

Battersea Park Road to Latchmere Road

Three-quarters of a mile separates Queenstown and Latchmere Roads by way of Battersea Park Road. Almost parallel to the south runs the barrier of the raised and multi-tracked main-line railway from Waterloo to Clapham Junction with its various converging and diverging branches. The tapered east-west enclave between these boundaries forms the subject of this chapter. Behind a ragged fringe along Battersea Park Road's south side, housing estates dominate the district. They range from the Edwardian Latchmere Estate, one of Britain's foremost early essays in municipal housing, to the calamitous Doddington Estate of 1967–71. Incoherent in the mass, they add up to a 'museum' of public housing, reflecting the changefulness and pressures attending the construction of this building type, especially in the post-war years. These later estates destroyed swathes of banal artisan streets of the 1860s and 70s, worn out by the time of their replacement.

As late as the tithe map of 1838, most of this land consisted of typical open strips within Battersea Fields, whose southern edge coincided roughly with the line of the railway. But the two hundred yards of territory closest to the present Queenstown Road belonged to Longhedge Farm, while at the western end behind the main road lay the preponderance of Latchmoor or Latchmere Common. This small common, enclosed in 1832, was bounded southwards by Sheepcote Lane. Two further rights of way through the area appear on the tithe map: Culvert Road, running south through the field strips to Poupart's Farm, beyond the railway; and another such lane, later Henley Street, which has vanished except for a stub at the northern end. The district's western edge is defined by Latchmere Road, formerly Pig Hill Lane or Path.

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First development, 1845–90

All but a fraction of this land was still being cultivated in the 1830s; the only nucleus of buildings was a group of three houses adjacent to the Battersea Park Road–Latchmere Road corner. There are several reasons why it was not better favoured when development took off. Drainage was one cause. Water-retentive soil favoured the market gardening for which Battersea Fields were famous, but damaged buildings until Battersea Park Road acquired a main sewer in 1864–5. Another difficulty was the multiplicity of tenure. The open field-strips were narrow and split among many owners. Between the Longhedge Farm boundary and Culvert Road the tithe map shows 41 separate holdings along the main road in two field divisions, Stony Shot and Cross Road Shot, and 12 further strips in Bird's Hedge Shot, east of Culvert Road. The sale in 1835 of the dozen or so scattered strips in the Spencers' ownership did not change this pattern, even if some purchasers had building in mind.

So co-ordinated planning proved impossible. When minor parallel streets, twenty in overall number, emerged south of Battersea Park Road between Queenstown and Latchmere Roads, they mirrored the shape of the thin field-strips (Ill. 6.2). Yet the strips could equally have been built up with roadside villas and long gardens. The record of the neighbouring Battersea Park and Park Town estates, where despite unified ownership the middle classes declined to meet the development hopes of the 1860s, suggests that the problem along Battersea Park Road was the local housing market at that time, not the specifics of tenure.

In earlier attempts to build here, modest 'villas' were indeed projected. The first venture came in 1846–8. This was the fourth of five Battersea

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developments promoted by the sanguine, self-styled civil engineer Henry Hart Davis, and his third on oddments of land picked up by the lawyer Robert Chambers in the Spencer sale. Among these were two field-strips off Battersea Road (as it then was), wide enough for Davis to set out a street christened Victoria Place – later changed to Doddington Grove after his Somerset birthplace. The original plan was to build six houses or more, either singly or ‘in pairs in Villa style’. Much subcontracting and mortgaging ensued, but by the time Davis failed in 1850 only six such semi-detached pairs had been built at the bottom of Doddington Grove. (Later, one of these ‘villas’ became the Old Farm House beer house.) Likewise, when the prolific Battersea developer Frederick Haines started to develop a strip as Alfred Street, the first houses leased (1856) were an independent pair, before Haines saw the way the wind was blowing and switched to lowly terraces.¹

One such early pair happily survives. These are Shakspeare and Byron Villas, conspicuous on the street front at 445 & 447 Battersea Park Road (Ill. 6.3). Beefy houses with mini-arches in stucco stepping up under the eaves to the apex of the dividing gable, urns topping the corners and other tokens of ebullience, they are attributable to the architect-surveyor-speculator Charles Lee or an assistant. They were leased by Lee in February 1853 to a fellow surveyor, James Jordan of Camden Town. Lee also owned the land to their west – acquired in the Spencer 1835 sale. This was filled up in the 1860s by ordinary terraced houses (Dovedale Terrace, see below), as by then the moment for villas had passed.²

Concerted development along the many different holdings gathered pace around 1860. By the time of the first large-scale Ordnance map (surveyed in about 1867) almost all the small streets south of the main road had been laid out, though much back land remained to be filled. Several protagonists in this campaign were already veterans of small-scale speculation in Battersea, content to pick up one strip here, another there, and work with surveyors and

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builders to cover them quickly, keeping or selling the freeholds afterwards as opportunity arose. Such were Frederick Haines, Henry Hunt, F. E. Knowles, Charles Lee, Jesse Nickinson and Edward Pain – men whose careers and interests have been set out in the studies of Keith Bailey. Two developers hereabouts were different in type. A purely local figure was Samuel Poupart of Poupart's Farm south of the railway. As building neared his market garden, he purchased at least three strips around 1863, and moved from his doomed farmhouse to Shakspeare Villa (445 Battersea Park Road). The local architect Charles Bowes laid out Poupart's plots for him. Bigger fish were the trustees of Thomas Cubitt, who had invested in parcels of land all over Battersea before his death. Two fell in this portion of Battersea Fields (around Blondel Street and St James's Grove), but the houses built there did not differ much from those elsewhere.

