

Around Battersea Park

Battersea Park's creation by the Crown in the mid nineteenth century has been the dominant influence on the character of the area covered by this chapter. Between 1846 and 1855 the Commissioners of Woods & Forests bought nearly 300 acres of the low-lying, flood-prone Battersea Fields. Only part was projected for parkland, the intention being to pay for and maintain it by leasing the surrounding land for building. To the park's east, the land was in the event largely taken for railways and industry; but to its south and west a sizeable Crown estate of housing grew up. The southern boundary of this estate is clearly defined by Battersea Park Road, but its western and eastern limits were more ragged.

For geographical simplicity this chapter also includes ground on the east side of Battersea Bridge Road not acquired by the Crown (Ill. 3.1). Little now remains of first-generation development there. By contrast, the Crown estate has survived well, with only a few pockets of rebuilding. Though construction began in the 1860s, the peak years were the 1880s–90s. This concentration of building, coupled with strict control exerted by the Office of Works, gave the area a homogeneity still evident today. If the scale and quality of the housing vary, the townscape is more attractive than elsewhere in northern Battersea, while the south-western sector especially possesses some well-designed Queen Anne-style houses. Last to be built were the several tall ranges of mansion flats. These bring a rare touch of Chelsea south of the river, notably to the long stretch along Prince of Wales Drive facing the park.

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The largest post-war initiative here was the Ethelburga Estate, replacing earlier housing between Albert Bridge and Battersea Bridge Roads. Recent years have seen redevelopment of the industrial riverside and the northern stretch of Queenstown Road with luxury apartments and offices. Amongst these are two buildings by Foster & Partners: Riverside Apartments and Studio, which houses the London headquarters of Norman Foster's celebrated architectural practice; and Albion Riverside, a curvaceous apartment block.

Early history

The park area was formerly the heartland of Battersea Fields. It was intensively cultivated for strip farming and market gardens but thinly inhabited, as the land was low-lying and prone to flooding. Before Battersea Bridge was built in 1771–2, it contained only a scatter of houses and cottages, reached along lanes or tracks, and a few riverside hostelries such as the Red House towards Nine Elms. The main east–west rights of way through the Fields included (from north to south): River Wall Road, now partly represented by the line of Parkgate Road; Marsh Lane, of which a stub survives as Ethelburga Street; and Surrey Lane, the main thoroughfare from Battersea village to Nine Elms, still present west of Battersea Bridge Road, but lost further eastwards. Linking these was Ferry Lane, predecessor of Battersea Bridge Road, which ran from the Chelsea Ferry as far south as Marsh Lane. Rocque's map of 1746 shows a few houses already existing on its east side.

The creation of the bridge gave some stimulus to development in this western sector, within reach of Battersea village. Industry and housing grew up piecemeal on a swathe of riverfront to its east, serviced in due course by a road behind, Wellington Lane (later Hester Road). South of this down to River Wall Road, ribbon development took place along Battersea Bridge

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Road, including houses, cottages, stables and outbuildings built c.1797 under lease from Earl Spencer by James Hill. One larger house, Spencer Lodge, may have formed part of this initiative.¹ Just south of River Wall Road lay Oak House, present on Rocque's map but shown more clearly on later maps as a sizeable villa on a large square plot. By the 1790s this house was in the possession of John Holmes, a sugar cooper, and by 1816 had passed to its last owner, John Charles Constable (d.1855), who owned plantations in Dominica.²

In 1835–6 the 3rd Earl Spencer put up his Battersea lands for auction, including all his freeholds in Battersea Fields. As a result the properties in the Fields were dispersed among many different owners. Few of the original purchasers seem to have had building in mind, and some certainly bought in the first instance to protect their market gardens. Nevertheless many of the plots ended up in the hands of speculators and investors, who in the more favourable climate of the 1840s grew interested in building, especially in the Battersea Bridge Road area. The longer-term repercussions of the Spencer sales were far-reaching, and created the climate of opinion which led to the Crown buying up large portions of the fields to form the present Battersea Park.

Battersea Bridge Road area

The laying out of Battersea Bridge Road took place in several phases between the 1770s and 1850s, the final southern stretch being the work of the Battersea Park Commissioners (see Chapter 2). When plans for the park's creation first became public in 1845, development was already taking place along the east side of Battersea Bridge Road, making it impractical for the Crown to buy up all the land as far as this logical western boundary. The housing built here in the 1840s is most naturally interpreted as part of the eastward expansion from

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Battersea village, comparable to development during these boom years along the road's west side and on Westbridge Road and Surrey Lane. The following paragraphs give details of development of the 1840s–80s east of Battersea Bridge Road not planned under the Crown, proceeding roughly from north to south. Surviving properties are indicated in bold.

The most important subsidiary road here was Park (after 1938 Parkgate) Road, essentially a straightening-out of River Wall Road to connect Battersea Bridge and Albert Bridge Roads. Its earlier name referenced the prospective park and also John Cornelius Park, a speculator who acquired land at the road's eastern end with a view to development, then sold out profitably to the Battersea Park Commissioners in 1850.³

As has been mentioned, some of the frontage between the present Hester and Parkgate Roads had been built up in the 1790s. In 1835 the Spencer Lodge property, then comprising around two acres with several roadside buildings and ample garden ground behind, just north of the Parkgate Road corner, was acquired by William Howey, of a family of Putney nurserymen, presumably for horticultural use. By 1864 market gardens were redundant hereabouts and Howey had retired. As with the larger field he owned north of Clapham Junction, he now laid out a grid of streets—Howie, Radstock and Elcho Streets—probably with the help of the surveyor and auctioneer George Todd. Some fifty building plots 'suitable for erection of cottage property' were offered for sale freehold. Several were acquired and built upon by new owners around 1866. But Howey undertook some development himself; his builders were John Riches and Samuel and Edwin Lathey, and the local architect Charles Bowes designed houses for him in Parkgate Road.⁴

This area has been heavily affected by the post-industrial regeneration of the riverside. Until 2010 some 1860s fabric remained at 17–35 Battersea Bridge Road but this was demolished to make way for the Royal College of

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Art's Dyson Building (below). The sole survivor now is the former Earl Spencer pub, **37 Battersea Bridge Road** (of 1866–7), at the corner of Howie Street.⁵

South of this, the area between Parkgate Road and Petworth Street is today almost wholly covered by the London County Council's Ethelburga Estate, having suffered heavily from bomb damage. At or after the Spencer sale in 1835, J. C. Constable of Oak House, near the Parkgate Road corner, extended his holding by purchasing the land southwards as far as Marsh Lane. In 1844 William Naylor Morrison, a speculator also active in North Kensington, bought Oak House, and over the next 2–3 years redeveloped the site with a new, smaller Oak House at the corner, two rows of houses on the main-road frontage (Oak Place and Terrace), and another row of five on the return (Park Road Terrace). Of these only three survive, much altered, as **61–65 Battersea Bridge Road**. After a gap for a future road (Peveril Street), a third row, Marlborough Terrace, took the development down to Marsh Lane (Ill. 3.1b).⁶

The land south of Marsh Lane was acquired in 1842 by Daniel Sturdy. The first building to go up there in 1844 was the Union beerhouse, now the **Union Arms, 109 Battersea Bridge Road**, later extended forward. A row of houses, Myddleton Terrace (since demolished), was added alongside to its south by Robert Jones, builder, in 1847–51, under a lease from Sturdy. Jones later bought some of Morrison's land to the north, including Marlborough Terrace, and built more housing behind in Marsh Lane (called Denbigh Terrace North), and also in Spencer (later Searle) Street, a new north–south side-road. The rest of Spencer Street and Peveril Street were built up in the 1860s along with a third small side-street, Ashurst Street, on the remains of the Oak House estate by Stephen Neate, a house agent.⁷ Marsh Lane became Ethelburga Street in 1871.

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Beyond Myddleton Terrace, the well-known Kensington developer (Sir) Charles James Freake was involved. In 1845 he took a lease of two thin strips close to the drainage ditch that cut through Battersea Fields south of Marsh Lane. Two years later their freehold was purchased by the Crown for Battersea Park, but Freake maintained his interest. He also acquired land adjoining to the north-west, giving him a squareish plot fronting Battersea Bridge Road, where in 1847–8 he built 14 houses (Edin Terrace) divided by the stub of a future street. Freake then waited before opening up the back land, meanwhile using the ground as a brickfield. It was not until 1873 that he finally entered into negotiations with the Park Commissioners to carry through his new east–west street and link up with Albert Bridge Road.⁸ This became Petworth Street in 1887. Henry E. Cooper, Freake’s surveyor, provided plans for part of the estate in 1874; and C. H. Thomas, his architect, submitted plans in 1876 for other new roads, Watford Villas and the L-shaped Bolan Street. The housing was built in the early 1880s by the brothers Samuel Lister Lyon and Ronald Lyon, and by Thomas Pugh, under agreements with Freake or his executors. A run survives as **1–14 Petworth Street** (south side), of three storeys, in white brick with thin red-brick stripes, and decorative stone dressings in the form of dentil cornices and rope-mouldings. The terraces of Bolan Street were similar, though some semi-detached pairs there and in Watford Villas leavened the mix.⁹

East of the Oak House property ran some 16 acres of ground between Park Road and Marsh Lane owned by Henry Juer, another market gardener. Juer’s family had been in business in Battersea since the seventeenth century and had held a lease of this ground for many years. In the 1840s the Crown contemplated buying his holdings, but the transaction never took place.¹⁰ After Juer’s death in 1878 the bulk of his considerable fortune descended to his nephew, Richard Pryce. Development began in the 1880s under Pryce’s son (also Richard) and daughter, Ann, together with two cousins, Thomas Edward Pryce (an architect) and Lucy Pugh, who granted building leases to

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William Stewart of Battersea and Samuel Bowes of Balham.¹¹ Under the name 'Prince's estate' (perhaps a reference to nearby Prince's Wharf), two new streets were laid out in 1888 called Juer and Worfield (the Shropshire parish where Lucy Pugh was then living). The architect Frederick Wheeler submitted layout and drainage plans, suggesting that he may also have designed the houses. These were built by Stewart and Bowes in 1889–95.¹² Some houses at the south end were demolished after the Second World War and cleared for the Ethelburga Estate, but **1-29 & 2-36 Juer Street** and **1-39 & 2-28 Worfield Street** survive (Ill. 3.2). They are of two stories with shallow front areas, built of yellow stocks with plentiful red-brick dressings and lively, Jacobean-style overdoors.

