference library in the south-west corner and, via a cantilevered concrete staircase, to the adult lending library. This has high-level windows to allow bookcases along the walls, and is separated from the hall by a half-height balustrade.¹³⁶

Battersea Park Road Library

Battersea Park Road Library, the second largest in the district now after Lavender Hill, was built in 1966–70 as part of the Doddington Estate and designed by Emberton, Tardrew & Partners.¹³⁷ It forms part of a cluster of low-level buildings providing social and health facilities and linking the slab blocks on Charlotte Despard Avenue with the lower scale of Battersea Park Road. Each building is an assemblage of interlocking rectangles. The ground floor consists of three such rectangles – adult lending library, book store and junior lending library – with a large square entrance hall in the angle and an L-shaped 'control desk'. The main staircase in the centre leads up to a study room and TV room, oversailing the entrance hall. A staircase tower at an angle ties together the brown-brick slabs. Lighting comes from patent glazing and prism-shaped rooflights. Inside, the walls are in exposed brick and the ceilings variously of coffered concrete and wood strip. A coyly post-modern gateway, with six cylindrical yellow-brick columns supporting a timber and

Draft

blue-metal roof, was added in front on Battersea Park Road in 1986 to designs by Lyster, Grillet & Harding.¹³⁸

Other libraries

Nine Elms Library in Thessaly Road was Battersea Council's valedictory gesture, opened in October 1964 by the Mayor of Battersea, attended by Douglas Jay, the local MP, and Jennie Lee, Minister of Public Building and Works, just before the borough was swallowed up by an enlarged Wandsworth. The idea of a library for Nine Elms went back many years, and a site on the post-war Patmore Estate had been reserved for it. The final upshot was a modest, single-storey rectangular building housing a children's library, reading room and offices, arranged round a courtyard embellished with a stone sculpture by the socialist sculptor Ian Walters, whose studio was in Battersea.¹³⁹ It closed after less than five years' service when Wandsworth Council opened Battersea Park Road Library. It subsequently became first a children's play centre and then a social education centre, for which purpose it was extended in 1988.¹⁴⁰ The building is closed at the time of writing.

Likewise connected with a post-war housing scheme was the **Winstanley Library**, opened in 1967 on the Winstanley Estate north of Clapham Junction. The library, planned under Battersea but opened under Wandsworth, occupied the ground floor of a block in Fenner Square off Thomas Baines Road and was denoted by a large mosaic of King Arthur on the outside wall. It closed in 1981 and was absorbed into York Road Library.¹⁴¹

York Road Library was built between the angles of Wye Street, Ingrave Street and Lavender Road in 1972–3 by Wandsworth Council in connection with its York Road Estate, to designs by Howes, Jackman & Partners. The modest red-brick block was extended during construction to

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comprise a community hall and offices. The library closed in 2000 and was absorbed into a newly expanded York Gardens Community Centre. The building was sold to Thames Christian College, which subdivided part of the main library space into classrooms.¹⁴²

The final building in this precarious sequence of facilities for north Battersea is therefore **York Gardens Library and Community Centre**. Designed by Wandsworth Borough Council's Director of Development to animate the bleakness of York Gardens, it opened in 1982.¹⁴³ A main, two-storey rectangular block in yellow brick extends into a steep second-floor monopitch with small adjuncts. It originally housed a hall to seat 265 with moveable stage, club room and kitchen. In 2000 its southern half became a library when York Road Library closed.¹⁴⁴

Baths and wash-houses

The first publicly funded baths in Battersea were opened at Latchmere in 1889. Further baths, this time also with a laundry, followed at Nine Elms in 1901. They marked the culmination of prolonged efforts to procure such facilities for the parish.

Providing facilities for washing and laundry by local authorities had been sanctioned by the Public Baths and Washhouses Act, 1846. This Act conferred the power to appoint commissioners of baths and wash-houses specifically on parish churchwardens and overseers. The potential adoption of the Act by Battersea Vestry therefore came to be seen as a gesture of independence after the parish was subsumed into the Wandsworth District Board of Works from 1856.

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Although the 1846 Act was primarily concerned with washing and laundering, bathing was also commended for sanitary reasons. Swimming facilities had the further advantage that they would benefit all parishioners. These the Vestry began to explore in the 1870s, considering floating baths in the Thames (as had been tried in a commercial venture near Charing Cross) or in Battersea Park lake, following precedents in Hyde Park, Regent's Park and Victoria Park.¹⁴⁵ The Commissioners of Works eventually refused to allow swimming in Battersea Park's lake, claiming it was too shallow and muddy.¹⁴⁶

The Vestry finally voted to adopt the Act and appoint commissioners in 1879. But progress was slow, as ratepayers' groups succeeded repeatedly in having the matter postponed on grounds of cost.

Latchmere Baths

In 1880 a special Vestry committee recommended that part of the Latchmere Allotments be used for baths and wash-houses. This site, formerly part of Latchmere Common, had been enclosed by Act of Parliament in the 1830s and let as allotments. Under the Act's terms it could not be employed for other purposes, but the Vestry was able to use the Baths and Washhouses Act to appropriate part of the site for this purpose, and it was reported that work would 'shortly be proceeded with'.¹⁴⁷

That proved optimistic. A competition limited to six invited architects was held in 1881, assessed by Ebenezer Saunders, and won by Rowland Plumbe with a design estimated to cost £30,000. Economies saw the wash-house element abandoned the following year, when the sale of part of the land for Latchmere Board School caused further delay. The Vestry now decided that it might be expedient to let the rest of the allotments on building

Draft

leases which, it was estimated, would yield £15,000 a year, enough to fund not just baths and wash-houses – possibly on two sites.¹⁴⁸

All this delayed the decision to build baths until 1887 when a reduced scheme, estimated at only £15,000, was approved. Credited as a joint effort between Rowland Plumbe, winner of the 1881 competition, and Thomas Bonner and Charles Jones, who had come third, it was probably a variant on the designs then submitted. The site adjoined Latchmere Road to the west, a new road (later Burns Road) to the north, the surviving allotments to the east and Sheepcote Lane to the south. The new buildings occupied the north-west corner, with room for expansion eastwards and southwards.¹⁴⁹

The buildings were utilitarian in character. A sober Queen Anne-style entrance block on Latchmere Road, of stock brick with red-brick dressings, featured twin pedimented gables at either end. Behind the central entrance the hall gave access to blocks of men's slipper baths. From the back of the hall a corridor led to the first- and second-class swimming baths. Women's slipper baths were ranged north of the first-class bath and entered from what became Burns Road. Although no public wash-houses were included, there was an establishment laundry for the towels and bathing costumes that swimmers hired.¹⁵⁰

The baths, begun by James Holloway of Marmion Road, on a tender of £10,180 and completed after his sudden death in 1889 by his brothers Thomas and Henry, were opened on 8 June 1889.¹⁵¹ The event was marked by an extravaganza featuring among others 'Little Ada, the Wonderful Baby Swimmer' and 'Natorial Performances by that Talented Lady Miss Ada Webb, PSA, Champion Lady Diver of the World, Empress of the Sea and Queen of the Crystal Tank'.¹⁵² In the winters the first-class swimming bath was floored over and used as a public hall, enjoying a variety of uses from improving

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meetings to boxing competitions. From 1899 it was fitted out instead as a gym. The second-class baths were also floored over in winter from 1898 as a recreation room which by the 1920s included four full-sized billiard tables.¹⁵³

More second-class slipper baths were soon added, and a new larger second-class swimming bath, built by L. Whitehead & Company to Plumbe's designs, opened in 1896 south of the original second-class swimming baths, which became the boys' or training pool. This addition was partly to assist the Latchmere School, which had contemplated building its own bath.¹⁵⁴