The generality were of standard looks and plan, of two or occasionally three storeys above basements. The tenor of the streets was working class from start to finish (Ill. 6.4). Skilled and unskilled manual workers mingled, with no particular trade preponderant, though railwaymen, not specially numerous in 1871, were becoming so in eastern streets like Palmerston Street by 1901. Multiple occupation was the norm, with two and often three households listed per house, and increased as time went on. The small houses were therefore heavily used, and exhausted by the middle of the twentieth century.³ As these streets have almost totally gone, they are listed summarily below in topographical order.

The hinterland between Culvert and Latchmere Roads had a separate character and history. Here the enclosed acres of the former Latchmere Common were used as public allotments from 1832. Several short streets fringed its eastern and northern boundaries. But after 1877 Battersea Vestry became interested in putting the land to better use, and in taking over or selling off its ragged western edge. Hence the construction of what became

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Burns Road (at first named as part of Abercrombie Street to its west), formed in about 1880 running east from Latchmere Road and giving access to the new Latchmere School (1882–3). Other large institutional buildings followed: the Latchmere Baths, Latchmere Road (from 1888–9), predecessor of the Latchmere Leisure Centre; and the Coroner’s Court facing Sheepcote Lane (1901–2). They are discussed in volume 49.

The district’s public life expressed itself chiefly on Battersea Park Road (Ill. 6.5), as the main road became after 1871 (replacing the previous names of Battersea Road and Lower Wandsworth Road). By then little had been built on the Crown land along its north side east of the Dovedale Almshouses, but a near-continuous ribbon of shops and pubs stretched all the way along opposite, pushing forward to the highway as single-storey extensions sallied outwards. Religious buildings along the frontage were few and unambitious; the one survival is the rock-faced St Saviour’s Church of 1869–71. Down the side streets, mission halls on back sites or upper storeys rivalled the pubs in number by the end of the century, but not glamour.

Weightier than the houses behind, the corner pubs tended to come first in each development (Ills 6.6–10). Running from east to west, eleven are recorded: the Park Tavern (later Park Town Hotel); the Eagle; the Magpie, incorporating the Battersea Music Hall until 1880; the Grove Tavern; the General Havelock, named after the hero of Lucknow; the Cricketers (on the opposite corner to the General Havelock); the Prince of Wales; the Royal Arms; the Half Way House, just east of Culvert Road; the Crown; the Clock House Tavern, opposite Albert Bridge Road; and the Latchmere Tavern at the important junction with Battersea Bridge and Latchmere Roads. Such main-road pubs changed hands often and at high prices. The Royal Arms, for instance, was reassigned or remortgaged some dozen times between 1888 and 1906, passing through the books of many brewers and distillers.⁴

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Those on the back streets were mostly smaller, but the Haberdashers Arms on the corner of Culvert Road and Chatham (later Dagnall) Street was on main-road scale. Though it outlasted the housing around it, it has now closed. Of the twelve Victorian pubs along this sector of Battersea Park Road, three survive: the former Prince of Wales at No. 339; the Clock House at No. 441, now the Lighthouse; and the Latchmere at No. 503. All date from the 1860s but have seen successive makeovers. Photographs at different decades of the Prince of Wales, currently the Lost Angel, show public-house romanticism shifting from robustness to sentimental popular culture via a middle period of austerity. The Clock House or Lighthouse has a lively elevation, with flattened arches on the first floor overtopping round-headed windows with broken pediments, and a small crowning clock. This pub, up by 1866, was the centre of operations for Samuel Hancock, sometime builder and licensee. The Battersea Park Road frontage to its immediate east was built up under agreements with him, while the extant Dovedale Terrace to its west at Nos 449–479 was developed in 1867–9 under his son James Hancock, mason, who was living with his family at No. 9 (now 465 Battersea Park Road) in 1871.⁵ The Latchmere was probably also the creation of its first licensee, Jonathan Parsons from Chelsea, who built much in the district but went bankrupt, not for the first time, in 1870.⁶ It is augustly round-windowed, with swags in the frieze and cresting on the Battersea Park Road parapet. Since 1982 it has gained a London-wide reputation for the cabaret theatre in its upstairs space.

Finally, four pubs in this area represent later rebuildings on Victorian sites. These are the Chelsea Reach at 181 Battersea Park Road, successor to the Park Tavern; the Secret Garden at No. 231, till recently the Eagle, rebuilt in the late 1930s for Watneys by their in-house architect, Alfred W. Blomfield; the Grove at No. 279, replacing the pub of the same name; and the British Flag, 101–103 Culvert Road, also of the late 1930s by Culpin & Son, architects.⁷

*Streets west of Queenstown Road*⁸

Palmerston (later Newtown) Street and Russell Street (at first Russell Road, later Ravenet Street). ‘Longhedge No. 1’ estate, developed by a consortium of Rochester businessmen including Jesse Nickinson, John Lewis Levy, Richard Prall and John Coles, some Pimlico-based builders and the Battersea tax-collector James Griffin junior from about 1862; **Palmerston Terrace**, a short connection between the two roads, was being laid out in 1865. Russell Street was prolonged as a passage under the railway into Queenstown Road in about 1878.