South of Freake's take, land on either side of what was then Surrey Lane became one of the targets of Henry Hart Davis, a persistent but hapless speculator-builder in Battersea during the 1840s. On the northern portion (owned by James Arnold), Davis built two houses in 1846, part of an intended Surrey Terrace. Now **181 & 183 Battersea Bridge Road**, these are his only surviving houses in Battersea. Beyond Surrey Lane, on land owned by Robert Chambers, Davis in 1844 built three north-facing properties: Clifton House and a semi-detached pair, 1 & 2 Clifton Villas. These stood till the 1890s, when they were demolished to make way for Connaught Mansions. A third Davis speculation was Earl Spencer Place, projected on a larger piece of land owned by Chambers further east, in the vicinity of the present Beechmore Road; this came to nothing. All Davis's properties were acquired by the Crown, and though he applied for compensation, it took too long to come through to save him from financial ruin.¹³

Although much of the housing built on and behind Battersea Bridge Road was aimed at the relatively affluent, the social character was mixed. Nearest to the river and its industries the smaller houses were densely occupied by those working locally. Throughout the second half of the

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nineteenth century labourers predominated here. Houses further south and in the back land were a little more genteel, a few households running to a domestic servant, but many let rooms to boarders and lodgers.

Battersea Park estate

In 1846 the first of a series of Acts of Parliament began the slow process of compulsory purchase of land for Battersea Park. In addition to the 200 acres reserved for the park, the Crown originally planned to have as many as 120 acres around it devoted to building development.¹⁴ Early plans devised under the aegis of James Pennethorne, architect to the Office of Works, were for a mix of high-class detached and semi-detached villas and grand terraces (including a crescent) on all three sides of the park and to some extent within it, with a second tier of middle-class terraces behind – in a similar vein to John Nash’s work for the Crown at Regent’s Park (Ill. 3.3). To improve access, a new river crossing at Chelsea Bridge was part of the original proposal. But after ten years little had been achieved and it took till 1858 for the park and Chelsea Bridge to open. A second crossing, Albert Bridge, was first proposed by Prince Albert in 1860. Consigned to private enterprise by Act of Parliament in 1864, it was not constructed till 1871–3.¹⁵

Control of the building lands lay with Her Majesty’s Commissioners of Works & Public Buildings, acting through the Office of Works. Between 1851 and 1874 they were specially incorporated as the Battersea Park Commissioners for the purpose of building and managing the estate. Pennethorne advised on its development until 1870, when Charles Reeks, a former pupil, succeeded him. Reeks acted as Receiver of the Crown Estates until 1899.

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The first setback to the grand housing scheme came in 1853, well before the park and bridge opened, when the Crown sold over 23 acres on the east side to the West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway Company (WELCPR). This sounded the knell for Pennethorne's plans for the land between the park and Nine Elms. Queen's Circus, at the park's south-eastern corner, became the only real piece of town planning to emerge on this side. Meanwhile on the west side less land than first intended had been acquired (see Ill. 3.3), extending at some points not far beyond the line of the future Albert Bridge Road.

By the end of 1853 most of the ground earmarked for purchase had been acquired. Pennethorne drew up revised layout plans and work began on the major roads. Battersea Bridge Road was continued south of Surrey Lane to meet the Lower Wandsworth (now Battersea Park) Road. Albert Bridge (at first Prince Albert) Road, along the park's western boundary, partly took the line of an existing track, extended to meet the Lower Wandsworth Road. Surrey Lane, where it ran south of the park, was realigned and renamed Prince of Wales Road (now Drive). On the eastern boundary of the park Victoria (later Queen's, now Queenstown) Road became part of a thoroughfare linking the West End with Clapham via Chelsea Bridge (see also Chapter 5).¹⁶

Although these main roads were largely complete by the end of 1856, the building ground was not yet an attractive prospect. As Pennethorne wrote: 'some time will ... elapse before all the newly acquired advantages of the locality become fully known'.¹⁷ The chief stumbling block was inadequate drainage – in particular the 'Lord Spencer' open sewer that traversed the south side of the park. This could not be remedied until the MBW had completed its new main sewer along the line of Battersea Park Road in 1865. In addition the railway, completed in 1858, sterilized the south-eastern

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district, and bridge tolls remained in place until 1879, retarding development and depreciating land values.

At first therefore the land was merely divided into parcels and let on yearly tenancies for grazing or market gardening. The earliest hint of major building came in 1864, when a Mr Knowles offered to purchase 74 acres – pretty much the entire land as yet unlet on the park’s west and south sides. This was probably James T. Knowles, promoter at that same time of the neighbouring Park Town estate (Chapter 5), though there was also an unrelated F. E. Knowles involved in development on the west side of Battersea Bridge Road. Pennethorne argued strongly in favour of accepting the offer, emanating as it did from ‘very large capitalists’, but William Cowper, First Commissioner of Works at the time, rejected it. Such was the burden of debt to the Exchequer that even the most generous offer for an outright sale would not come close to paying off the loans and providing the promised profit for creating the park. Cowper pressed for the land to be let on building leases but declined a fresh offer from Knowles to take a lease of 35 acres on the grounds that there was no competitive tendering.¹⁸

Early development was therefore fitful, spawning mainly a handful of detached and semi-detached houses west of the park in the 1860s and 70s. The unrealizable ideal of building villas within the park was finally abandoned in 1866. Only after the bridge tolls were removed did general building activity accelerate in the 1880s–90s.¹⁹

East and south-east of the park

On this side of the park, delimited by Victoria (now Queenstown) Road, the construction in 1857–60 of the railway lines to and from Victoria were a major blow to Pennethorne’s original plans for high-class development. After 1862

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the railway works here gradually proliferated into a large-scale depot and wharf along almost the full extent of the frontage, semi-concealed behind a high brick wall, putting paid to any remaining prospects for smart housing.

Beyond the railway, the Park Commissioners had bought much land, extending some way eastwards towards Nine Elms. But the presence of the Southwark & Vauxhall Water Company's reservoirs and filter-beds, and, beyond that, the wharves of Nine Elms, was equally unfavourable to housing. All that got built under the Crown in this district was the long-lost Royal Rifleman public house (1858-9) and a few adjoining houses, situated at about the point where Battersea Park Road becomes Nine Elms Lane.²⁰

The Commissioners therefore in 1864 sold their remaining land east of Queenstown Road to the West London Docks (later Wharves) & Warehouses Company, for a proposed riverside canal basin, docks, wharfage and bonded warehousing connected to the railways. This 'very precarious' undertaking proved unable to survive the banking collapse of 1866 and was wound up before a sod could be dug or a brick laid.²¹ By 1868 the company's liquidators were looking to dispose of its land for building, but it was to be nearly a decade before any house-construction actually took place.

Curiously it was on this least successful eastern flank that two of James Pennethorne's original ideas of the 1840s for geometric forms around the park took shape along Queenstown Road. Intended as incidents on this important approach to Chelsea Bridge, one was a large circus where roads intersected beside the south-east park gates, the other a smaller octagon at the north-east corner. Both had been completed and gravelled by 1856. The latter rapidly disappeared, but the former survives as Queen's Circus. Its present appearance as a raised, grass-covered roundabout was the result of improvements carried out by John Mowlem & Company for the London

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County Council at the time of the Festival of Britain in 1951, picking up a scheme first proposed in 1939.²²

All the first-generation buildings in the circus and on the available frontages of Queenstown Road near by date from the 1870s–80s. The south-west corner of Queen’s Circus was acquired in 1878 by the Rev. Erskine Clarke for the future All Saints’ Church, built first in temporary form, then as a permanent church (1882–3); a vicarage was added alongside in 1890. Behind in Lurline Gardens was a branch library, also of 1890. The church was destroyed by fire, rebuilt in 1970 on another site (vol. 49), and its place taken by modern housing.²³ Further south, the frontage at 341–361 Queenstown Road, between Lurline Gardens and Battersea Park Road, has a terrace of three-storey and basement red-brick flatted houses, built in 1879–80 by Lloyd & Co. to designs by R. O. Whitfield and J. Alick Thomas (as were the adjoining houses in Meath Street and Lurline Gardens). No. 341, at the Battersea Park Road junction, became a bank and was given a rendered ground floor (to resemble stone) and corner entrance porch with a scrolled pediment.²⁴

On the opposite (east) side, the plain stock-brick and cement row at 278–284 Queenstown Road, including another corner bank, was erected in 1875–6 by John Lane, a Stockwell builder, to designs by his surveyor, Charles Dannell of Great George Street, Westminster. Lane had hoped to build shops but was prevented from doing so this close to the park. The longer, more attractive run of brick-and-cement houses between here and the circus, at Nos 286–314, was the work in 1878–9 of the local building partnership of Swann & Howard, using designs revised if not provided by the City surveyor William Eve (one of the liquidators of the Wharves & Warehouse Company). The same team was responsible for the four awkwardly shaped houses in the circus itself, at Nos 316–322, of 1879–80. Here Eve, under pressure from Charles Reeks, who wanted better-quality houses opposite the park entrance,

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was able to add a few more decorative touches to the elevations, though he complained that the cramped site, so close to the 'rattle' of trains, was unsuitable for good housing.²⁵

North of the circus, development was fragmentary. The wedge of ground at its north-east corner remained vacant and popular with gypsies until a modern petrol station filled the gap. A small dyeing factory had been built just north of this, set back from the road front, in the late 1870s; and a row of four terraced houses, similar to those south of the circus, was built alongside in 1880-2, again by Swann & Howard.²⁶ Beyond them the last residential building before the railway depot hove into view was a single double-fronted house of 1890, provided by the railway company for its superintendent. All these buildings have been demolished as part of the redevelopment of this area since the 1980s, discussed below.