In 1897 it was decided to explore supplying water for the baths from an artesian well. C. Isler & Co. sank a 450ft well to see if an adequate supply could be found; two years later A. C. Potter & Co. followed suit with three further 520ft wells. The wells were steam-pumped and lined to a depth of 360ft in steel, the top 40ft being double-lined to prevent contamination from surface water. Up to 60,000 gallons an hour could be pumped, sufficient to supply the baths, as well as future needs of the public laundry and adjacent Latchmere Estate.¹⁵⁵

The popularity of the ladies' times at Latchmere Baths led in 1904 to the opening east of the main baths and facing Burns Road of a separate ladies' swimming bath, together with nine slipper baths.¹⁵⁶ The pool was laid out on amphitheatre lines to facilitate swimming contests, with teak seating in tiers on three sides. The seating was advanced for baths design, offering better sightlines than the traditional narrow galleries and making the ladies' bath eligible for winter hire as a hall. It was much used for meetings and boxing.¹⁵⁷

The lack of a laundry at the Latchmere site was remedied in 1906. Accompanied by a separate laundry to service the disinfecting station (see below), it was built by the Works Department at a cost of over £9,000 and designed by the Borough Surveyor, T. W. A. Hayward. Facing Matthews

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Street, it was a top-lit shed in stock brick with red-brick dressings, in keeping with the original baths. Stanchions supporting the steel roof-trusses created aisles housing four electrically driven mangles on each side. Down the middle ran two ranks of washing compartments, each containing a cast-iron trough and shelf. In the centre of each rank was a drying chamber, with a sliding clothes-horse serving each compartment.¹⁵⁸

Among subsequent alterations to the complex, the biggest was the removal of the iron gallery and south wall in the first-class bath to create deep amphitheatre seating under the roof of the former boys' pool. Following war damage, the gables of the 1889 building were rebuilt without their mini-pediments and in the 1970s the men's first-class slipper baths lost its Latchmere Road gable. In the early 1950s 'zotofoam baths', a precursor of the modern whirlpool aimed at 'every woman who wishes to reduce her figure without diet, quickly and inexpensively', were made available in the slipper baths. This involved pumping compressed air into very hot water treated with 'zotofoam extract'.¹⁵⁹

In 1977 Wandsworth Council decided to redevelop the whole of the Latchmere site apart from the Coroner's Court, in favour of a modern leisure centre. Vigorous local opposition delayed the demolition of the old baths until 1980. A revised scheme designed by R. Child, Wandsworth's Borough Architect, was then built at a cost of around £5 million by G.E. Wallis & Sons Ltd and Norwest Holst Construction Ltd, and opened in July 1983. No 'personal baths' were provided as they were deemed 'no longer necessary'. A further phase with a sports hall and ten squash courts followed in 1985.¹⁶⁰ The Latchmere Leisure Centre is an opaque series of windowless yellow-brick boxes with curving cornices suggestive of a conventional roof, though the swimming baths are top-lit. Inside are a freeform-shape 25m swimming pool with wave machine, learners' pool and other facilities. The original entry was from Burns Road via a concrete scissor ramp, but an extension of 2001 by

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Pozzoni Design Group, architects, created a new glazed and rendered triangular entrance and reception area on the east side, with an attached 'feature' lift set in an aluminium-clad oval tower.¹⁶¹

Nine Elms Baths (demolished)

From 1893 calls were increasingly heard for additional baths in a location more convenient for those working in the grimy riverside industries of Nine Elms. The proposal was taken up in 1895, after the Progressives gained control of the Vestry.¹⁶² Next year the Southwark and Vauxhall Waterworks Company sold the Vestry a plot of land on the corner of Battersea Park Road and the recently formed Cringle Street. The Local Government Board, which was asked to provide a loan for the scheme, gave it cautious sanction after hearing evidence. Its report noted that although Nine Elms Ward was not the most populous in Battersea, as industry had pushed out many residents, the lack of local laundry facilities together with the proximity of industry meant that the poorer classes could not dry their washing without it becoming spotted with 'blacks and dust from the gas works, etc'.¹⁶³

A competition was advertised in 1897 for baths and wash-houses with, at the request of the Library Committee, a reading room. Fifteen entries were received and assessed by the Vestry's surveyor J. T. Pilditch.¹⁶⁴ There was little enthusiasm in the architectural press for the three winning designs: 'none have much pretension to be called Architecture'.¹⁶⁵ The awkward site meant that most of the plans featured a scatter of light wells. The third premium, preferred by some critics, was won by A. Hessel Tiltman, architect of several other London baths.¹⁶⁶ The second went to J. Hatchard Smith, who stepped back the main road frontage with a series of bays, crowning the whole with a tower.¹⁶⁷

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The winning design was by Francis J. Smith, who was from Battersea, 'in the Renaissance style of architecture, plainly treated', of stock brick with red-brick facings and Portland-stone dressings to the numerous mullioned windows.¹⁶⁸ The plan was dominated by the huge 150ft by 50ft swimming bath required by the baths commissioners, parallel to Cringle Street. This had galleries all round, and was intended in winter for public entertainments, accommodating nearly 1,500 people on two levels. The reading room occupied the acute angle between the roads, west of which came women's slipper baths and men's and women's entrances. A staircase led up to the superintendent's flat, rooms for the baths and wash-houses commissioners, and the establishment laundry above the men's slipper baths. These lay behind the swimming bath, along with a public wash-house with 53 compartments.¹⁶⁹ Further entrances on Cringle Street beyond the swimming bath led to two 'artistes' rooms' on the ground floor and a stair to the gallery, and to the wash-houses, waiting room and – unusually – a crèche. Here the corridor was commended as wide enough for the 'perambulators in which the linen is generally brought'.¹⁷⁰ The main entrance to the swimming bath was at the southern end of Cringle Street, with a men's clubroom adjoining.¹⁷¹

The foundation stone was laid by John Burns on 9 September 1899. Various alterations were made to the baths' design during their construction by the Vestry's Works Department.¹⁷² The men's clubroom was replaced by a larger clubroom beneath the reading room; a ladies' room was added above the entrance hall; and the accommodation of the artistes was rearranged.¹⁷³ Also, perhaps in response to criticism of Smith's design in the architectural press, the awkward acute angle was replaced with a semicircular bay, apparently 'taken' from Tiltman's competition entry.¹⁷⁴

The cost of building what was the largest covered swimming bath in the UK at the time rose to an estimated £35,000 even before construction began, rather than the £25,000 envisaged, but the Local Government Board

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sanctioned the higher figure.¹⁷⁵ The final cost was estimated at around £45,000 when the baths opened in 1901. The iron and steel contracts alone, taken by H. Young & Company, came to more than £3,000, mostly spent on the galleries and the circular trusses and stanchions for the swimming bath roof.¹⁷⁶ Services were not stinted. Two artesian wells were sunk at Nine Elms on the same pattern as Latchmere Baths. Steam heating warmed all the facilities, and woodblock floors were widely employed. Diving boards and steps into the bath were teak. Electric lighting was added, as with many public buildings in Battersea, after the Electricity Generating Station in Lombard Road opened in 1901.¹⁷⁷

The reading room did not last at Nine Elms, as it was found to be outside the scope of loans authorised, so it was turned into an extravagantly large waiting room. Nine Elms Baths quickly became a centre for radical political meetings, but was also popular as a boxing venue. By 1904 it was being referred to as the 'People's Hall', a name that persisted.¹⁷⁸

By the 1930s the writing was on the wall for the building.¹⁷⁹ Structural defects in the balconies led to the closing and, by 1956, the demolition of the galleries. In 1964 the site became part of the area selected for redevelopment by the Covent Garden Market Authority (page xxx). Though the plans for this part of the site were eventually abandoned, the baths closed in 1970 and were demolished the following year.¹⁸⁰