Alfred (later Alfreda) Street and Arthur (later Rawson) Street. Frederick Haines, developer, from 1856, most building taking place in about 1860–74 (see Ill.6.6). George Shearing the jazz pianist was born at 67 Arthur Street in 1919.

Rollo Street and Landseer Street. Laid out on land of the architect-developer Charles Lee, from 1864, largely by his successor-firm, Lee Sons & Pain. The short **Landseer Terrace** joined the streets. Rollo Street was continued southwards to meet Longhedge Street, 1872–4. Fourteen houses in these streets, built 1867–8, were the first houses of the Artizans’, Labourers’, and General Dwellings Company (see pages ##).

Park Grove. Developed by Henry John Hunt, c.1863–5.

Kilton Street. Laid out by Charles Bowes for Samuel Poupart, c.1866–71. Freehold largely sold by 1870 to C. H. Spurgeon’s Stockwell Orphanage.

Doddington Grove (later Road). Started as Victoria Place by Henry Hart Davis on land of Robert Chambers, 1846–51 (see above). Completed by Henry John Hunt, 1859–63, then continued to Longhedge Street from 1863.

Austin(s) Road. An old farm track, known as Austins Road by 1851, when freehold was sold. West side partly developed by George Wyld from 1852; east side followed under Glasier & Sons.

Henley (later Harpsden) Street and hinterland. Northern end of Henley Street laid out for Frederick Haines, 1862. Southern end and the east–west **Longhedge Street** (at first **Lucy’s Terrace**) abutting the railway were laid out for John Lucy by Charles Bowes from 1863 on land bought by Daniel Lucy, 1857, and partly used for the Lucy family’s piggery and fat-melting business. Not much built up until **Kennard (later Astle) Street and Oulton Street**, smaller east–west streets, were

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added by Henry Vulliamy for the Lucys from 1879. The two-storey frontage between Harpsden and Parkside Streets, at 325–337 Battersea Park Road, originally Medina Cottages, survives (see Ill. 6.8).

Parkside Street and Chesney Street. Henry Hunt, developer, 1860s. The north end of Parkside Street proceeded from 1860, Chesney Street (intended at first as Mansfield Street) from 1869. The Lost Angel, at 339 Battersea Park Road, survives (see Ills 6.7, 8).

St Saviour's Church (vol. 49) was built on land bought from Samuel Poupart, 1867.

Orkney Street. North end laid out for Edward Pain, developer, from about 1865 by his son, Arthur C. Pain. Continued southwards from 1868.

Warsill Street. A cul-de-sac laid out by W. H. Lamborn, architect-surveyor, for John Boon from 1866.

Half Way House, Battersea Park Road, and Albert Terrace, east side of Culvert Road. Developed for Samuel Poupart, c.1865, under Charles Bowes, architect; pub rebuilt or refronted, 1932.⁹

Chatham (later Dagnall) Street and Anerley Street (north side). East–west streets out of Culvert Road, laid out for F. E. Knowles from 1862. East of Orkney Street, Chatham Street was originally called **Chatham Terrace**.¹⁰ The name Chatham Street was extended in 1891 to cover this and a new north–south street, briefly **St Saviour's Road**, built on former church property between the back of St Saviour's Church and Millgrove Street.¹¹

Anerley Street (south side) and Millgrove Street. Continuations of Edward Pain's Orkney Street development southwards and westwards, c.1868–75.

Blondel(l) Street. East–west street out of Culvert Road laid out for Thomas Cubitt's trustees from 1876, following agreement with Sidney Grist, builder.¹²

Carpenter (later Weybridge) Street. East–west street out of Culvert Road laid out by George Legg for family of James Carpenter, 1872–81.

Sheepcote Lane east of Culvert Road, later Rowditch Lane. Various small developments from 1863 onwards, e.g. **Gaine's Cottages or Place**, a cul de sac backing on to the railway, and **Barton Cottages**.¹³

Berk(e)ley (later Wilditch) Street and Brougham Street. Minor streets off west side of Culvert Road, developed by Glasier & Sons, 1866–79.

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Culvert Road, top of west side, and Carlton (later Leitrim) Grove, east side.

Developed by Glasier & Son from 1867 for Frederick Haines, who bought the land in 1862.¹⁴

Carlton (later Leitrim) Grove, west side. Small development by Henry Hunt with Samuel Hancock from 1863.

St James's Grove and 421–439 Battersea Park Road. Mostly developed by Samuel Hancock under an agreement of 1866 with Thomas Cubitt's trustees, but Nos 431 & 433 were on a strip owned by Edward Pain.¹⁵

475–491 Battersea Park Road were being rebuilt at the time of writing (2012) for Barratt Homes (Hughes Jones Farrell, architects) to provide 64 flats in two blocks.¹⁶ The site was previously occupied by a timber merchant with three Victorian houses of about 1880 (Nos 489–491) at the west end.