West and south-west of the park

Until 1863 little or no development took place on property bought by the Crown west of Battersea Park. In that year George Todd, having failed to persuade the First Commissioner of Works to allow him to act as his agent for letting all the building land around the park, ventured on a small speculation.²⁷ This involved taking over Henry Hart Davis's Clyde House and Clifton Villas at the west end of Surrey Lane, and developing a plot further east, on the corner of Prince of Wales Drive and Albert Bridge Road, opposite the park's south-west entrance. Here in 1864-5 he built Strathdon, a large Italianate villa which it was hoped would attract similar development at the park's edge. In size if not in elegance, this was just the type of residence the Commissioners were after, but not only did it fail as a decoy duck, a decade later it was still tenantless and had earned the soubriquet 'Todd's folly'. Eventually it was taken over as the National Anti-Vivisection Hospital,

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opening in 1902 (since demolished). A care home at 29–35 Prince of Wales Drive now occupies the site (Servite Houses, 1987–91).²⁸

In 1864 Todd also took over Hart Davis's other development on Battersea Bridge Road, agreeing to 'repair and improve' the two houses Davis had begun (Nos 181 & 183) and extend the terrace to either side to make Nos 177–189.²⁹ In 1865 Todd took a further plot next to these at the corner of Prince of Wales Drive and Battersea Bridge Road, where he intended to build another large house. This he revised to a pair of double-fronted houses, but struggled to get his plans past the Commissioners' architect, Charles Reeks, who pronounced their design 'objectionable'. Fresh plans were finally approved in 1869, and work began the following year, Todd having assigned his interest to the builders Thomas Swain and Charles Hall.³⁰ Now Elstree and Carlton Houses (191 Battersea Bridge Road and 1 Prince of Wales Drive respectively), they are big three-storey residences of stock brick and stone dressings, with double-height canted bays.

Covenants in the Commissioners' building agreements generally banned non-domestic use, apart from on Battersea Park Road. Another exception was the one public house on the estate, the Albert Tavern (now the Prince Albert), erected at the corner of Albert Bridge and Parkgate Roads in 1866–8 (extended c.1871), replacing a pub of the same name formerly within the park site. It was designed by Joseph Tanner, a City architect and surveyor, and is now the oldest building on Albert Bridge Road (Ill. 3.6).³¹

After the opening of Albert Bridge in 1873 offered the prospect of easy access to Chelsea and the West End, development along its approach road became more attractive. Hedworth Williamson, a speculator then acting as building contractor for the bridge, saw the potential. A cousin of his better-known namesake, the diplomat Sir Hedworth Williamson, he had a somewhat doubtful record in property speculation. A warrant for his arrest

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issued in 1865 over a questionable sale of shares described him as '5ft 6in high, of florid complexion, and very stout face, with projecting front teeth; wears no whiskers or moustache'.³² He employed as his architect and surveyor John Robinson, a former pupil of Pennethorne. Robinson drew up the initial plans for Williamson, writing in November 1871 to the Commissioners:

At the present moment I think it cannot be denied that the Locality has a bad name, but, as most of the Building Ground surrounding the Park is still unlet and as it is in most parts of considerable width, the opportunity I think presents itself of raising the character of the neighbourhood by limiting the number of houses to be erected and by requiring those to be erected to be of a superior class.

On these lines, Williamson agreed to take most of the ground on the west side of the park (about twelve acres) at £80 per annum per acre, promising to build five detached or ten semi-detached villas facing Albert Bridge Road by 1874–5, with terraces behind, and to repeat this rate of building annually until there were 16 detached or 32 semi-detached houses and a further 65 houses in the hinterland.³³

Robinson devised two new roads behind Albert Bridge Road (Rosenau and Anhalt Roads) to be lined with terraces. In addition, Petworth Street was extended to its east, but plans to straighten out Marsh Lane (later Ethelburga Street) and create a new park entrance opposite came to nothing. Among the first houses on Albert Bridge Road was Park House (demolished), built in 1873 at the north corner of Ethelburga Street for Benjamin Cooke, a former Lincolnshire farmer turned builder, who also took other plots near by. A pair of semi-detached villas survives at 65 & 67 Parkgate Road. Built by Cooke to Robinson's plans in 1878, they stand out from later housing on the estate for

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their wealth of moulded brick or pale terracotta decoration, light stock brickwork and white brick dressings (Ill. 3.7).³⁴

In 1875–6 six further large houses went up fronting Albert Bridge Road. They included the semi-detached Nevil House and Nevil Villa, built by John Roberts of West Brompton on the south corner of Ethelburga Street for John Nevil Maskelyne, a watchmaker turned stage magician, who specialized in exposing fraudulent spiritualists and card sharpers. Nevil House at the corner was considerably extended in 1879 for Maskelyne, perhaps to designs by Frederick William Roper.³⁵ North of Park House came another pair (Aubry and Frathy Houses, also demolished), then two detached residences: Stafford Lodge (since divided as 81 & 81A Albert Bridge Road) and Rutland Lodge (No. 83). These last are in a simple Tudor style of red brick with stone mullioned windows (Ill. 3.8). A major landmark of this part of the estate was the church of St Mary le Park, begun in 1882 (vol. 49).

Hedworth Williamson's hopes to develop the estate were thwarted by delays in the construction of and disappointing profits from Albert Bridge, coupled with a depression in the building trade. By 1879 he was behind on his rent to the Commissioners and had lost interest in the scheme. Two years later his brother, Capt. Augustus Henry Williamson, stepped in and applied for an assignment of the agreement, much to the Commissioners' relief. Reeks was critical of Hedworth Williamson ('he has been a nuisance with his persistent gravel digging and failure to build or pay his rent. The Board have been charitable enough') and thought Augustus would prove a more reliable and solvent lessee. But when, on Robinson's advice, the latter sought a variation in the terms, as it became clear that large houses would not let in this area, Reeks advised against such a concession.³⁶

For the development of Anhalt Road and the stretch of Albert Bridge Road north of Parkgate Road, Augustus Williamson made an agreement in

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1881 with William Henry Iles and Thomas Wood, West Country men who had established a London building firm then employing some 50 men.³⁷ Work in Anhalt Road took place mainly in 1882–3. The resulting three-storey terraces were of mundane appearance and were soon mostly multi-occupied. A grander terrace, Hertford Gardens, was built in 1885–6 by Iles & Wood facing the park at 87–111 Albert Bridge Road. These three-storey, basement and attic houses have a shaped-gable skyline, and a decorative ironwork balcony along their entire length. Further south, Iles & Wood also agreed in 1881 with Williamson to build in Rosenau Road. Here 69 houses were built, but the work dragged on till at least 1885; Iles himself moved into No. 29 (now demolished).³⁸

During the 1880s further development took place on Albert Bridge Road. A pair of semi-detached villas, Trafalgar and Acacia Houses (Nos 67 & 69), with old-fashioned stuccoed fronts, went up south of Nevil Villa in 1882. Further south, large detached houses were built on either corner of Petworth Street: Hertford House (No. 65), a pedestrian stock-brick building on the north corner for Walter William Young, a solicitor; and Holmwood (No. 63), on the south corner. The latter is of greater interest architecturally, being the design of John S. Quilter. Its front elevation comprises two broad bays, both bowed on the ground floor with stone mullioned and transomed windows. The left-hand bow continues up through all three storeys to be topped off by a low conical roof (Ill. 3.9). The house was built c.1885 for Robert Miller, a master barge builder, who may have had a family connection with Quilter.³⁹ To the south, Nos 51–61 (originally named York Terrace after their builder, Robert York) date from 1888. They are vertiginous and narrow, of three storeys over a raised basement, and in a simplified Queen Anne style, in red brick, with small-pane upper sashes to the tall windows, gablets and balconies with fine cast-iron railings. In 1882 two pairs (Innisfail and Selsey Houses, Nos 43–49) were built between York Terrace and Strathdon House on the corner of Prince of Wales Road; both were acquired by the Anti-

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Vivisection Hospital in 1912 and have since been demolished. The last detached house to be built on Albert Bridge Road was Hertford Lodge, of 1889–90 (since demolished), at the corner of Anhalt Road. It was designed for a Belgian sculptor, François Verheyden, with a rear studio.⁴⁰

By 1890, Albert Bridge Road had just four vacant plots remaining. Here mansion flats were built, contemporary with those on Prince of Wales Drive; their development is discussed below. It was also in 1890–1 that the north side of Prince of Wales Drive west of Battersea Bridge Road was built up, mainly by W. H. Iles. He was responsible for the lively terrace of red-brick flats at Nos 3–17, with shaped gables picked out in stone piping, as well as the plainer houses at Nos 19, 21 and 25 & 27.⁴¹

To the south-west of the park, the rectangle of ground bounded by Prince of Wales Drive and Albert Bridge, Battersea Bridge and Battersea Park Roads was bisected by a new diagonal approach called Cambridge Road (Ill. 3.4). The more interesting phase of development here began in 1879 on the triangular wedge south of the new road; the smaller, northern triangle followed in the 1880s–90s.