Other municipal sites and buildings

Mortuary and coroner's court, Sheepcote Lane

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Battersea was reputedly the first parish in London to build an independent mortuary, in 1876. The initiative came from the vicar, Canon Erskine Clarke, and the site chosen was St Mary's churchyard. One reason given was the vast increase of population, largely 'of a humble position' living in one or two rooms, and the wisdom of removing 'as early as practicable the bodies of deceased persons from the residence in which the rest of the family live'. The other was that the churchyard's proximity to the Thames made it handy 'for the deposit of the numerous dead bodies which are found in the said River'. The Vestry's surveyor, J. T. Pilditch, made the first design in 1874, for a location beside the parish dock. But it was Clarke's favourite architect, William White, who provided the design eventually carried out, on a site in the churchyard's north-east corner, further from the public eye. The crow-stepped gables shown on White's sketch seem to have been omitted.¹⁸¹

After this first mortuary was built, inquests were held in the Star and Garter pub off Althorpe Grove. By the 1890s both facilities were judged inadequate, in particular the single-cell mortuary with only a 'small and inconvenient' room adjacent for post-mortems.¹⁸² Enquiries about using the Relief Station in Latchmere Road were rebuffed by the Board of Guardians.¹⁸³ Momentum to replace the old mortuary gathered with the near-simultaneous advent of the London County Council and the independent Battersea Vestry. Under legislation of 1891 the LCC was obliged to provide space for inquests, while local authorities were enabled to take out loans in order to build suitable accommodation which would then be leased to the LCC. The Vestry's first idea was to have a coroner's court in the new town hall, and one was included in the original design (page xxx). This proved impractical, as the coroner required a mortuary near by to allow viewing of the body at an inquest. As an interim measure the LCC in 1894 leased the upper floors of the former surveyor's office at the stone yard in Westbridge Road, but this proved so damp that the coroner, Braxton Hicks, threatened to walk out.¹⁸⁴

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Finally the Vestry's health committee chose a site in Sheepcote Lane south of the Latchmere Baths for a combined court and mortuary. Pilditch's plans were accepted by the Vestry in 1899, but the building (constructed by direct labour) did not open till 1902, the LCC taking a 21-year lease, later renewed. At its opening the coroner declared it 'the best court in London', a sentiment reiterated by a later coroner.¹⁸⁵

The court building itself fronted the street in a sober Tudor style, of red brick with stone-mullioned windows. The courtroom lay on the upper floor and the coroner's and doctor's rooms beneath, while a double-height canted bay to the right lit the witnesses' waiting room above and the attendants' room beneath. A gateway led under the centre into a yard having a large post-mortem room and mortuary with cast-iron 'catacombs' for bodies at the back, and a viewing room and mortuary for infectious cases to the right. All the walls were faced in 'opal glass' tiles.

In 1904 a disinfecting station for treating the clothing and bedding from those afflicted with infectious diseases was built east of the court and mortuary. It was divided into two rooms behind an open van shed, with a pair of cylindrical disinfectors connecting front and rear chambers. Infected items arriving by van at the front were loaded into wire carts and sprayed with disinfecting fluid before being slid into one of the disinfectors. After the items had been heated, the disinfector's rear door was opened and the contents unloaded to be repatriated to the disinfected houses. West of the court a two-storey block of four cottage flats was built simultaneously, like those erected by the Vestry on the nearby Latchmere Estate. These housed families displaced while their homes and clothes were disinfected.¹⁸⁶

Refrigerated cabinets for 18 bodies replaced the mortuary's catacombs in 1933, solving previous problems with non-refrigerated body storage: 'during the summer months putrefaction may advance rapidly ... and the

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presence of the blow-fly in large numbers is only the most obvious of the many unpleasant conditions that may arise'.¹⁸⁷ The infectious mortuary was out of use by 1939.¹⁸⁸

The trend towards larger coroner's districts in London from the 1930s led to several courts being abandoned. Battersea's was threatened in 1951 but reprieved by a further reorganisation in 1955.¹⁸⁹ The court finally ceased functioning in 1986. Only the front block survives, as the rest of the complex was demolished for the Latchmere Leisure Centre in 1981–4. Known as The Old Court, it has been a children's nursery since 1991.¹⁹⁰

Lombard Road Generating Station (demolished)

Though Battersea Power Station remains Battersea's totemic building, the district that provided its name was not supplied by it. Instead it was served until 1972 by a generating station built in Lombard Road by the Battersea Vestry and opened by its successor, Battersea Borough Council, in 1901. The building went up after the Progressive administration was granted the Battersea Electric Lighting Order, 1896, the ninth local authority in London to be so empowered, and the first south of the river.¹⁹¹

The site, bounded by Lombard, Gwynne, Harroway and Holman Roads, was bought by the Vestry in 1897–8. Proximity to the river facilitated supplies of water and of coal, the latter coming via Grove Wharf opposite, which the Vestry had also just acquired. The buildings were erected in 1899–1901 by direct labour at a cost of £55,000. The architect employed was C. Stanley Peach, a specialist in the design of such stations, working with the electrical engineer A. B. W. (later Sir Alexander) Kennedy. The scheme was adaptable not just to electric lighting, but also to driving machinery and traction for electric tramways.¹⁹²

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Peach's buildings were unusual, mixing austere stock brick and blue brick plinths and courses with jaunty, mildly oriental flourishes – perhaps 'Lombardic' in allusion to Lombard Road. The accommodation block culminated in a piquant circular tower at the street corner, and swooping parapets crowned by finials in grey Burmantofts terracotta, which also featured on the transept of the boiler house. Inside, there were offices on the ground floor with rooms over for the resident engineer and some of his staff. Northwards lay the economiser house and pump house, with a dominating octagonal chimney 194ft high between them, and then the boiler house, with glazed roof, central clerestory and transept. The smaller eastern leg consisted of an engine house and switch room. An inclined coal conveyor ran from the Grove Wharf dock across Lombard Road to a store. Room was left throughout for future expansion.¹⁹³

The area supplied fanned 2¼ miles around the generating station. By the time it opened mains had been laid in 32 streets, although in the first full year of production there were only 324 subscribers. Battersea's principal thoroughfares were lit by arc lamps supplied by the General Electric Company. Following the success of the artesian wells at the Latchmere Baths, a well was sunk to supply the station's boilers. Later, various sub-stations helped transmit and convert the supply. The first of these was established at Nine Elms in 1917 for the benefit of local industry.¹⁹⁴

The biggest alterations came with the switch-over to alternating current. The change went back to 1915, when the Hammersmith, Battersea and Fulham generating stations were connected. This allowed the Central Electricity Board to link Lombard Road into the new National Grid a decade later. In 1925–7 Battersea Council built extensions to the boiler house, complete with four metal chimneys, making it look like a miniature prototype Battersea Power Station; an engine room to house a 10,000kw turbo-alternator

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generating set; and an overhead electric travelling crane. A further generator and switch house were added to designs by the borough engineer W. J. Dresden in 1931 between the engine house and Harroway Road. By 1939 more than 73 million kWh were being supplied to Battersea and another 27 million to the National Grid.¹⁹⁵

Following nationalisation of the electricity industry, the buildings were extended again in 1952 and the tall chimney was demolished, its base capped off flat, in 1960 or 1961.¹⁹⁶ The power station's age, inadequate size and awkward location saw it generate for the last time on 31 March 1972.¹⁹⁷ Apart from the boiler room wall, which survives on Lombard Road, the buildings were demolished in the late 1970s, although a sub-station was built on its south side in 2001.¹⁹⁸

Electric House, Lavender Hill (demolished)

The continued expansion of the generating station [on Lombard Road](#) led Battersea Council in 1925 to acquire a site adjoining the postal sorting office on Lavender Hill for an electricity showroom to encourage consumers. This building, opened in 1927, was credited jointly to the borough surveyor T. W. A. Hayward and his assistant Henry Hyams; the architectural features were clearly the latter's work.¹⁹⁹

Electric House was a lavish affair, boasting a 65ft frontage with five storeys over a basement. It was faced externally in Portland stone over a steel frame. The ground storey was marked by a shallow-arched arcade prefacing elegant bronze shop windows and floored in green marble. Above came squareish sash windows in a 2-3-2-3 pattern, divided by pilaster strips. The steep roof, of green Westmorland slate, was pierced by dormers in the same

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rhythm. Behind the building were an electricity sub-station and highways depot.