Latchmere Street. Now a stub but formerly a through road, perhaps developed under Henry & Robert Cobb, surveyors. Houses leased mostly in 1863 and 1866, the south end following on under Jesse Nickinson in the early 1870s.¹⁷

493–501 Battersea Park Road. Surviving stuccoed terrace of c.1863–6, probably developed by the Cobbs and connected to demolished houses in Latchmere Street and Latchmere Road on Harling Court site.¹⁸

Latchmere Road, west side. In 1868, at the time when the Latchmere pub was built at the Battersea Park Road corner, some of the houses in the surviving terrace at Nos 2–16 to its south were leased by Jesse Nickinson via Jonathan Parsons, the Latchmere's licensee, to Edwin Price, builder. South end of this terrace demolished following war damage and replaced by nursery building at 18 Latchmere Road. Stevenson House (No. 28), at the corner of Abercrombie Street, is a small block of eighteen flats built as Latchmere House by Battersea Borough Council in 1927.¹⁹

Public Housing

Few changes took place to this district's fabric between 1905 and the Second World War. Then in the subsequent thirty years the area east of Culvert Road was completely replanned and rebuilt with council housing, leaving few

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traces of the previous configuration. Changes to the western portion were less radical, but of the same type, with three smaller developments replacing worn-out Victorian artisan streets. The present pattern of the area makes it best to discuss it in terms of its public housing, starting with the early Latchmere Estate, then the swathe of connected estates east of Culvert Road, and finally three smaller estates to the west. The only other modern buildings of note are also municipal: two schools built to serve the reconstructed area, Chesterton and Battersea Park, and the Latchmere Leisure Centre (discussed in volume 49).

Latchmere Estate

This estate, built in 1902–3 and opened by John Burns, is the most vivid extant reminder of the efforts undertaken in Battersea's heyday as a progressive municipality to better the life of its working classes.

The present site covers around half of the ground enclosed in 1832 from Latchmoor Common as allotments for the poor. At that time Battersea's population was around 5,500, but by the 1880s had shot up to 107,000, creating great pressures on space. In the changed circumstances the land's use as allotments seemed 'almost unproductive'. Battersea Vestry first considered and rejected the idea of development in 1877. Having then disposed of the north-west corner for Latchmere School, it appointed a committee in 1884 to examine the issues.²⁰

Initially the thought was to lease the ground to commercial builders conditionally upon 'the erection of healthy homes for the working classes', the proceeds to be used for school scholarships, almshouses, a town hall and library.²¹ However, from 1885 the committee was augmented with, among others, the radical-liberals Andrew Cameron and the builder Thomas

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Spearing. It now reconsidered and by February 1886 reported in favour of the parish erecting dwellings itself. The scheme got as far as a layout for the whole allotment site (taking back land intended for Latchmere Baths) and an elevation for 476 two-storey buildings – half as single houses, half as flats, on similar lines to what was eventually built but on a larger scale. Despite the Social Democratic Federation's encouragement all this came to nothing, as the Local Government Board concluded that the Vestry (then still subservient to the Wandsworth District Board of Works) was not entitled under existing legislation to erect houses itself.²²

In 1887, with independence from the board of works imminent, the Vestry sought to tackle the issue by another route, through Act of Parliament. But even in modified form, with part of the site retained as open space, the Battersea Vestry (Parish Lands) Bill was so widely opposed that it was withdrawn.²³ Had it succeeded, this could be regarded as the first extensive public housing estate in London.

After such setbacks the Latchmere project largely hung fire until 1898, when it was taken up by Fred Knee (1868–1914), a Somerset compositor and sometime SDF activist who had just moved to Battersea.²⁴ That year Knee founded the Workmen's National Housing Council, a pressure group aimed at securing 'good houses for all' by inducing public authorities to build them on a non-profit basis. As vestries were precluded from adopting Part III of the 1890 Housing Act, which permitted larger authorities to build housing outside the constraints of slum-clearance, in May 1899 Battersea Vestry at Knee's suggestion gave a list of suitable sites to the London County Council, which did have such powers.²⁵

The Vestry still hoped to build housing itself, having already voted to ask the LCC to pursue legislation allowing London vestries and district boards to adopt Part III. But events overtook them. The 1899 London

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Government Act reformed the vestries and district boards into metropolitan borough councils, while the 1900 Housing Act permitted the new boroughs to adopt Part III of the old Act. The new Metropolitan Borough of Battersea duly did this in February 1901.²⁶

By this time permission had also been obtained through the LCC's 1900 General Powers Act to develop the Latchmere allotments. Within six weeks of the borough's inception, Knee had joined its inaugural housing committee, a body which took an unusually wide view of the London housing question.²⁷ By November 1901 Battersea Council had decided to hold an architectural competition for developing the site, but insisted that it would adapt premiated designs as it saw fit.²⁸

The plan of the site as defined in the 1900 Act consisted of a simple grid extending the cul-de-sac which became Burns Road (then part of Abercrombie Street) eastwards from Latchmere School, with four streets running south to meet Sheepcote Lane (Ill. 6.11). The ambition, never achieved, was to take Abercrombie Street on to Culvert Road, although a short eastern exit road was provided into Brougham Street.