In 1879 the builder Thomas Pink of Harlesden agreed with the Commissioners to erect substantial houses facing Albert Bridge Road and one large detached house (Dunraven House) at the northern apex of the triangle. He also began laying out Foxmore and Kersley Streets behind, and Kersley Mews – the only mews on the estate to survive and a rarity in Battersea. Pink's architects were H. E. Coe (a former pupil of Gilbert Scott) and Stephen Robinson. Pink had lately built big houses on the Cadogan estate in Chelsea, but overreached himself in Battersea. He was unable to secure tenants, and went into liquidation, assigning his interest around 1880–1 to Edward William Hudson, an architect with whom he had worked elsewhere alongside a solicitor, John Tryon. Pink himself was living at Dunraven House in 1881.⁴²

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The houses that Coe & Robinson designed for Pink are some of the best near the park. Queen Anne Terrace, at 7–37 Albert Bridge Road, forms a particularly attractive group, the houses varying in height and detail (Ill. 3.10). In Kersley Street, Pink's terraces at Nos 1–7 & 2–28 are less grand, while in the mews stock brick replaced red brick for the simple two-storey coach-houses and stabling. Now converted to housing, with many painted fronts, the mews retains its charm, having granite setts and central gutter, carriage lamps, coach-house doors and much original glazing (Ill. 3.11).

When Hudson took over he needed to economize in order to avoid insolvency, but struggled in his negotiations with the Commissioners to build cheaper houses than Pink's. His request to substitute stock-brick facings with red-brick dressings for red-brick facings was rejected. Hudson argued that the lighter fronts would let more readily as they would seem more cheerful and brighter-looking. Charles Reeks thought this a 'peculiar opinion with which I do not concur'. In Kersley Street (where Pink had already built eighteen houses) and Cambridge Road (where he had built a five-house terrace, Nos 4–12), Hudson was forced to comply with the red-brick facings, but in Foxmore Street stock brick prevailed.⁴³

Hudson was acting here as a developer and used a fellow architect, George F. Sharpe, to devise plans for the remaining coach-houses on the south side of Kersley Mews and the housing on the south side of Cambridge Road (Nos 32–58). James Harris, a Battersea builder, and the solicitor John Tryon were also involved. The three-storey red-brick terraced houses in Cambridge Road were built in 1884; that at No. 58, on the corner with Battersea Bridge Road, was designed as a house and surgery for a Dr Hunter.⁴⁴ By then most of the development had been completed. St Stephen's Church was built at the corner of Kersley Street in 1886 (vol. 49).

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North of Cambridge Road, Rosenau Crescent (originally Rosenau Road South) was the first street to be built up, with attractive two-storey terraced houses, under agreements of 1886. On the east side the northern terrace of seven (Nos 1–13) was built by William Stewart, and the ten to the south (Nos 15–33) by George N. Street, of Street & Son of Battersea Park Road. Thomas Pugh took the plot on the west side, where he built Nos 2–18.⁴⁵ Street's architect was Henry John Hansom, and as all the houses on the Crescent are identical, his designs presumably were also used by Stewart and Pugh. Building was completed around 1890. Street's take included the corner plot fronting Battersea Bridge Road where he built a semi-detached pair of double-fronted houses (Nos 211 & 213, also designed by Hansom). Pugh's take included the stretch of Battersea Bridge Road to the north (Nos 193–209).

The remaining plots in the northern triangle were taken by John Halley around 1894. He designed Connaught and Cambridge Mansions, built between c.1896–9 (see below, page ##). The rest of his take he assigned to Walter Peacock, who put up three-storey cottage flats in the mid 1890s at 10–56 Prince of Wales Drive.⁴⁶

South of the park

Though slow to get going, development south of Prince of Wales Drive was more straightforward. The overall layout here seems to have been arrived at pragmatically after the idea of building villas in green surroundings had been dropped in 1866. It divided the land into two major blocks bisected by a long east–west road, named Brynmaer Road at the west end, Warriner Gardens in the centre, and Lurline Gardens at the east end, intersected by eight short north–south streets, of which only half ran all the way through from Prince of Wales Drive to Battersea Park Road (Ill. 3.12).

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Just one large detached house appeared in this area: the former St Saviour's Vicarage, now 7 Alexandra Avenue, built in 1879–80 with a return frontage facing the park on the as yet empty Prince of Wales Drive. It was the initiative of the recently appointed incumbent of St Saviour's, Samuel Gilbert Scott, who thought his vicarage might form 'no small inducement' to builders to erect a good class of houses along Prince of Wales Drive: 'in the creation of a new neighbourhood some one has to set an example'.⁴⁷ Scott's cousin, the architect John Oldrid Scott, designed the house. It is a pretty Queen Anne Revival composition in greyish stocks and orange-red brick dressings with a crow-stepped gable (Ill. 3.13). The builder was J. D. Hobson.⁴⁸

Along the north side of Battersea Park Road, the Commissioners knew there was no point in holding out for high-class houses given the 'very inferior character' of the developments opposite (Chapter 6). Institutional buildings came first with the Battersea Tabernacle of 1869–70 and the Battersea Park Board School of 1873–4. A blacking factory and two huge steam laundries soon followed, taking up almost the entire block from Beechmore Road to Alexandra Avenue.

The first housing to be built here was Victoria Dwellings (since demolished). These three gaunt blocks of working-class flats were erected in 1876–7 by the newly formed Metropolitan Artizans' & Labourers' Dwellings Association (later the Victoria Dwellings Association), whose main purpose was to rehouse working-class Londoners evicted through slum clearance. John Walter, proprietor of *The Times*, was chairman of the Association's executive council, which also boasted Benjamin Disraeli among its largely Tory membership; Walter presided over the opening in June 1877. The plan was to take the entire stretch between the Tabernacle and Macduff Road and erect two quadrangles of artisans' dwellings and two four-storey blocks for labourers, but one of the quadrangles was subsequently shelved. Charles Barry junior, the Association's architect, designed the plain, four-storey blocks

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of stock brick, embellished only by strings and arches of white Suffolk bricks and concrete lintels. They were in the manner of Henry Darbishire's Peabody estates, which the Association aimed to emulate, made more imposing by overhanging eaves and prominent chimneys. The building contract was taken by Downs & Co. at £33,800.⁴⁹

The artisans' block was distinguished by a rusticated ground floor and disposed around a central court, with 98 self-contained flats of two or three rooms, accessed from open staircases. The labourers' blocks, facing each other 35ft apart, had two staircases each, leading to access balconies. These flats were 'associated', that is they shared WCs off the passages, and were so arranged that a labourer could rent one, two, three or four rooms, according to his earnings, with a total of 150 rooms in the two blocks. Groups of wash-houses were built along the northern perimeter wall. Rents varied from 7s to 10s per week for artisans, and from 2s 6d to 6s 6d for labourers, making the smallest rooms (about 10ft square) affordable to all but the very poorest. Lodgers, except elderly dependents, were not permitted. The ceiling heights throughout were just 8ft. How far such conditions could be viewed as philanthropic was raised by the *Building News*, which suggested that the 'haut ton of society' present at the opening might consider accepting a lower return than 5% and increase the height of the rooms.⁵⁰ They survived until 1983 (see below).

Elsewhere, the pace of development quickened during the 1880s, when various builders put up terraces from Albert Bridge Road eastwards as far as Forfar Road – all excepting the prime strip facing the park on Prince of Wales Drive. One plot bounded west and east by Albert Bridge and Beechmore Roads, with frontages to Battersea Park and Brynmaer Roads, was developed from 1880 by James Thomas Helby, managing director of the London & Provincial Steam Laundry (just erected on land to the east), to designs by the laundry's architect, Ernest Turner. A terrace of 30 two-storey houses was built

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first, c.1881, in Brynmaer Road (Nos 7–65 odd), extended at either end in 1885–90 (Nos 1–5 and 67–75). Of stock brick with red-brick dressings and minimal decoration, these houses provided a bay-windowed drawing room at the front leading into a dining room behind, with kitchen, scullery and WC (approached from outside) in the back extension. Upstairs were four bedrooms, another WC, and at the front above the entrance a bath or dressing room. Most have since had dormers added.⁵¹ John Richard Archer, famous as the black mayor of Battersea, lived at No. 55 from 1898, and had a photographic studio in Battersea Park Road.

On Battersea Park Road, Helby built three-storey terraces of shops with living accommodation above, of which Nos 156–206 & 220–236 survive. They were flexibly planned, but most had plate-glass shopfronts with a central entrance, a door to the housing upstairs to the side, and a two-storey rear wing. At the present No. 200 an archway gave direct access to a builder's yard behind (Ill. 3.14). This was almost certainly for Helby's builder, Alfred Boon.