The whole building was conceived as a showcase for electricity. On the frontage, floodlights were suspended from stone and bronze brackets at the top of each pilaster; lights were concealed in the arcade soffits, and even the window boxes were illuminated.²⁰⁰ Internally the ground floor, entered through bronze and glass swing doors beneath illuminated carved marble arms of Battersea, was arranged as a large central hall flanked by open niches or rooms. The main showroom was in an exotic mélange of styles, wavering between a fin-de-siècle manner and an up-to-the-minute Art Deco taste. In the centre a miniature illuminated fountain played under a saucer dome, with heraldic plasterwork lit by up-lighters. Along the walls, the frieze was punctuated with the names of electrical pioneers picked out in gold; beneath were back-lit niches with figurines, fibrous plaster panels designed by Hyams, and bronze display cases full of kettles and percolators.

A semi-circular arch led to the top-lit rear section, backed by walnut and marquetry panelling and an electric clock. Side rooms were furnished to show electricity in various domestic settings – drawing room, bedroom, bathroom to the left; hall (in suburban Tudor taste), dining room and kitchen to the right; offices and a wrapping-room were to the rear in a top-lit extension. In one corner, a ‘scientific illumination room’ showed off electric light’s authentic daylight qualities. The three upper floors housed a demonstration room, offices for the borough electrical engineer and others, and a small flat.²⁰¹

In 1956 the interior was whitewashed and **functional** office furniture replaced the Art deco fantasy.²⁰² A new extended shop front was installed in 1961. A first proposal for redevelopment, of 1980, included a London Electricity Board showroom on the site. Instead, electricity privatization and

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the redevelopment of the wider site led to the demolition of Electric House in 1985.²⁰³

Stone yard, Westbridge Road (demolished)

A roughly square open piece of land at the north end of Althorpe Grove, off King Street (now Westbridge Road), was acquired by the Wandsworth District Board of Works in 1861 as a stone yard. Its surveyor Thomas Buckham added a cart shed and office for himself in the 1860s. Over the ensuing thirty years his successor J. T. Pilditch extended the offices, added further stables and built an archway through from Althorpe Grove. As the Borough Council concentrated its work in Culvert Road, the stone yard was leased out, and by 1916 a large garage covered half of the open area. The various users included veterinary stables in the 1920s and the Astral Garage and filling station in the 1940s. The site was cleared in the early 1970s for the houses and flats of Sunbury Lane.²⁰⁴

Culvert Road depot (demolished)

In 1881 the Wandsworth Board opened a 'dust depot' for refuse disposal on a recently acquired site off Culvert Road – one of the many slivers of land between the east–west railway lines converging on Clapham Junction. Originally the only structures were sheds and stables, but it was soon equipped with a 'dust destructor' supplied by Manlove, Alliott & Co. of Nottingham, which was still burning 20,000 tons of Battersea's domestic and trade refuse 25 years later. The reformed Vestry extended the landholding in 1889, took over many railway arches, and leased further plots in 1896–7. The clinker produced was used for road fill or flagstones, at first hand-moulded

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but later made in a hydraulic flag-making machine by Musker of Liverpool, which could turn out 600 yards weekly of flags faced with granite chips.²⁰⁵

Battersea Borough Council consolidated Culvert Road as their main depot in the 1890s, adding inter alia more stabling and a disinfecting chamber for cabs. The tall destructor chimney survived until the 1950s and the depot remained in council use until 1977, when the Works Department, by then under Wandsworth Council, transferred to Falcon Wharf, Lombard Road. From 1979 the Culvert Road land was rented out to building contractors and motor engineers. It and the site adjoining to the east were sold in 1981 and redeveloped the following year as Parkfield Industrial Estate (page xxx).²⁰⁶

Municipal workshops, Battersea Park Road (demolished)

In 1878 the Wandsworth Board acquired the lease of 281–285 Battersea Park Road, newly built houses with shops designed by the Battersea architect Charles Jones, and the strip of land running back behind the archway under No. 283. This back plot, between houses in Kilton Street and Park Grove, was turned into a depot by the Board's surveyor J. T. Pilditch with offices, stores, stables and a cart shed. In 1896–8 Pilditch converted all the existing buildings into stores and added five two-storey workshops filling out the east side of the site. These workshops (Ills 1.1, 1.37) housed joiners', wheelwrights', fitters', painters', harness-makers' and plumbers' shops, a smithy with five forges, and a Crossley gas-engine to power the extensive machinery in the joiners' and wheelwrights' shops, including a van lift. By the end of the First World War the workshops were no longer in use and the site had become a depot for Cornells, road haulage contractors. It became the Imperial Garage by the end of the 1920s, with lock-ups for 200 cars, and remained there until the Doddington Estate swept away the street pattern.²⁰⁷

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Wharves and stables, Lombard Road (demolished)

In 1888 the reformed Vestry took the site of two large adjoining houses – Riverside and Lombard House – at the north end of Lombard Road as a parish wharf. Four adjacent wharves (Grove, Canada, Falcon and Granite Wharves) were acquired in 1897–9, and finally Whiffen's Wharf in 1932, making the Council owners of most of the Lombard Road riverside. The wharves were originally for disposing of domestic and commercial waste by barge, and for storage.²⁰⁸ But portions, notably Falcon Wharf, which already had serviceable structures, were used for processing building materials as the scope of Battersea's direct-labour operations expanded. Equipment at Grove Wharf in 1906 included a travelling crane for transferring coal to the generating station opposite, and two saw benches and a mortar mill powered by portable engines.²⁰⁹

The one substantial building added to the riverside sites was a three-storey block of stabling, built in two ranges on the Lombard Road side of Falcon Wharf in 1901–2 to J. T. Pilditch's designs. Some 96 stalls, eight loose boxes and six harness rooms occupied the ground and first floors, the latter reached by a ramp leading to a cantilevered inner gallery. The top storey, served by an electrically driven hoist, was used to store fodder, with chaff-cutting machine and delivery chutes. At either end of the roadside block were small houses for senior staff.²¹⁰ As motor power replaced horsepower, the buildings were gradually adapted for lorries, while in 1926 the draw dock at Falcon Wharf was partly filled in and partly converted to a wet dock to receive rubbish barges diverted from Grove Wharf, the whole of which was needed for loading and storing coal. Falcon Wharf was used variously as a highways and works depot, refuse-disposal point, laundry and vehicle-repair workshops, and remained in Wandsworth Council ownership until 1996. The stable building itself was replaced in 1977 by a systems-built office block,

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when the Works Department relocated here from Culvert Road. This in turn gave way in 2005–6 to a 17-storey development of shops, flats and offices which has retained the name Falcon Wharf. The adjacent Grove Wharf, enlarged to include Whiffen's Wharf in 1932, had various later uses. Though scheduled in 1986 for public open space, it was replaced after 2001 by a development named Oyster Wharf (vol. 50).²¹¹

Public Conveniences (mostly demolished)

Public lavatories demonstrated that independent Battersea took seriously the comfort of its peripatetic working classes. Emblematic of the Vestry's pride in these facilities was their dignified and decorative timber-framed design, visible in the one surviving example, south-east of Battersea Park next to Queen's Circus. The first conveniences were plain enough examples of the underground type, installed in 1892 at the junction of Lavender Hill and Falcon Road, to which the Hospitals Association added an ambulance station in 1895.²¹²

After 1895 the Works Department built six 'chalet' conveniences. Three were in Battersea Park (two near Chelsea Bridge, one at Queen's Circus); the others were in Battersea Park Road, Christchurch Gardens, and at the junction of York and Plough Roads. The Queen's Circus and Christchurch Gardens chalets were combined with ambulance stations.²¹³ Typically they contained four men's and four women's WCs, accommodated in a picturesque cottage with timber-framed and rendered walls over a masonry plinth, beneath a red-tiled roof with decorative ventilators and leaded windows.