In the month before the competition Battersea Council sent its Medical Officer of Health to look at the LCC's Totterdown Estate, Tooting, and borrowed drawings for that project and for the LCC's Idenden Cottages near the Blackwall Tunnel, as well as consulting Alderman William Thompson of Richmond, the first suburban London council to build cottages (at Manor Grove, North Sheen, 1894–6). At the invitation of the Workmen's National Housing Council members of the Council also heard Raymond Unwin lecture on 4 November 1901, and obtained his pamphlet *The Art of Building a Home*.²⁹

As the competition drew as many as fifty-eight entries, the Council agreed to employ a professional assessor. They first considered the LCC's

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Architect, W. E. Riley, then his predecessor Thomas Blashill whose fee was deemed 'too heavy'. Having unsuccessfully approached Rowland Plumbe, John Slater and even Norman Shaw (on the grounds that he had helped the LCC over the Kingsway improvement), Blashill's terms were accepted.³⁰

The first outcome of the competition appeared to fulfil expectations of a certain kind of architecture and planning at the Latchmere Estate. The Council had asked for five sets of designs – for a five-roomed house, and for small blocks containing three and four-roomed flats.³¹ After meetings with the housing committee Blashill recommended three sets of designs and, given the number of entries, the Council approved four extra £10 premiums. The winners were George Thow Smith and George Weald, former pupils of Norman Shaw and then still only in their late twenties, but by this time salaried architects in the LCC's housing section.³² The other premiated entries were: (second) J. Sydney Brocklesby of Merton; (third) H. Bertram Tarrant of Wandsworth. The extra premiums were given to Haigh & Spencer of Wealdstone; W. G. Lewton of Reading; William West of London; and F. J. W. Goepel of Leytonstone.

Smith and Weald were now asked to prepare a detailed specification, but their involvement went no further. By May 1902 William Eaton, already employed as architectural assistant to the Borough Surveyor, J. T. Pilditch, had been deployed to work on the estate full-time, evidently taking over the job.³³

Pilditch brought forward three suggested estate layouts using Eaton's designs for five-room houses and two and three-storey blocks of flats based on Smith and Weald's drawings, as well as another three-storey design based on those by William West.³⁴ But in June the Council decided to proceed with two-storey designs only, which meant rejigging the plan to include a fifth north-south street (Matthews Street). In the final blend the estate catered

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particularly for larger families – a constituency most disliked by private landlords, according to Knee – and consisted of eight five-room houses, 69 houses with a three-room flat on each floor, 73 houses with a four-room flat on each floor and six odd houses of four or five rooms: examples of the last are the two shallow double-fronted houses on the east side of Reform Street, encroached on at the time of building by back gardens in Brougham Street.

While the plans as built were essentially those devised by Smith and Weald, adapted in some respects, the elevations appear to have been entirely Eaton's; all traces of the minimal LCC cottage-estate picturesqueness present in the competition designs – square and rectangular casements, roughcast top storeys and occasional Wrenaissance features – were expunged in the interests of economy.³⁵ Plain stock-brick frontages were substituted, with small-paned sash windows, a few bands and quoins of red brick, granolithic cills and chamfered hoods, and salt-glazed bull-nosed reveals to the doors (Ill. 6.12). The front doors of the flats were grouped in two pairs beneath a shallow arch, each double pair topped by straight projecting hoods on moulded brackets (Ill. 6.13). Small forecourts were surrounded by light iron railings, and each house or flat had a small rear garden, reached by a teak staircase from the upper flats.

The servicing of the houses was remarkable. Electric lighting was supplied by the new generating station in Lombard Road, and paid by slot meters, the earliest applicants to live at Latchmere having all expressed the desire to have electricity. This arrangement was rare in working-class housing at the time (though the LCC had tried something similar at Totterdown). Water was supplied from an artesian well at Latchmere Baths.³⁶ In January 1902 the architect and designer James Cornes, who later featured the estate in his book on working-class housing, had called with his business partner, the Lancashire iron founder William Haighton, on Battersea's Town Clerk. Corner was promoting his patent combined kitchen range, boiler and bath (he

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is said to have designed it after losing a family member to an exploding boiler), to be built into the wall between living room and scullery – range to living room side, bath to scullery (Ill. 6.14a,b). These were fitted in all the houses at the high cost of £18 10s apiece.³⁷

The estate's street names were not finalised until early 1903; two years of discussions had yielded sixteen different names, ranging from local and national heroes of liberalism or the Left to the more pedestrian Allotments and Council Streets. Those chosen were Freedom and Reform Streets, while the others commemorated the Chartist and union leader George Odger, John Burns and the recently deceased William Matthews, a councillor who had been among those who pressed to get the estate built. The final name, Joubert, the Boer general who had inflicted an embarrassing defeat on British forces, was the most controversial and drew opposition within the Council; but Battersea was a centre of the Stop the War committee and it was accepted.³⁸

The work, including drainage, sewerage and electric mains, was carried out by the Borough's own Works Department, its largest job yet, between Autumn 1902 and the end of 1903 (Ill. 6.15). Paving, breeze internal walls and granolithic floors were also made by the Works Department. Much was made of the £12,000 saving on the original estimated cost of £116,000.³⁹