Boon went on to take the vacant land adjoining to the north, where he put up more two-storey houses, similar to those he had just built for Helby, at 1–9 Beechmore Road, 2–46 Brynmaer Road and in the exotically named side streets, Soudan and Kassala Roads. Specifications stipulated Bath stone for the keystones and Carnarvon slates for the roofs.⁵² Round the corner facing Albert Bridge Road, the site demanded something grander and more in keeping with Thomas Pink's lively Queen Anne Terrace opposite. Here Boon put up a short terrace of four houses (Nos 4–10), of two storeys and a mansard floor, with full-height canted bay windows topped by a tall gabled dormer.

Nearly all the buildings on these plots had been completed by 1888, but Helby ran into difficulties at the east end of his take where it met Beechmore Road. The Commissioners wanted sizeable houses on this

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important approach to the park, but the proximity of the steam laundry was discouraging. Helby's architect, Turner, complained: 'it is difficult to persuade the Builder to spend an extra penny upon the elevation overlooking the Laundry drying ground – I will do my best but I am sure you will appreciate my difficulty'. Plans were approved in 1887, but a year later work had not started and Helby was hoping to substitute a far simpler house on the corner of Battersea Park Road. He blamed the 'great depression in property at Battersea', which meant that he had been unable to let the land 'and whilst it remains unbuilt upon, it really becomes a nuisance to the neighbourhood as it is impossible to keep the roughs off it'. In the end standard shops were built at this corner.⁵³

Housing along Warriner Gardens, the eastern continuation of Brynmaer Road, was built up by two separate developers. In 1881 William Davies, who had been responsible for some houses in Meath Street the year before, took the plot further east that wrapped around Battersea Park School, including the east side of Alexandra Avenue (now Nos 2–18) and the row at 118–138 Battersea Park Road. His architect was John Edward Arpin. The smartest of his houses were semi-detached villas at 18–36 Warriner Gardens and on Alexandra Avenue.⁵⁴

George Dobbs Goulder, a Brixton oil and colourman, took the western plot in 1885. Goulder's proposal to build 40 houses along the north side of Warriner Gardens may have been received by the Commissioners with relief, as two years earlier there had been an application to build a telegraph factory on the site. Among Goulder's referees were the architects Christopher & White, who perhaps provided the plans. Following Goulder's death in 1887, the development was completed by his son, George Frederick Goulder.⁵⁵ This plain terrace of three-storey houses of stock brick with full height canted bays (now Nos 38–108) was let as working-class flats – inevitable given their position opposite the laundries (II. 3.15).

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East of Forfar Road the mid 1880s saw the construction of the spectacular Albert Palace, a vast exhibition and concert hall, which opened in 1885 (vol. 49). It flourished only briefly and was put up for sale in 1888. It found no buyer, and for a time, while the structure deteriorated, its future remained hotly debated. In 1891 Battersea Polytechnic was built on part of the site. Two years later Alfred Boon took a lease of ground here in Lurline Gardens, Macduff and Cupar Roads and a stretch of Battersea Park Road. On the back land he built cheap, cheerful housing aimed firmly at the working classes, including cottage flats at 21–51 Lurline Gardens. Reeks, the Commissioners' architect, excused the 'very limited character' of their internal accommodation on the grounds that they backed on to Victoria Dwellings, 'the residents in which (I am given to understand) are very far from desirable neighbours'.⁵⁶ The flats were of two storeys over a raised basement, each with its own front door. Many of the original decorative iron gates to the semi-basement flats survive.

In Macduff and Cupar Roads, Boon built attractive two-storey terraced houses designed as mirrored pairs. The roof of the bay windows extends across the front doors, supported by a little balustrade, to create a small porch. The original glazing pattern has been retained, the sashes having small square panes in a band across the top. Within, each house had two sitting rooms, front and back, kitchen and scullery, and a WC reached from the back yard. Upstairs were three bedrooms, bathroom and a second WC.⁵⁷ In 1893–5 Boon also put up shops with accommodation above at 42–64 Battersea Park Road, along similar lines to those he had previously built further west for J. T. Helby.

Mansion flats

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The highpoint of the 1890s was the sudden proliferation of mansion flats all along Prince of Wales Drive opposite the park and on the remaining vacant land on Albert Bridge Road. By then it was clear that nobody would build detached or even semi-detached houses here of the type originally planned by the Commissioners. The fine prospect across parkland and the long, shallow building plots lent themselves to tall ranges of flats, growing in popularity across the capital from the 1880s and potentially more profitable for developers than standard terraces. They were also likely to attract a better class of resident, despite the lower-grade housing in the streets behind. Their unusually large concentration here and the speed of their construction are striking, with thirteen long ranges comprising almost 1,000 apartments built between 1892 and 1902. Flats of this type evidently now appealed to a growing section of London's younger middle classes whose work and social milieu required them to be close to the West End, but whose modest means suppressed any qualms about living south of the river. One developer told the Park Commissioners in 1892 that he had 'several members of good families anxious to become tenants' of his blocks.⁵⁸

The proposal to erect flats seems to have been made first by John Halley, an obscure Scottish architect who had been in practice in Glasgow in the 1870s. In the early 1880s Halley moved to London and was involved in property speculation in Kensington around 1886–8 with a Glaswegian stockbroker, putting up flats in Drayton Gardens and houses in Earl's Court Square.⁵⁹

Halley first offered to take the ground south of the park in February 1886. This was declined, but five years later, in 1891, with the land still vacant, he proposed to erect a string of mansion flats along Prince of Wales Drive all the way from Albert Bridge Road to the corner of Alexandra Avenue (the sites now occupied by Park, Norfolk, Cyril and Overstrand Mansions). The frontage was around 1,420ft, for which Halley's offer of £650 per annum on a

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99-year lease was accepted. In a new departure for the Office of Works, the agreement included the option to acquire the freehold once the buildings were completed. Subsequently the Treasury authorized the disposal of the entire estate, and from 1893 lessees were invited to submit offers to purchase the freeholds of their properties.⁶⁰

Halley submitted plans in June and December 1891, the later set drawn up jointly with another architect, William Isaac Chambers. He claimed they were 'merely typical of the class of buildings I wish to erect, and my present ideas for utilising the land', adding that he looked upon the enterprise as 'somewhat of a venture'. The earlier drawings showed a long, repetitive range of four-storey flats which seem to betray his Scottish roots, resembling the average Glasgow tenement of the time. Perhaps they were given a cool reception and caused Halley to team up with Chambers in order to bring a bit of showmanship to the façades. Chambers had a colourful career, and was the architect of Woking Mosque in 1899. Certainly the plans devised with Chambers are far closer in style to the flats as actually built, full of free-style Queen Anne details.⁶¹

Possibly Halley never intended to carry out the development himself, for in December 1892 he assigned his agreement to Charles Julius Knowles for £2,000. By then Halley had already acquired the largest empty plot in Albert Bridge Road and submitted plans to build flats there (Albany Mansions, see below).⁶² Knowles was a successful businessman who had already dabbled in property speculation, though this was perhaps his largest venture. Originally from Russia, and formerly named Charles Kino, he came to London as a tailor with his brothers, becoming a naturalized British citizen in 1866. He amassed great wealth, leaving an estate in excess of £1 million when he died in 1900, and was a patron and friend of artists such as Whistler, Legros and Rodin.⁶³

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In all Knowles built seven blocks on Prince of Wales Drive: from west to east, Park, Norfolk (originally Sidestrand), Cyril, Overstrand, Primrose, York and Prince of Wales Mansions. One additional set was built behind Prince of Wales Mansions on the Albert Palace site, and duly named Albert Palace Mansions. Some of these names suggest a connection with Cyril Flower, Lord Battersea, owner of the adjacent Park Town estate, who had employed the Kino family firm in the 1870s to supply dress coats for his staff, so it seems plausible that he had some financial involvement in the development, either directly or through his wife's family, the Rothschilds.⁶⁴

Knowles's agent in charge of the development was Charles Watkins, who had risen through the ranks of the building trade to become an architect and surveyor. Although his signature appears with Knowles's on most of the plans, he was not their architect. Designs for Overstrand Mansions (Ill. 3.16), the first to be built, were drawn up by Allan Ovenden Collard, later an active member of C. R. Ashbee's London Survey Committee. Tenders were advertised in January 1893 for the erection of the first portion of these flats, and Harry Johnson's of £54,000 accepted.⁶⁵ Johnson, a peripatetic builder, by then settled in Wood Green, was to put up the lion's share of the Battersea Park flats – some 600 all told. Like many of the ranges, Overstrand Mansions were conceived as a series of discrete but interlinked blocks, generally with two apartments to a floor, behind what was otherwise a continuous frontage, allowing them to be erected and occupied in phases. The entire run of flats, consisting of a sequence of ten blocks, was finished early in 1894. The freehold ground rents were then offered for sale at auction.⁶⁶

Cyril Mansions were built next, in 1894–5. Continuing westwards, plans were approved in October 1894 for Norfolk and Park Mansions. Also in 1894 Knowles turned his attention to the land east of Overstrand Mansions, submitting plans for Primrose Mansions.⁶⁷ These presumably were named after the Prime Minister, Archibald Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery, who took