Fire stations

Battersea's growth, and its concentration of hazardous riverside industries, led to an increasing awareness of fire risks in the mid-Victorian parish. As early as 1859, A. A. Corsellis, clerk to the Wandsworth District Board of Works, had suggested that the Vestry pay for a fire escape – an extending ladder on wheels – out of the poor rate, in emulation of Poplar, but the request was declined.²¹⁴ After the Metropolitan Board of Works took over London's fire protection in 1866, the Wandsworth Board submitted to it two memorials. The first suggested establishing a station 'in the vicinity of one of the arches of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway'. The next was prompted in March 1870 by a major fire in Orkney Street, to which it took an hour for fire engines to arrive: 'Had the conflagration ... broken out at dead of night, in a house fully tenanted, it is awful to contemplate the probable loss of life'.²¹⁵ The memorialists, following a public meeting, requested an engine and an escape in the vicinity. The Fire Brigade Committee of the MBW asked its surveyor Edward Cresy to find a site for a station 'near Battersea Square'. But on the recommendation of Captain Shaw, the Chief Fire Officer, one further south at the corner of Simpson Street and Battersea Park Road was selected as equidistant from Clapham and Wandsworth fire stations.²¹⁶

Battersea Fire Station, Simpson Street (demolished)

Following the acquisition of the Simpson Street land, instructions were given to the MBW's superintending architect, George Vulliamy, in 1871 for a fire station for three firemen, one engine, three horses and a driver. Designs were submitted a year later by Alfred Mott, who after Cresy's death took over as surveyor to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. The successful tenderer, John High, built the station in 1873–4.²¹⁷

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The site, fronting Simpson Street with its side to Battersea Park Road, was typically compact for the period before drill yards were thought essential. An engine room, three-stall stable and hay store, single men's mess-room and watch room occupied ground level, while the upper floors were for living accommodation. A fire escape, added at Captain Shaw's suggestion, was parked outside.

The compact building was in Mott's signature secular Gothic manner. It piled up picturesquely along its two short frontages, dominated by the octagonal lookout tower, a recently introduced feature of London fire stations, rising from the square corner stair. The frontages were gabled with half-hips over the second-floor windows. MFB fire stations were standardizing their specifications by this time, so Battersea reflected the house style of red Suffolk brick facings, with bands of stone and blue and white bricks, saw-tooth moulded bricks, stone colonnettes and red roof tiles.²¹⁸

In 1883 the Vestry successfully petitioned for a steam fire engine in Simpson Street.²¹⁹ After the LCC took over control of the MFB, a decision was made in 1892 to acquire adjoining properties along Simpson Street for an extension, as three firemen had to be lodged outside the station – an 'inconvenient arrangement'. Robert Pearsall, now the principal fire station architect, produced sketch plans for an extension, at first for nine married firemen, later reduced to six. By 1896 he had produced drawings and specification for a squareish building within the awkward triangular site. But Pearsall had to alter the designs again in 1898 when it was decided to house a further appliance at the station, turn the old stable into a second engine room and extend the new building into the tiny yard for a new four-stall stable.²²⁰

Pearsall recast the northernmost bay of the old station to match the new, mildly picturesque gabled frontage. This was of red brick with stone stringcourses and other dressings, and a shallow triangular bay. A tender of

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£4,895 from C. F. Kearley was accepted after the LCC Works Department suggested it could not do the work for less than £7,500.²²¹

Despite being, by 1926, 'the most of out of date station in the brigade' (it had no drill yard or firemen's poles, and cramped appliance room) the extended station continued in service until 1938, when it was replaced by a new one in Este Road. The 1874 portion was irreparably damaged in the Second World War by the same bomb that destroyed Christ Church opposite, but the extension survived until around 1970.²²²

Battersea River Fire Station, Battersea Bridge Road (demolished)

The London riverside, as the site of high-risk warehouses and factories which used the Thames for transport and manufacturing, featured strongly in the development of fire protection after the Metropolitan Fire Brigade was created in 1866. Steam floats were first moored at four locations from Westminster Bridge eastwards. A river station was later added at Pimlico, but by the 1890s this was deemed inadequate to serve Battersea's booming industrial shoreline.²²³

Following recommendations in 1892 by Captain J. S. Simonds, the Chief Fire Officer, the LCC's Fire Brigade Committee chose a site at Grove Wharf, Lombard Road. This proved too expensive, so the committee fell back on one further downstream which already belonged to the Council, at the south-east corner of the lately rebuilt Battersea Bridge. It was to be divided between the Works Department and the Fire Brigade, which sought a station housing an officer and 11 married men. Wrangles over apportioning costs and ensuring the station had a good frontage to Battersea Bridge Road and adequate access to moorings caused severe delays. So a temporary 'street station' resembling 'a small-tram car' and housing a hand-pump, hoses, a

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curricle or hose-truck, and accommodation for firemen, was moved here from Peckham in 1895. Meanwhile the Thames Conservancy built two sets of moorings at the Council's expense, and the Works Department added a causeway for embarkation.²²⁴

Robert Pearsall, nearing the end of his time as the architect of London's fire stations, revised his designs several times to cope with the various changes. The Works Department built the station in two stages, completing the basement for themselves (containing storage and stabling) in 1896-7, then adding the superstructure for the brigade in 1898-9. Service commenced in August 1899.²²⁵

As completed, the building's longer frontage faced Battersea Bridge Road while a two-storey projection with canted bay at the north-east corner overlooked the river.²²⁶ Equipment needs in a river station were limited: the ground floor comprised only a small engine room for a hose and ladder truck, a wash-house and stores to the rear, three flats, and a watch room and recreation room occupying the bay-windowed wing. The upper floors had three more flats each. Above the bay window corner rose a watchtower with an octagonal cupola. A hose-drying tower topped by a short open steel structure was positioned behind the building. The red-brick elevations were plain to the point of dullness with minimal features or dressings, and repeating paired windows.

This was the second of five river stations (after Rotherhithe). Crews lived in, and the stations were equipped with new fire floats which could get steam up quickly and displaced less than two feet, allowing closer engagement with a fire.²²⁷ Yet as early as 1902 the Chief Fire Officer was considering moving the station to Charing Cross or replacing the floats with land-based fire engines, as he was 'practically unable to get the best use out of' the 11 firemen, officer and three pilots 'unless a fire happens to be so

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situated that we can engage the services of the float'. The argument was disproved when the Battersea fire float 'was able to get quickly and effectively close' to fires on 7 August 1904 at Phoenix Wharf and on 20 February 1905 in Battersea Church Road when the hydrants supplying the steam fire engines had dried up. Afterwards, four extra firemen were allotted to the station, along with a petrol-powered escape ladder which entailed a new entrance at the building's south end in 1906.²²⁸

By 1926 overall fire station provision in Battersea was deemed unsatisfactory. Neither Simpson Street nor the river station had an adequate drill yard, while the Northcote Road station, which did have one, had closed (see below). In 1930 the LCC Architect's Department produced a design for a large combined land and river station with drill yard on the river station site and disused tramways depot, later amended to add further facilities.²²⁹ This scheme was first postponed 'on account of the economic crisis' and then dropped entirely. The duties of the river station were taken over by the London Fire Brigade's new riverside headquarters on Albert Embankment in 1938, while Simpson Street gave way to the new Este Road station (see below).²³⁰

The building was used during the Second World War for emergency housing and again in 1962-3 by the LCC, along with Battersea Bridge Buildings, for homeless families, before being demolished in the early 1970s. Today the site forms part of the Thames Path.²³¹

Battersea Park Road sub-station (demolished)

In the same report of 1892 that led to the building of the river station, Simonds recommended establishing a residential sub-station in Battersea Park Road, for three staff, a hose-cart and an escape. Recently built premises at 32

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(now 42) Battersea Park Road, adjacent to Victoria Dwellings and with a rear entrance on Cupar Road, were leased, and after some adaptation service was commenced in 1895.²³² The sub-station was out of use by 1950 when the premises became a depot for charging electric milkfloats. It later operated as variously a café, betting shop, veterinary surgery and pizza take-away.²³³

Northcote Road Fire Station, Chatham Road (demolished)

Northcote Road, Battersea's most architecturally appealing fire station, was in service for only 14 years – less time than from when it was first mooted in 1891 to when it opened in 1906.