John Burns presided over a ceremonial opening on 1 August 1903, before any tenants were in. The *South Western Star* decried the 'rather too long' speech given by Fred Knee at the event. But as well as a victory for local persistence, with its roots in the plan to build a cottage estate here in the 1880s, the estate represented a success for Knee's Workmen's National Housing Council, which favoured practical, simple cottage estates over both block dwellings.⁴⁰

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Despite rents of 7s 6d to 11s a week, the Latchmere Estate was oversubscribed three times over. Of 84 tenants surveyed by the manufacturers of the combined range and boiler in 1903 only one was not satisfied, the rest finding it 'splendid', 'famous' and 'a little beauty': 'we found one tenant boiling 7 Christmas puddings in the boiler from the centre fire [in the range] alone'. Alternating golden poplars and plane trees were planted in the streets, while from 1904 the Battersea Chrysanthemum and Horticultural Society ran competitions to encourage tenants to cultivate their gardens and floral window boxes.⁴¹

Plans were soon made to extend the estate, but this became a saga as lengthy as the original building scheme. William Eaton drew up a scheme in December 1903 but under the terms of the 1900 Act, the council could not build on land north of Burns Road, the central portion of which had become the Latchmere Recreation Ground, unless it provided a replacement. This proved difficult to find, and the offer of land outside the borough on Wandsworth Common was deemed unacceptable. Although powers obtained in 1906 permitted buildings around the edges of the northern site, the extension was not built until 1920–1 when Reform Street was extended northwards around the east and north sides of the recreation ground, connecting with St James's Grove. The design was by the borough surveyor, T. W. A. Hayward. The cottage flats broadly respect the 1902 designs, though they dispense with the paired doors and hoods and are closer to typical cottage estates of the 1920s. Modest picturesqueness is introduced in the grouping of houses around the corner and end of the extended Reform Street, and in the slight breaking back and forth of the frontages.⁴²

The Latchmere Estate, taking in this northern extension and Latchmere School, became a Conservation Area in 1978, given teeth with an Article 4 direction in 1990, in order to safeguard the consistency and simplicity of the original part of the estate.⁴³ The protection became increasingly relevant as

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tenants exercised their right to buy after 1980, and in this it has been successful. The only significant alterations have been a few rear extensions and loft conversions and the addition of 'in-keeping' terraced houses by Paul Brookes Architects at 33–47 Burns Road, added in 1996–7 when Latchmere School became the residential Southside Quarter.⁴⁴

The Battersea Park Road estates (east of Culvert Road)

The unkempt fringe along Battersea Park Road's south side fronts Battersea's largest array of post-war housing estates, stretching back to the railway (Ills 6.1, 16). They are the upshot of thirty years' effort to replace the shabby artisan streets with better housing – an ambition which reached a climax in the saga of the Doddington Estate. The following account treats the area as a single district, and covers its evolution since the 1930s in mainly chronological sequence.

The history of the Battersea Park Road development, as the overall project was generally called until its completion, goes back to a small pre-war clearance scheme at the south-western corner of the district. In 1933 Battersea Council resolved to clear and rebuild two areas under the 1930 Housing Act, at Stewart's Lane, Nine Elms, and the stretch of Sheepcote Lane east of Culvert Road – later renamed Rowditch Lane. While Stewart's Lane went forward, Sheepcote Lane stalled. So in 1936 the London County Council took on the 'congested, damp and dilapidated property', cleared the site and handed it back to Battersea, which prepared a scheme of five-storey walk-up blocks but failed to execute them.⁴⁵

As the Second World War neared its end, authorities embarked on visionary housing plans. In March 1944 Battersea's Housing Committee pronounced the previous Sheepcote Lane scheme wanting. Better, they

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thought, to heed people's 'undoubted preference for houses or maisonettes rather than block dwellings', but to inscribe that within a plan for the whole 60 acres between Battersea Park Road, Culvert Road, Queenstown Road and the railway. The aspiration was to create 1,238 dwellings in a mixture of terraced houses and two- and four-storey flats, with an ultimate population of 6,000 against the pre-war figure of 8,500. Battersea Park Road now became the Council's leading project. But it had no unifying or controlling mind, and soon proved labile. By October 1945 it was to entail 'the complete re-development of the area on modern lines by the construction of multi-storied flats, terraced houses, shopping centre, educational and recreational facilities, etc.', to be tackled section by section, starting with an enlarged Sheepcote Lane development.⁴⁶

The revised **Sheepcote Lane scheme** seems to have been planned before this second change of emphasis. As built in 1946–8 to designs by the Battersea Borough Engineer and Surveyor's staff, it consisted of rows of 20 terraced houses broken by three-storey flats in the middle, all with pitched roofs, now numbered 1–34 Rowditch Lane (south side). As a supplement to their east in 1950–1 came a different-style block of flats, the L-shaped, flat-roofed and prominently balconied Barloch House stretching up Henley Street and round into Blondel Street, and then in 1953 a further short terrace at 1–11 Longhedge Street (H. Fairweather, builder).⁴⁷ A later addition in this zone were the houses of Golding Terrace, Longhedge Street.