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up office in March 1894, and whose late wife had been another Rothschild heiress; an alternative candidate is Rosebery's cousin Herbert Primrose, at this time Secretary to the First Commissioner of Works. An advertisement appeared in April 1896 to let flats in 'magnificent residences' (Cyril and Primrose Mansions), giving the rents as between £60 and £80 per annum for suites of seven rooms, bathroom and two WCs, suitable for large or small families.⁶⁸

Moving eastwards, York Mansions differ most from the other flats. They did not back on to lower-grade housing but occupied the full depth of the ground to Lurline Gardens, on the other side of which stood Battersea Polytechnic. The architect here was Frederick Pilkington, and there is a marked stylistic difference, with a plainer main elevation (made plainer today having lost its classical urns and pediments), and a flat roof. Pilkington's plans, though approved by the Commissioners in 1896, were rejected by the LCC and Battersea Vestry, but this did not stop building from beginning. J. T. Pilditch, the Vestry's surveyor, complained to Charles Reeks: 'to say the least of it, there appears to be a spirit of indifference on behalf of the architect to the property, as to whether he meets the requirements of the Council or the Vestry, or otherwise'. Amendments to the plans finally won the necessary sanction and the flats were completed in 1898.⁶⁹

Last to be built were Prince of Wales and Albert Palace Mansions at the less fashionable end of the development, on the site of the Albert Palace. Knowles began negotiations with the Commissioners here late in 1893, offering less than he had elsewhere on the estate. However, rival developers were showing an interest in the site or in acquiring the defunct palace, while the LCC was being urged to buy the exhibition building for 'public purposes'.⁷⁰ Knowles at first proposed leaving the Palace standing, and building only on the vacant part of the site until the fuss had died down; but in the end the Commissioners cleared the site as part of his agreement (of

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May 1894) and sold the materials at auction, Knowles having already arranged to buy some for use in his construction work.⁷¹

Taking a 99-year lease at £1,000 per annum, Knowles agreed to lay out £3,000 on each block of flats. Overstrand Mansions had cost him much more (around £5,000 per block), but letting was not going as quickly as had been hoped. Plans for Prince of Wales and Albert Palace Mansions were not submitted until January 1898, when all the other flats had either been completed or were nearly so. The architect was John A. Gill Knight, who was designing mansion flats south of Stamford Brook Common around the same time, and later designed more in Basil Street, Chelsea (where Harry Johnson was again the builder). When Knowles died suddenly in February 1900, about half the flats had been built on the Albert Palace site. Charles Watkins, Knowles's surveyor, continued to act for his executors.⁷²

At the same time that Knowles bought John Halley's building agreement for the flats in Prince of Wales Drive, the latter was just beginning his own mansion-flat developments west of the park in Albert Bridge Road. As early as 1891 the residents of the largest houses there complained to the Office of Works about Halley's proposals to build 'lodgings', fearing the location would not attract the high class of tenant that similar flats north of the river might, and that an influx of artisans would ruin the value of their own property.⁷³

Nevertheless, Halley's proposals for two sets of flats (Albany and Albert Mansions) were approved. Although Halley alone dealt with the Office of Works, he had a co-developer here, Captain Juba Page Kennerley – a colourful character who had dabbled in a variety of dubious money-making schemes, including as a builder and speculator in New York in the late 1880s. Initial plans for Albany Mansions were drawn up by W. I. Chambers by July 1892. His designs were similar to those for Prince of Wales Drive, though of

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four storeys and attics rather than three. The name proposed was 'Chelsea Reach Mansions', as advertisements to let flats in the area consistently gave the address as Chelsea Reach, Battersea remaining obstinately unfashionable.⁷⁴

Plans for Albert Mansions were submitted by Halley in April 1893. Work must have proceeded rapidly as flats were being advertised for rent by the end of November that year, at £45 to £50 per annum; the builder was C. W. Ward.⁷⁵ But it is possible that work came to a halt in the winter of 1894–5 when Kennerley was indicted for theft and declared bankrupt, and the flats were perhaps finished under Halley alone. This would certainly explain the change in style, the three blocks to the north, completed first, being more in keeping with the look and scale of the semi-detached villas adjoining, whereas the two southern blocks were considerably wider and with a stronger Queen Anne flavour.⁷⁶ Exceptional for Battersea and possessing great charm is Albert Studios, the single-storey gabled range of purpose-built studios built by Halley behind the flats (Ill. 3.19). The area was already attracting artists. In addition to the sculptor François Verheyden at Hertford Lodge, four artists were living in Hertford Gardens, and this may well have suggested the inclusion of studios and the name originally proposed, 'Academy Chambers'.⁷⁷

Albany Mansions, built in 1894–6, were much plainer and taller at five full storeys instead of the four with attics previously proposed. They have eight blocks or divisions, each with a pair of flats per floor. Almost all the ornament has been stripped away, leaving the rhythm of the tall canted bay windows interspersed with flat double-gabled bays to relieve the monotony.⁷⁸

The last two building plots to be taken in Albert Bridge Road were much smaller, but on each a single mansion block was erected. At Cranbourne Court, Halley was again involved, as was J. P. Kennerley (now an

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undischarged bankrupt) as head lessee and builder, using the alias John Cranbourne. Building work was carried out in 1895 by his own firm, Cranbourne & Cranbourne, based in Westbourne Grove close to where Kennerley was living with his mistress.⁷⁹ Consisting of a single, five-storey block, Cranbourne Court has a central entrance leading to flats on either side of the central stair.

A similar block, Stafford Mansions, was built in 1895 next to Stafford Lodge further down Albert Bridge Road. Here the developer was Edmund Ridout, a land and estate agent of Sloane Square, who also bought the lodge, dividing it into two. Ridout's architect was Edward F. Seaman. Halley was to be involved with the development of two other blocks of mansion flats: Connaught Mansions, of 1896–8, at the western end of Prince of Wales Drive; and Cambridge Mansions, of 1898–9, on the north side of Cambridge Road. James R. Ward was the builder for both.⁸⁰

Although the flats were the creation of a limited number of developers, architects and builders, and all were faced in a unifying red brick, there was variety in their architectural treatment (Ills 3.16–23). A. O. Collard's Overstrand Mansions, the first to go up, have an exuberant long, symmetrical frontage in a free Queen Anne cum Northern Renaissance style, with a varied skyline of gables, dormers and tall chimneys, interspersed with little turrets; Norman Shaw's Albert Hall Mansions (1879–86) are the obvious precedent. Tall, canted bays add movement, and entrances are marked by Baroque door surrounds – though not as heavy and ornate as suggested by Collard's drawings. Cyril Mansions are similar, suggesting the same hand at work. Norfolk, Park and Primrose Mansions have a stronger neo-Georgian domestic flavour; their hipped dormer roofs are prominent, and in places triangular pediments appear on the main frontages, as well as expanses of white-painted render to set off the red brick. Whether or not these too were designed by Collard, Shaw is again the likely inspiration. F. T. Pilkington's robust, flat-

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fronted classicism and muted sandstone dressings ensure that York Mansions stand out from the crowd, while Gill Knight's later Prince of Wales and Albert Palace Mansions are plainer, but exhibit the banded brick and stone look then in vogue. Those blocks further away from the park, such as Cambridge and Connaught Mansions, tend also to be less ornate.

Building the flats in separate blocks or divisions within a continuous frontage probably eased the strain on developers and builders, but it brought certain drawbacks to the internal planning. Often the blocks had quite narrow frontages and long back extensions, with a pair of flats per floor either side of a central entrance – producing a footprint not unlike that of a pair of semi-detached houses. The reception rooms at the front commanded the best views, so bedrooms had often to be placed at the rear, as at Albany and York Mansions (Ill. 3.23); this could necessitate a long, dark corridor, and left the kitchen, bathroom and other service or servants' rooms (and potentially noise and smell) at the apartment's centre. The alternative, as at Primrose Mansions, was to plan the bedrooms behind the reception rooms, with the servants' and kitchen accommodation to the rear, but then food had to be carried a long way for meals, and bedrooms had a poor outlook. The bigger and better-class ranges, such as Norfolk, Overstrand and Cyril Mansions, avoided this conundrum by giving the apartments longer frontages, often with a master bedroom overlooking the park alongside the drawing and dining rooms, and grouping the servants' and subsidiary rooms together compactly.⁸¹

Social character

According to Booth's survey of 1899, the Crown estate district included 'the whole of the wealth and aristocracy of what one is accustomed to think of as Battersea'. Apart from the corner close to Battersea Bridge there was little or no outright poverty. The older houses on Albert Bridge Road were still the

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best and 'most aristocratic'. But a shift took place during the 1890s when the mansion flats were built. Although the apartments overlooking the park commanded rents affordable only to the comfortably off, the police evidence transmitted to Booth's investigator was that there were 'a good many queer customers' among the residents – encapsulating the late-Victorian suspicion of London's middle-class flat-dwellers as a faster, younger, more socially liberated set. In particular, the cheaper flats in Albert Bridge Road were said to house 'many kept women and prostitutes'; none of the blocks was free from suspicion.⁸²

As the flats went up, the status of those living in the streets behind began to sink. Multi-occupancy was becoming the norm towards Battersea Park Road, and new buildings, such as Alfred Boon's on Lurline Gardens of the mid 1890s, were designed specifically with a working-class population in mind. Occupants here at the turn of the century were mostly unskilled labourers, railway workers, domestics and shop assistants, with a few skilled workers and clerks. Booth speculated that the middle classes had either gone further afield or been drawn to the new, more attractive flats, with their 'splendid open outlook on the park'.⁸³