The need for the station arose because of the expansion of housing between the commons, the delay because of difficulty in finding a site. Eventually 59–71 Chatham Road were acquired in 1901; further ground was added next year.²³⁴ Sketch plans for the five-storey station were submitted by the LCC Architect's Department (Fire Brigade Section) in 1904. It was a dignified Renaissance affair, startling and imposing in its residential setting, and closely resembling the later Knightsbridge Fire Station of 1907. The main frontage to Chatham Road displayed plenty of Portland stone, rusticated on the ground storey. The end bays rose by way of alternating stone and brick quoins to broken pediments at parapet level. The roof was marked by five dormer windows and four soaring chimneys.

The station was built in 1905–6 by the Works Department of the LCC at a cost of £11,275.²³⁵ Its complement consisted of one station officer, nine firemen and two coachmen. Equipment in the engine room and yard behind included a horse-drawn escape ladder, a motor fire engine and horse engine, as well as stalls for two pairs of horses. The watch room at the south-west corner overlooked the engine room and a pedestrian entrance on the flank.

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The upper floors were residential. Firemen's poles – a relative novelty for the LFB – ran from top to bottom beside the main staircase. At the back of the yard was a skeleton drill tower, clad in oak weatherboarding and tapering up to a railed platform.

Northcote Road fire station closed in 1920, following the introduction of a shift system that enabled the firemen largely to live out.²³⁶ This development, coupled with the increasing use of motorised fire engines covering a larger area, meant that fewer stations were needed. The drill tower was taken down and re-erected at Euston, while Battersea Council bought the freehold for housing purposes. In 1925 the main building was converted into council flats known as Chatham House. It survived until about 1970 when it made way for the Chatham Road West Estate.²³⁷

Este Road Fire Station

The present Battersea Fire Station in Este Road is a rare survival of a London inter-war station still in its original use. It came into being as a consequence of the relocation of the London Fire Brigade's headquarters to Albert Embankment in 1938. In appearance Este Road is a cut-price miniature of its progenitor, devoid of the carving and metalwork that give glamour to the headquarters building.

The plan of 1934 to build a new headquarters and close the river station in Battersea Bridge Road left local fire protection in deficit. Space for drill was needed in particular, and could not be provided at cramped Simpson Street.²³⁸ The LCC therefore earmarked a site on the north side of Este Road consisting of four houses with a timber yard behind. E. P. Wheeler, the Council's architect, presented plans in 1935. W. H. Gaze and Sons' tender was accepted on the understanding, common in LCC contracts of the period,

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that only British Empire materials be used. The station commenced service from October 1938.

The resulting building was ascetically plain, in keeping with the straitened times. Concrete-framed and faced in stock brick with metal casement windows, the three-storey main block offered the merest hint at classicism in the piers either side of the three appliance-room doors. Adjoining westwards was a staircase tower, while behind the appliance room came a glazed-roof washing space. When the station opened, novel equipment included a motor fire engine with its own escape ladder (the standard configuration for future machines), and a pump carrying breathing equipment for each crew member.

The first floor contained a locker and bunk room for 32 men, a billiard room and a mess-room. Sliding poles ran down to the appliance room. Above was a two-bedroom flat for the station officer, the only officer accommodated. In the yard was a smaller version of the 'new pattern' drill tower that had been projected for the aborted land and river station in 1930, rising to seven storeys.²³⁹

Alterations over the years included the replacement of the three original main folding doors of the appliance room with standard-pattern red metal doors. The metal windows have been replaced at least once, most recently in 2005.

Pumping stations

The introduction to this volume remarks on the drainage problems of low-lying Battersea and the major works carried out by the MBW in 1864-6 to

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alleviate them (page xxx). Flooding by storm water around the Falcon brook and Heathwall sewer continued to cause difficulties thereafter, inducing the Board and its successor body, the LCC, to erect pumping stations towards the two ends of the parish's riverside strip. Both were rebuilt by the LCC in the 1960s to deal with increased loadings.

Heathwall Pumping Station, Nine Elms Lane

This plain brick-and-concrete structure on the north side of Nine Elms Lane was built by the LCC in 1960–2. It replaces a previous pumping station erected by the Council in 1898 on a neighbouring site, to deal with floodwater and sewage from the Heathwall sewer, which joins the Thames near here. A relief sewer was also constructed at the same time. The contractors were Peter Lund & Company, with plant provided by the Pulsometer Engineering Company.²⁴⁰

Falconbrook Pumping Station, York Gardens

The current Falconbrook Pumping Station, built to the designs of the LCC's architects and engineers in about 1961–3, is the third of that name. It stands in the midst of York Gardens but predates the park, which was formed around it ten years later.

The first pumping station here was built near the corner of York and Creek Roads by the MBW in 1878–9. It closed when the LCC opened its first Heathwall Pumping Station, but it soon transpired that a second station was still needed: hence the reconstruction of Falconbrook on a larger scale in 1905–7, replacing the Black Swan pub and some houses at the corner of Creek Road as well as the first station. Designed by the LCC's Engineer's Department and

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built by its Works Department, this was an old-fashioned building in brick with round windows and a high pediment facing York Road. Inside, three centrifugal pumps powered by gas engines raised storm water and dilute sewage to the level of the Thames in times of emergency.²⁴¹

Fifty years later, the Edwardian station was out of date. Fresh power was needed to cope with persistent flooding not just in Battersea but in low-lying parts of Putney and Wandsworth, which the LCC addressed by means of a new relief sewer connected with a rebuilt station. This was sited slightly north-east of its predecessor, replacing some houses in Ingrave Street. The building contractor was A. Waddington & Son and the equipment was supplied by Vickers Armstrong.²⁴²

Police stations and courts

Before the advent of the Metropolitan Police, maintenance of the peace in Battersea was the business of the parish constable, an office first mentioned in 1560. By 1648 there were two constables in Battersea, supported by two head boroughs. Their collective duties included maintaining and repairing the parish stocks and watch house, fire buckets and engines and the parish arms and armour. The stocks are first mentioned in 1662 in Battersea Square, and the watch house in the same location in 1756. The churchwardens' accounts record the removal of the watch house to a new site on what is now Westbridge Road in 1772, and the stocks were removed to the churchyard gate in 1811.²⁴³

South-Western Police Court, Lavender Hill (demolished)

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From 1841 justice in Battersea was dispensed at the Wandsworth Police Court. Its cramped and rough conditions – it was in a converted stable behind Wandsworth Police Station in Putney Bridge Road – caused persistent complaint.²⁴⁴ In 1882 the barrister Charles Warton, MP, said he ‘was never in a more disgraceful Court House. It was about 20 feet long and 12 wide, and into this space were stuffed the magistrate and his clerk, half-a-dozen policemen, prisoners, witnesses, counsel, and the public’.²⁴⁵ By then a Home Office committee had reported that a new court ought to be erected close to Clapham Junction. In the late 1880s the Lavender Hill sites of Normanby House and an adjoining villa were acquired. Plans by John Taylor, Surveyor to the Office of Works, were approved in 1890. The building opened in July 1892; the contractor was Mowlem & Company.²⁴⁶

South-Western Police Court, as it was officially named, was a sober, old-fashioned brick building, with Portland stone facings for the ground storey and a central pediment. The main offices faced Lavender Hill, but there was a separate entrance from Kathleen Road for magistrates. On a lower level at the back because of the ground’s slope were the top-lit court room, public waiting areas and associated rooms, while on the north-east side projected a cellblock with 12 cells.