From November 1946 attention switched to the eastern end of the area, from Rollo Street (opposite the Battersea Polytechnic) eastwards. As the Borough Surveyor's department was overstretched, the private architects Howes & Jackman were appointed in July 1947 for what became known as the **Rollo (Street) Estate**.⁴⁸ They designed a set of four L-shaped brick-faced blocks of five and six storeys up against the railway (Newtown, Ravenet, Alfreda and Rawson Courts), linked by the future Strasburg Road; and one

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higher block, the eight-storey Rawson Court. Along with these went Bank Court, an independent block at 203–217 Battersea Park Road. This fragmented scheme left clumps of surviving artisan housing between the blocks. The flats were built only in 1951–3, after delay in acquiring properties and awarding the contract, which Battersea wished to give to its Works Department, only to be vetoed by the LCC. In the end the contractor was M. J. Gleeson, except at Bank Court, built by E. S. Moss Ltd. These flats were well-appointed for their date, with lifts even in the lowest blocks. Their plain red brickwork was relieved by coloured tiles round the entrances. The intention to use concrete frames was scuppered by steel shortages during the Korean War, so the construction throughout was of load-bearing brick except at Rawson Court. That block, doubled in length from the first plans, set a new scale for the development.⁴⁹

For the next stage, Battersea Council turned back westwards to the area between Dagnall and Blondel Streets. This four-acre rectangle was christened the Anerley Street site after one of the roads to be expunged, but is now called the **Battersea Park Estate**. The first proposals, exhibited as a model in March 1951 and produced under the Battersea Borough Engineer & Surveyor, H. Atkinson, were to build 230 flats in blocks of four, nine and eleven storeys, proceeding eastwards from Culvert Road. Generous courts were created by aligning the high slab blocks north-south but turning the four-storey ones at right-angles to face Dagnall and Blondel Streets. The high buildings were steel-framed (W. V. Zinn, engineering consultant). The LCC having reduced them to ten storeys, the first eight blocks (Berry, Bishopstone, Dresden, Farnhurst, Hopkinson, MacDonald, Rushlake and Wittering Houses) went ahead in 1954–7 with Rush & Tompkins as contractors. They were succeeded by Langhurst, Lodsworth and Walden Houses, continuing the pattern eastwards under Rush & Tompkins in a new phase called the Dagnall Street section; here the eleventh storey was restored to the high slabs. In a final phase, the so-called Austin Road scheme, Atkinson and Telscombe Houses

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were added in the same idiom by M. J. Gleeson around 1959–61. All these buildings are neatly fronted but even more austere than Rollo Street, enlivened only by differing tones of brick and tilework round the doors.⁵⁰

North of Dagnall Street, sites were slowly cleared for extending Battersea Central Schools and constructing the new Chesterton School, projects not realized till the late 1960s (see vol. 49). That left awkward patches of land around Austin Road and Henley Street, west of the larger Doddington Road section which was to be the ultimate phase of the scheme.⁵¹ Room on the east side of Austin Road had to be found for what is now the Shaftesbury Christian Centre, built in about 1964; later, houses were added beside it, and also the Battersea Fields Medical Practice next to Charlotte Despard Avenue. Nearer Battersea Park Road, Howes, Jackman & Partners in 1962 proposed a single 22-storey tower, square on plan and much taller than anything thus far, for a tight site near the top of Austin Road. It was built in 1963–6 by Robert Hart & Sons and named **Jay Court**, after Douglas Jay, the local MP. Though of indifferent architectural quality, Jay Court had technical interest as an early exercise in lightweight in situ concrete construction, using crosswalls and storey-height cladding panels cast on site. It was emptied by Wandsworth Council in 1984, sold, and renamed Park South in 1988. Unlike many local tower blocks, it has not been reclad.⁵²

One other district should be mentioned before the Doddington Estate itself is dealt with. That is the rectangle between Blondel Street and Rowditch Lane, known at first as the Weybridge Street section but now without a name, its houses being numbered in the two streets. It had been agreed by 1960 to build low-rise housing here, but a preliminary scheme of 1963 shows blocks aligned north–south in parallel, very different from what was built. In the event, Wandsworth's Building Works Department put up fifty pairs of two-storey houses with private gardens in 1965–7. They are designed in the intimate, opaque manner then coming into favour, with end entrances from

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passages and small internal courts (Ill. 6.17). The houses themselves are demurely pitch-roofed and all face south, the north-facing elevations being largely blank and tile-hung or weather-boarded. They reinforce the tone of the earlier housing along Rowditch Avenue, endowing this south-western corner of the district with a suburban quietude, despite the railway's proximity. It was in connection with this work that the eastern end of Sheepcote Lane was renamed Rowditch Lane.⁵³

In 1964 the Battersea Park Road development assumed a faster rhythm. After almost twenty years there was scant sense of social or architectural achievement. Many Victorian terraces remained, particularly east of Austin Road. Battersea Council and its Housing Committee under Sidney Sporle now hoped to crown the last two phases of development, designated as Doddington and Newtown Roads, with a spectacular memorial, before Wandsworth inherited their powers the following year. The sections, covering some 22 acres and awkwardly separated by Rawson Court, were now pursued urgently and simultaneously, with the aim of building 1,000 dwellings on what has generally been called the **Doddington Estate**. A preliminary layout of 1963 shows the usual balance of low and high blocks, including three further towers on the model of Jay Court. But by the end of 1964 J. C. Bianco & Partners (headed by Joseph Capo Bianco), advocates of production-driven housing, had been appointed engineering consultants, and Emberton, Franck & Tardrew architects for both sections, supplanting Howes & Jackman.⁵⁴ Battersea were already pursuing systems-building at the Winstanley Estate, so there was no absolute novelty about this initiative. Nor were the architects new to Battersea, as they had been working at Southlands and Chatham Road.