A short story by P. G. Wodehouse about a police constable whose beat covers a stretch of the mansion flats in Prince of Wales Drive describes the inhabitants – the 'cliff-dwellers':

Authors, musicians, newspaper men, actors, and artists are the inhabitants of these mansions. A child could control them. They assault and batter nothing but pianos; they steal nothing but ideas; they murder nobody except Chopin and Beethoven. Not through these shall an ambitious young constable achieve promotion.⁸⁴

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The flats also form the backdrop to Philip Gibbs's novel *Intellectual Mansions* (1910), which paints a similar picture of aspiring, second-rank artists, musicians and writers – 'the world of the "Would-be-greats" ... the "Just-fall-shorts"', where 'you will find disappointed hopes staring at you from the title pages of books which nobody reads, from pictures ... which nobody buys'.⁸⁵ Gibbs contrasts the flat-dwellers of Battersea Park, worrying over small economies and travelling up to town 'by a brown bus and a District train', with those of older, wealthier areas 'across the water', where, with a 'nod to men disguised as Teddy Bears', one could be 'whirled away in motor cars and glorious luxury'. Gibbs includes a resident doubtless modelled on the flats' best-known occupant: G. K. Chesterton. The Chestertons lived at 60 Overstrand Mansions from 1903 until 1909 (Ill. 3.24). According to his friend and biographer, Maisie Ward, the Chestertons altered their flat, knocking through the drawing and dining rooms to make one large room, 'as soon as they could afford it'.⁸⁶ Hilaire Belloc and his family were frequent guests, and the Chestertons became friendly with others among the mostly young, recently married couples in their block, 'all tending to the intellectual', including the actor and playwright Charles Rann Kennedy and his wife, the actress Edith Wynne Matthison; and the journalist and author John Saxon Mills, 'a Liberal imperialist with whom Chesterton would gleefully argue for hours'.⁸⁷

Other mansion-dwelling writers included Alfred Alexander Gordon Clark, author of detective novels, who took his pen-name (Cyril Hare) from Cyril Mansions where he had his London home from 1933. Sean O'Casey lived at 49 Overstrand Mansions for a time, where there is a Blue Plaque to him, and the translator and historian Robert Nisbet Bain at No. 7 in the same block. The travel writer Norman Douglas is marked by a small plaque at 63 Albany Mansions, where he lived from 1913 to 1917. Douglas took the flat, his son remembered, because of the greenery outside and because it was cheap:

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The rent was so low that he could afford to lock the door with a clear conscience of not being extravagant when he went abroad on one of his long trips ... There was no central heating nor was there a constant hot water supply; nor were there doormen and liftmen—there was no lift.⁸⁸

A sadder case was the poet Ernest Dowson's consumptive and literary father, Alfred Dowson, who slid down the social scale till he ended up in Albert Mansions, dying there of a suspected suicide in 1894 from an overdose of chloral hydrate.⁸⁹

Artists resident in the area have included the sculptor Charles Sargeant Jagger at 67 Albert Bridge Road, and Francis Bacon, who shared a flat in Overstrand Mansions between 1955 and 1961 with Peter Pollock and Paul Danquah. The silversmiths Omar Ramsden and Alwyn Carr had shared a studio at 6 Albert Studios in 1902, and the abstract painter Terry Frost lodged in Albert Bridge Road during his time at Camberwell School of Art. The 1881 census records various architects living in the area. Some can be linked with development here, such as Edward Hudson at 13 Queen Anne Terrace, and J. S. Quilter in 1891 at Selsey House on Albert Bridge Road. Henry John Hansom, previously a local district surveyor but employed by the LCC after his bankruptcy in 1886, was living at 45 Albert Bridge Road (now demolished) in 1891; and, as an architectural pupil, Giles Gilbert Scott stayed in York Mansions with his two brothers at the turn of the century.⁹⁰

Post-war redevelopment

Bomb damage during the Second World War was particularly severe west of the park around Ethelburga and Bolan Streets. There were also houses lost on Parkgate and Albert Bridge Roads and damage to buildings at the north end

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of Battersea Bridge Road. Where houses were demolished, temporary accommodation went up in their place – about eighty prefabs in all were built in this area. In the early 1960s an even larger area was cleared to make way for the LCC's Ethelburga Estate. South of Prince of Wales Drive war damage was less widespread: here only a few houses were demolished, all in Brynmaer Road. Even at the eastern edge of the park, close to the railways, there was little damage.

The decline of industry and post-war economic slumps left much of the area depressed, particularly towards the riverside between Battersea and Albert Bridges, and along Queenstown Road. Here there has been great change, with new office buildings and blocks of flats. The character of Battersea Park Road is changing too; the laundries have long since fallen silent and found new uses, while the board school and polytechnic have been converted to apartments. This regeneration, begun in the mid 1980s, was still in progress at the time of writing in 2012.

ETHELBURGA ESTATE

This substantial estate between Battersea Bridge and Albert Bridge Roads is understated for an LCC development of its date, 1963–5. Its planning, pleasantly knitting together a series of internal squares, makes up for a certain want of architectural imagination (see Ill. 3.5).

The LCC's involvement with the wedge of land between the main roads to the bridges dates back to 1958, when it agreed to build a hostel here for 200 students as part of the deal for turning Battersea Polytechnic into a college of advanced technology. This tall and imposing building, the future Ralph West Hall, was erected to designs by the LCC Architect's Department in 1959–61 (job architect, Michael Horsman). It was demolished in 2009. Its

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prominent site facing Albert Bridge Road was noted at the planning stage as adjoining an 'area to be redeveloped by the Council to the west'.⁹¹

A scheme duly came before the Council in November 1960. A typical mixed development on a site of some 14 acres, it comprised 578 dwellings distributed between one 23-storey block (the highest yet mooted in Battersea), three blocks of seven-storey flats, and a multitude of lower groups. The density was high, at 145 persons per acre. A notable feature for its date was the proposal to rehabilitate some houses in Rosenau Road (as the LCC had just begun to do elsewhere), partly as flatlets for old people. The LCC housing architect in charge of the project was H. G. Gillett.⁹²

Most of the estate went to tender in January 1963, when Tersons Ltd won with a bid of over £2 million. The main element delayed was the future Ethelburga Tower, to whose height local residents had objected. A tribunal upheld their case, forcing the LCC to lop off six storeys. 'This means that 32 families who are at present badly housed will lose their chance of a decent home', grumbled the Housing Committee's chairman.⁹³ Otherwise the construction phase seems to have gone well, most of the estate being occupied in 1965.

The layout is in the rationalized-picturesque traditions of the LCC. Approaching from the east, one encounters first the arresting Ethelburga Tower, asymmetrically elevated, with maisonettes double-banked along its two long sides. It is tamed, however, by its position in the first of a series of informal squares or 'closes', this one left open to Rosenau Road and with a community centre in the lee of the tower. The enclosing elements to the squares, which all differ in dimensions, are mostly four-storey maisonette blocks, linked by a second-floor walkway system which occasionally bridges across between blocks and marks the transition from one square to the next. In one of the larger spaces is a single shop and Myddleton House, a curious

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survival from the 1930s. The three seven-storey blocks of flats are stretched out in line as a western termination to the estate, presenting a plodding front to Battersea Bridge Road but shielding the spaces behind from noise. The architectural language is simple: expressed brick crosswall construction throughout, the interstices being filled up entirely by windows, doors or spandrel panels, these last painted (at least today) in differing colours according to their position in the squares. This simplicity may explain why so large an LCC estate, exceptionally, received no attention in the architectural journals. The naming of the blocks and internal roads held local significance: Jagger House, and Henty and Maskelyne Closes were called after famous Battersea residents; Watford Close after Watford Villas, and Searles House after Searle Street, both obliterated by the development.

Various ancillary buildings are attached to the Ethelburga Estate. A sizeable site between Searles Close and Battersea Bridge Road had been reserved for old people, with flatlets on the west side of Searles Close (James Searles Lodge) linked to a larger old people's home with a courtyard plan facing Parkgate Road. Ronald Ward & Partners were the architects for both. Though planned in 1965, they appear not to have been built till 1968. The home is now Meadbank Nursing Centre and has been much altered. In 1968 what is now called the Ethelburga Community Centre in Rosenau Road, a pleasant brick building planned round a central octagon, was in preparation. The final element was a primary school to replace the Ethelburga Street School bombed in the war. This new Ethelburga School was built in 1967–9, next to Petworth Street, and demolished after its premature closure in 2000 (vol. 49).⁹⁴

LATER 20TH CENTURY REDEVELOPMENT

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Queenstown Road

The Battersea Park locomotive depot behind its high wall along Queenstown Road had been underused since the 1930s but its main buildings, including three notable railway roundhouses, were not demolished till the 1980s. The first major new building on the site was Marco Polo House (Ill. 3.25). Built in 1987 to designs by the developer-architect Ian Pollard, this post-modern office block achieved immediate notoriety. In 1988 it won an award for development from the *Illustrated London News*, which found it to be ‘an outstanding, controversial new London landmark’. Pollard himself, a chartered surveyor by training, was no stranger to controversy. His self-designed developments for his company Flaxyard often echoed those of his contemporaries James Stirling and John Outram, but took their sense of parody and humour to new extremes while abandoning their underlying thoughtfulness. A playful Egyptian-style store for Homebase on Warwick Road, Earl’s Court, opened in 1988, brought Pollard particular opprobrium. Shortly afterwards he turned his back on development in the late 1980s slump.