The building underwent few alterations in its 47 years of service: it closed in 1939, with the expectation that a new court would be built here, taking in also the work of the Lambeth Police Court, but war intervened. The court was temporarily accommodated in a former doctor’s surgery in Balham High Road, deemed ‘hopelessly inadequate’ by the late 1950s.²⁴⁷ Battersea finally got its new court when the combined magistrates court and Lavender Hill Police Station opened on the site in 1963 (see below).

Battersea Police Station, Battersea Bridge Road

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The present Battersea Police Station at 112–118 Battersea Bridge Road is the second police station built here. In 1858 sites for a new station near the Castle public house in Battersea High Street and in Clapham were considered. But it was at the corner of Bridge Road and Hyde Lane (the site of the present 118 Battersea Bridge Road) that the new station was built, to designs presented by Charles Reeves, the police surveyor, to the Wandsworth District Board in 1859.²⁴⁸ Opened in January 1861, it was a compact, stock-brick building of two storeys over a basement, embellished only by the incised word POLICE over the round-headed door. Unmarried constables occupied a section house on the first floor, four per bedroom. The offices were on the raised ground floor over the mess-room and kitchen below. The station's importance grew along with the local population. By 1864 its strength was four sergeants and 20 constables. In 1867 stables were added behind. The following year Battersea became a full sub-division, with two inspectors.²⁴⁹

The building suffered from the perennial north Battersea problem of flooded basements, which affected the men's health. In the 1890s the Receiver of Police suggested moving the mess-room to the first floor, or rebuilding the stables. Superintendent David Saines ruled out the latter, as he thought mounted police essential in Battersea 'which is a troublesome Borough from a Police point of view'.²⁵⁰

The flooding got worse, bringing with it in June 1907 two feet of sewage. That year the freehold site of 112–116 Bridge Road adjoining was bought. The Receiver did not foresee proceeding with a new station soon, but a Home Office memorandum of 1908 reported: 'This station is not a credit to the force ... the single men cannot be considered to be raised above the level of their surroundings which are decidedly low'. The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police therefore overruled the Receiver, recommending that a 'Station of the First Class (Large Town)' should be erected. In 1910 Dixon

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Butler produced his design for the new station, which was duly built by J. G. Minter and taken into service in November 1911.²⁵¹

The main station is a sober red-brick building of two storeys over a basement, surmounted by a mansarded attic storey with dormers, offset from the paired windows below. A shallow canted bay at the south end of the frontage dignifies the former inspector's room but sits uncomfortably beneath the deep eaves cornice. As first planned, the public areas were at the south end, which was staggered back along Hyde Road, while the entrance adjoined the inspector's bay. Behind were the charge, detention and matron's rooms, and seven cells – two singles for women and four singles and one 'association' or group cell for men. The northern part, entered from the rear yard, housed the facilities for the officers and men. Beneath the cells was a parade room and on the north side of the yard a three-stall stable. In execution, a proposed ambulance garage in the yard was replaced first by a temporary prefabricated iron office for the Public Carriage Office licensing branch, and then by a permanent building for testing taxicabs.²⁵²

The station survived largely unaltered until 1983 when extra land was acquired to the rear and an extension built, bringing the cell block to the same height as the main building and finishing it with a roof and cornice in the same style. The principal entrance was moved to the south end, the former entrance blocked in, the staircase removed and a wing added at the north end on the site of the stable block.²⁵³

Lavender Hill Police Station and South Western Magistrates Court

Battersea Bridge Road has always been the divisional police headquarters, probably because north Battersea was thought of in the early twentieth century as a 'rough and turbulent district'. But the southward drift in

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population, coupled with the opening of the South-Western Police Court in 1892, meant that a new sub-divisional police station was thought desirable in the Lavender Hill area.²⁵⁴

The Receiver's office liked the large site behind the new town hall (later occupied by the Town Hall Estate), and thought another location adjoining the police court 'too cramped'. But the Home Office along with Saines, the divisional superintendent, preferred a main-road frontage, more visible and convenient for transfer of prisoners. An alternative site was therefore acquired for £3,000 from Battersea Vestry in 1894. It lay immediately east of the police court, on the same side of Lavender Hill.²⁵⁵

Following sketches of 1893, plans by the police surveyor John Butler for 'a small town station of the 2nd class' were approved next year.²⁵⁶ The building was a shallow rectangle with a frontage of about 70ft to Lavender Hill, in severe red brick relieved with a central gable and limited stone dressings. The cramped site barely left room for a yard to turn a van, while the parade shed had to be squeezed into a semi-basement beneath the five ground-floor cells. The public entrance was offset with a square staircase behind. Within were the usual public office and inspector's room, with accommodation above for 22 single men.

While the station was under construction in 1895, Superintendent Saines made a plea for increased staffing on the grounds that the area had

grown to a very great extent during the last few years, for in the past the residential property consisted of fine large houses, standing in their own grounds, now those estates have been swept away ... and new roads made and the whole district is now made up of villa and cottage property, which has of course very largely increased Police Duties there ... in the evenings, especially Saturdays, some thousands of persons go

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there for marketing purposes which makes it necessary to have special Police there.

By the time the station opened in March 1896, an extra two inspectors, two station sergeants for station duty and six constables for reserve duty had been sanctioned.²⁵⁷

By 1908 Lavender Hill was considered 'barely sufficient for local needs', with 'military deserters and others brought in from the Court frequently for temporary detention'. Several times that year the accommodation was exceeded.²⁵⁸ However, few later alterations were made before the Lavender Hill station's demolition in 1962 to make way for the new combined police station and magistrates' court, opened in December 1963.

One of the last such combined buildings in London, this was designed by the Chief Surveyor to the Metropolitan Police, John Innes Elliott.²⁵⁹ It is in a sub-Royal Festival Hall manner, stylish but old-fashioned compared with the contemporary Lavender Hill Post Office to its west. The building's two main storeys, clad in Portland Grove Whitbed stone panels accentuated by vertical channelling, appear to float over the pink-granite semi-basement. On the Lavender Hill elevation, the court is distinguished from the police station by its imposing entrance, which consists of a double-height recess with vestigial columns sporting Derbyshire fossil panels. The main courtroom is lit from above by continuous strips of glazing along the sides of a raised shallow barrel vault. The police station entrance is tucked into the corner with Latchmere Road. The Kathleen Road elevation is enlivened at first-floor level by a zigzag of enclosed triangular balconies. To the rear is a plain brick-faced section house of four storeys, entered from Latchmere Road.

Nine Elms Police Station, 147 Battersea Park Road

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A sub-divisional police station was opened in the mid 1860s to serve Nine Elms and eastern Battersea.²⁶⁰ It was located in what was to become 143 Battersea Park Road, a semi-detached house opposite the junction with Prince of Wales Drive. By 1881 it had a complement of six resident constables.²⁶¹ A replacement was mooted in 1915, but the station house and the adjoining house to the west were not ultimately rebuilt until 1925. The resulting small station, designed by the police surveyor G. Mackenzie Trench and numbered 147, is a square brown-brick building in a vaguely Tudorbethan style reminiscent of a reformed public house.²⁶² The symmetrical front features twin canted bays in Portland stone over a projecting stone-clad ground storey, with mullioned windows either side of the entrance.

The building ceased to be a general police station in 1970. Appropriately, given its location near Battersea Dogs Home, it has been in recent use as one of five Metropolitan Police Dog Support Units (in 1996 planning permission was secured for a dog bath behind the building). Nine Elms' dogs are trained specifically to detect explosives. The original entrance having been blocked, entry is now from the flank.²⁶³

Post offices

Lavender Hill District Post and Sorting Office

Until 1898 Battersea's main post office occupied what the service's in-house magazine described as a 'tenement' on an 'insalubrious and unpicturesque' site in Battersea High Street, supplemented by sub-post offices in York Road, Battersea Rise and Battersea Park.²⁶⁴

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To meet growing demand, the Battersea Vestry offered the Post Office **various sites**, including its old offices in Battersea Rise and some empty land behind the new town hall. The site bought in 1894, the eastern third of the grounds of Highbury House, had a frontage to Lavender Hill – then becoming, with the building of the town hall, police court and police station, Battersea’s municipal high street. A small piece of ground was added in 1896, so affording room for a district post office on the street and a sorting office behind. The building was erected for just under £9,000 and opened in 1898.²⁶⁵

Battersea District Post Office, as it became known, was designed by Jasper Wager of the Office of Works. The frontage building had some pretension, having a symmetrical elevation of red brick with pink sandstone dressings and plentiful carved and rubbed brick consoles, swags, gadroons, etc.²⁶⁶ Pairs of mullioned windows flanked a high central gable over a two-storey bay window with pediments. The main entrance to the right was at first mirrored by a similar one to the left leading to the sorting office behind.

A public office with a full-length counter occupied most of the Lavender Hill frontage, with an ‘instrument’ or telephone room beside it.²⁶⁷ Basement accommodation included a messengers’ library, since Battersea Post Office, like a number of others, ran an institute for preparing boys for messenger work. On the first floor the postmaster’s office commanded the bay window, while the rest of the upper floors contained administrative rooms.

The original sorting office at the rear was a simple shed covered by a steel roof. Within six years of opening this proved inadequate for the flow of mail. A plot adjoining north-eastwards on the site of 3–9 Dorothy Road was considered for an extension in 1904–6, and Jasper Wager duly made designs for adding accommodation there. Instead the Post Office in 1908 bought

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Highbury House and the remainder of its grounds from the London and North-Western Railway. The Lavender Hill frontage of this site allowed better access for the larger vans now in use. The project, again by Wager, was designed in 1910 but built (by Galbraith Brothers) only in 1912–13.²⁶⁸ The new elements included a second plain shed, linked into the existing sorting office, top-lit, and preceded by a glazed-over loading yard. The prominent street frontage was executed in a Portland-stone, stripped-classical manner fairly advanced for its date, with Tuscan columns to the two open windows, and rusticated quoins. The whole site suffered extensive damage from the V1 that destroyed the Pavilion cinema and nearby buildings on 17 August 1944.²⁶⁹ Partly to compensate for this, for two decades from the 1950s a district parcels office operated from single-storey sheds on a nearby site south of the railway, with access from Falcon Road.²⁷⁰

The Post Office building on Lavender Hill was first reduced to a single storey and then replaced in 1962–3 by a fresh building that fills almost the whole site; combining public office and rear sorting office: this was designed by an unidentified assistant working under Eric Bedford, Chief Architect to the Ministry of Works. The building is in the spare modernist manner adopted by the Post Office in the late 1950s. It has an exposed concrete and steel frame infilled with stock-brick panels, steel-framed windows and green tiles. The front portion is three storeys high, marked over the ground floor by a rhythm of pivoting windows over shiny green spandrels, but the offices behind rise to five storeys, flanked at the ends by higher staircase towers. Access to the loading bay and parking beneath the building was, as in the earlier buildings, from Dorothy Road. The redevelopment from 1985 of the site adjoining to the west and north with a large supermarket entailed refacing the western wall in stock facing brick.²⁷¹

The only other purpose-built post office in Battersea was a **branch office at 52–54 Lavender Hill** at the corner with Woodmere Close. As

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unforgiving in manner as the main post office, it operated between 1964 and 1991. Following subsequent use as a church and shop, it was demolished in 2003 and replaced with a quietly post-modern block of flats by Caradoc-Hodgkins Architects.²⁷²

Telephone Exchanges

Battersea, perhaps because of its industrial and commercial importance, was in the vanguard of telephone connection, with lines in place by 1885. Its first exchange, belonging to the United Telephone Company, opened at 352 Battersea Park Road by 1892, followed by the National Telephone Company at 75 St John's Hill around 1895. Increased demand saw premises at 248–250 Lavender Hill, close to Clapham Junction, opened by the latter company for an exchange, office and stores in 1902. It was technically advanced, only the second CB (Common Battery) exchange in London after Kensington, which meant it required less maintenance, and was equipped with a Kellogg 8-type switchboard, the only one in London at the time.²⁷³

The exchange was close to the great fire at Arding & Hobbs in December 1909 when the prevailing wind blew 'a great quantity of burning material' on to the roof. This caused 'a veritable storm of sparks, which created considerable uneasiness', but despite this and the great heat, the operating staff 'stuck "manfully" [most were women, the clerk-in-charge Ada Gertrude Buckwell] to their posts throughout', dealing with the 'large increase in traffic' due to the fire.²⁷⁴

Replacement of the equipment was mooted in 1913, but the war delayed expansion till an exchange opened at the relief station in Latchmere

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Road in 1920. All subscribers to both exchanges were transferred to a new exchange at Altenburg Gardens in 1926.

Battersea Telephone Exchange, 56–62 Altenburg Gardens

The new exchange occupied the site of the two northernmost of the once-grand 1860s villas along the east side of this street. No. 62 remained largely intact as offices and staff rooms, but its neighbour, No. 60, was replaced by a plain brick office. A large boxy exchange building where the team of women operators worked occupied the gardens of both houses, stretching also behind No. 58.

Following the Second World War a new frontage building usurped the place of two further villas. This was designed in Utility neo-Georgian with round-headed windows set in a blind arcade to the ground floor. Behind came a further wing housing an apparatus room, south of the exchange. The 1926 office building and No. 62 gave way in 1971 to a new wing. Partly faced in pinkish brick, quasi-classical with hints of repressed Brutalism, it is four windows wide, the first and second-floor windows yoked vertically by curving concrete frames, the top floor windows in concrete-framed dormers. Following privatisation of British Telecom in 1984 Battersea is alleged to have been the first telephone exchange in the country to undertake local loop unbundling, whereby BT makes its local network (the copper cables that run from customers' premises to the exchange) available to other companies.²⁷⁵

Nine Elms Telephone Exchange, 180 Stewart's Road

A boxy, brown-brick telephone exchange was built here in 1928–30 to designs by the architect's department of the Office of Works to serve the Nine Elms

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and Wandsworth Road areas. On the unfavoured industrial fringe of Battersea just north of Clyston Street, Clapham, between the Midland Railway's goods yard and a shabby terrace of 1880, it shared the backyard site of a one-time mission room with a small bakery, both reached by an entrance between 180 and 184 Stewart's Road. Its original name was the Macaulay exchange, after the historian Lord Macaulay who grew up in Clapham. This reflected the Post Office's policy of commemorating famous locals, as the proliferation of automatic exchanges in the 1920s outstripped the supply of suitable geographical prefixes. The building was renamed Nine Elms following the introduction of subscriber trunk dialling in 1963 and was supplemented in 1972 by a conspicuous, six-storey concrete tower on the bakery site at its south end, designed by A. J. Baker of the Ministry of Public Buildings & Works.²⁷⁶