At Marco Polo House, Pollard had intended to face its monumental neoclassical façades in polished white concrete or white ceramic tiles, but came across Neopariés (also known as Neo-Paris or neoparium), a crystallized glass-ceramic material from Japan with a similar appearance to marble, which he used instead, dramatically adding to the building costs. This was deployed in grey and white banded piers, interspersed with panels of dark tinted Pilkington glass, which give the building its distinctive stripey look. The entrances at each compass point are framed by giant arches rising to a broken pediment, the hole in the pediment – the ‘mark of the Polo mint’ – supposedly suggested the name for the building.⁹⁵

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Loved and loathed in equal measure, it epitomised the Thatcherite spirit of the 1980s. It has had a series of often high-profile occupants, beginning with the *Observer* newspaper, and British Satellite Broadcasting television. Latterly it has housed the offices of the QVC television shopping channel. In 2006 the site was bought for £63m by a Russian consortium, Anastasia Ltd, which embarked on a joint redevelopment scheme with the Marcus Cooper Group. In 2011 plans were submitted by the architects Scott Brownrigg to demolish Marco Polo House and build in its stead two raking glass-fronted tower blocks, with 450-plus luxury flats, as well as shops and offices, at an estimated cost of £500m.⁹⁶ The site covers just over three acres and forms the western edge of the large Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea Opportunity Area. It is expected that Marco Polo House will be demolished when QVC's lease expires in 2012. Pollard was critical of the latest plans, which he described as a 'lower grade of architecture', adding that 'Marco was a fun building', intended to stand out from the railway lines, Battersea Power Station, and the gasholders.⁹⁷

In contrast to Marco Polo House's quirky architectural merits, the proposed new development is in keeping with the two other unexceptional and seemingly endless apartment blocks which take up most of the rest of this sector of Queenstown Road: Chelsea Bridge Wharf, built by Berkeley Homes in 2001–6 (Scott Brownrigg, architects) and incorporating a large hotel; and The Bridge, by Arup Associates for London Town plc, built in 2001–2.⁹⁸

Battersea Park Road (north side)

Many of the original non-domestic buildings permitted by the Park Commissioners have been converted to new uses. One loss, not much regretted, was Victoria Dwellings. These were acquired by Wandsworth Council in 1969, originally with the intention of demolition, but were

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modernised instead and only finally pulled down in 1983.⁹⁹ Elmwood Court flats and sheltered housing were built on their site in 1984 for the Peabody Trust.

Further west, several educational and commercial buildings have recently become housing. This began around 2000 when the former Battersea Park School was turned into loft-style apartments named Old Chesterton Building (110–116 Battersea Park Road) in a gated development for Thirlstone Homes (HM2 architects, of Harper Mackay). Battersea Polytechnic was taken on by St James Homes (like Thirlstone, part of the Berkeley Group) and converted into flats with a new building added to its rear in 2006–8 to form Kingsway Square.¹⁰⁰

The Spiers & Pond laundry site was transformed in 2005–8 into The Quadrangle, a mix of apartments, commercial and office space, developed by Battersea Park Ltd Liability Partnership with McCusker Storey McIntosh as architects. Two squat 1960s office blocks were demolished, and a new range was constructed fronting Battersea Park Road. The façades of the laundry buildings to the side and rear have been retained.¹⁰¹

As yet the old Imperial Laundry has remained relatively intact, but the former job centre and employment service offices on the corner of Beechmore Road were demolished in 2010. In 2011 planning permission was sought by Shanly Homes to erect seven terraced houses on the site.¹⁰²

The riverfront

By 2013 the redevelopment of the riverside area between the two bridges was all but complete. Albert Bridge House, a 1960s office block beside Albert Bridge, led the way (it has since been demolished for high-class flats of the

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same name by Michael Aukett). At the other end, Michael Lyell & Associates' Glassmill, a 1980s office building, took a similar position overlooking the river at Battersea Bridge. But between these two bookmarks run-down wharves, warehouses and a bus depot hung on into the 1990s. Now in their place along the riverfront sit two major buildings designed by Norman Foster's firm: Riverside Apartments & Studio and Albion Riverside. They occupy contiguous sites and each comprises one main building with a number of smaller satellite blocks alongside (see Ill. 0.19).¹⁰³

Riverside came first, built in 1986–90 as the suave new London offices of Foster Associates (now Foster and Partners), unusually for the time with private flats for sale in the upper storeys. This integrated, mixed use broke with the accepted planning guidelines for separate zones, but tallied with Foster's ideas about integrated 'urban living'. Wandsworth Council was supportive, recognizing the potential benefit in regenerating and pedestrianizing the riverside area around Ransome's Dock.

The move to Battersea was prompted by a growing dissatisfaction with the crowded Fosters' offices in Great Portland Street and a desire to unite the major elements of the design process under one roof. The search for a suitable site with a 'riverside perspective' took some time before the land west of Ransome's Dock became available in the mid-1980s. Foster intended to act as architect and developer, but the financial liability was too great. Despite the backing of the local authority, it also proved hard to find a developer willing to take on Foster's concept of leasing or selling the flats within an integrated building to help fund the whole project. Following a chance meeting with Foster, David Gabbay of O & H Construction, then involved in developing Waterside Point, a block of flats on the opposite flank of Ransome's Dock, took on the Riverside scheme with his partners there, Petmoor Developments. Petmoor acquired the freehold and offered Fosters a protected low rent for the offices, while O & H Construction acted as general contractors.¹⁰⁴

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As completed, Riverside comprises Foster and Partners' studio on the lower three floors of an eight-storey building, beneath residential flats and a penthouse. Access is from the rear, where a courtyard has been formed between the main building and a two-storey pavilion behind containing further studio space and a print shop. Fosters had a free hand in the overall design and the internal finish of the architectural office (Ill. 3.27). A grand formal stair leads up to the open-plan main studio, a double-height space at first-floor level dominated by ranks of long parallel workbenches, where each member of staff is allocated an identical, 'democratic' work-space. In theory there are no private rooms. The Foster 'look' pervades throughout, emphasised by matt grey paint finishes, and details such as industrial-type aluminium shelving units with grey information folders in the technical library. Only in the apartments, where Petmoor had some control over the internal finish, was the Foster minimalism undermined by gold taps and ornate door ironmongery.

Albion Riverside, built for the Hong Kong-based developers, Hutchison Whampoa in 1999–2003, is a larger development on the adjoining site westwards. It carries on the Foster practice's mixed-use ethos, bringing together offices, apartments, shops, cafés, restaurants, galleries and a gym with a public open space and Thameside walk. But it took time and compromise to achieve. The present crescent-shaped 11-storey apartment block was the fifth design. Early schemes of similar configuration were bulkier, taller and roundly criticized. A less imaginative pair of rectangular blocks arranged in a V came next, but this was described as 'inferior' by the Royal Fine Art Commission and also withdrawn. After a reduction in height down to eleven storeys at its tallest point, and the inclusion of a separate block of social housing, a revived crescent design finally won approval.¹⁰⁵

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The main building's curvilinear rear elevation and rippled frontage mark it as a product of the late 1990s, alongside other contemporary 'organic' Foster designs, such as the Swiss Re building and City Hall (Ills 0.19, 3.29). The project architect, Andy Bow, made the point that such complex geometric shapes were made possible only through recent advances in computer software. The bulbous form of Albion Riverside has earned it nicknames: kidney bean, doughnut, even 'huge camembert on stilts'.¹⁰⁶ The 'stilts' refer to the giant, raking V-shaped concrete columns, which lift the radial concrete superstructure for the 183 apartments and 12 penthouses above a ground-floor space given over to shops, offices and circulation. A basement car park fills the entire site beneath. The main façade is mostly of glass, with curved balconies (big enough for 'outdoor dining') and clear balustrades. In contrast the back elevation and the elaborately curved roof are both aluminium-clad. Ove Arup & Partners were the consulting and mechanical engineers.¹⁰⁷ The apartments are buffered by two four-storey rectilinear office blocks to the rear (one of them the UK headquarters of Hutchison Whampoa), and a seven-storey block of 45 low-cost flats on the west side for the Peabody Trust.

The other major presence in this area is the Royal College of Art, which in 1990 acquired a substantial 1950s industrial building at the corner of Howie Street and Battersea Bridge Road as premises for sculpture and film-making. In 2006 the building was altered to create the Sculpture School, part of a planned new Battersea campus. A competition for designs to develop the entire site was won by Haworth Tompkins, architects, in 2007.¹⁰⁸ The first of the new facilities to be completed (in 2009) was the Sackler Building, housing the painting department in a converted red-brick post-war factory, enhanced by a saw-tooth corrugated steel roof with rows of north lights for the studios. Funds were contributed by the Dr Mortimer & Theresa Sackler Foundation and proceeds from the sale of a Francis Bacon study from the College's collection; the main contractor was LIFE Build Solutions. In 2010 work then began on the Dyson Building, occupying a large corner site with its main

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entrance on Battersea Bridge Road. When completed in 2012 this will house the college's printmaking and photography departments. Funding for the project was boosted by a large donation from James Dyson, a former student, and by an art auction featuring work by other alumni.¹⁰⁹

Near by at 9-15 Elcho Street is another recent warehouse extension, the Vivienne Westwood Studios, where Anarchitect Ltd has recast the designer's original premises, in a 1980s light industrial building, as a five-storey studio.¹¹⁰