Early in 1965, J. C. Bianco produced a report on possible methods of industrialized building: ten were investigated and three shortlisted. In the last months of Battersea Borough Council, the borough engineer and his principal

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architect set out on the well-trodden route to visit European industrialized housing, inspecting the Balency system in Paris and the Jespersen system in Copenhagen. In June the new Wandsworth Housing Committee, again chaired by Sporle, beat the same path, taking in also Allbetong system housing at Malmo. They followed the professionals too by recommending a limited competition for the Doddington Estate between three contractors: John Laing (Construction) Ltd, who held the British rights to Jespersen; Holland & Hannen and Cubitts, sponsors for Balency; and Reema Ltd. If Balency, untried in Britain, was unavailable, Wates Ltd might participate, using their system for the Winstanley Estate.⁵⁵

Despite this semblance of competition, only Laings was wooed. The Housing Committee argued in March 1966 that Jespersen was ‘ideally suited’ to the site. ‘Jespersen 12M’ was indeed probably the most sophisticated system then on the housing market. It used structural crosswalls and wall units of varying width, allowing rare elevational freedom for a ‘heavy panel’ system. Emberton & Tardrew (as the architects had become) duly tailored their design to the technique. The majority of the approximately 970 units now scheduled (exact numbers differ) were shoehorned into six long blocks rising from between ten to fourteen storeys, aligned to face east and west to minimize noise from the road and the railway, and linked by covered car-parks with children’s play space on top. The three blocks in the Newtown section, east of Rawson Court – the future Turpin House, Park Court and Connor Court – stood in isolation. But in the Doddington section, west of Rawson Court, the blocks were longer, articulated by changes in angle as well as the sudden leaps in height characteristic of Jespersen, and linked at alternate levels by pedestrian bridges across the winding circulation route, to be named Francis Chichester Way and Charlotte Despard Avenue. Flanked by combined stair-and-lift towers and by flue stacks, these internal canyons acquired an ominous grandeur (Ills 16.16, 18). To their south lay a lower scatter of blocks jumping down box-wise from eight to four storeys. The

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eventual names chosen for the Doddington blocks were Arthur Court, Bolton Court, Cromwell House, Falkener Court, Kennard House, Landseer House, Lucas Court, Palmerston House, Russell Court, St George Court, Voltaire Court and Young's Court. The whole estate was to be space-heated from a single boiler house, intended also to serve earlier blocks near by. There was promise of a 'suitably sized' social centre to include shops, an old people's home, library and health clinic, all on a shallow site facing Battersea Park Road. 'This will be the largest industrialised building project yet undertaken in the London area', announced the Housing Committee in June 1966. 'We have thrown down the gauntlet to London', exulted Sir Maurice Laing.⁵⁶

John Laing Ltd signed a negotiated contract for £6,194,849 in about July 1967. Under the fast-track timetable, work was to commence that October, with the first handovers taking place in Autumn 1969, the rest the following spring. Following an expeditious start, a ceremonial stone-laying took place on 4 May 1968 at which Sporle's deputy, Sam Dougherty, acclaimed him as 'Mr Battersea'.⁵⁷ Under a fortnight later came the partial collapse after a gas explosion of Ronan Point, West Ham, and with it a national panic about industrialized housing. All systems were investigated and modified. Though Jespersen 12M was not at fault, changes to the jointing of the panels were enforced, causing expense and delay; it was also agreed to exclude gas from all the flats.⁵⁸

The handovers were therefore delayed by several months, occurring between December 1969 and February 1971. One early such event was botched, with tenants turning up to find their flats not ready. No sooner had the housing filled up than troubles arose. Problems with vandalism were constant, but paled besides the severe and chronic difficulties with the district heating. At one time there was a continual loss of heating in 400 out of the 970 flats, causing Wandsworth to keep two plumbers on stand-by to deal with the problems. Though Wandsworth contemplated suing J. C. Bianco, their

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lawyers advised against it. There were also some severe backflows of sewage. The atmosphere was further soured by the Doddington's role in Sidney Sporle's fall from grace. Among the allegations at his trial for corruption in 1971, it was stated that he had been paid £1,000 in connection with the drainage contract. It was also claimed that an agent for Laings, Peter Day, stood to gain £19,000 as a result of that firm winning the contract without competition. To add to the estate's woes, its size and conspicuousness from the railway made it an aunt sally for the new-found zeal of the architectural press in attacking high-rise and industrialized housing.⁵⁹

Already in October 1972 the tenants' association reported that the Doddington was deteriorating into a slum. Part of the problem was inadequate social facilities. In the strip reserved for them along Battersea Park Road, the library and an embryonic shopping centre also designed by Emberton, Tardrew & Partners, were ready by 1970. A children's health centre was opened early in 1972 and an old people's home at the corner of Austin Road shortly afterwards (now being replaced by a private one). But in 1974 there was still nowhere for children to go. Calls for a public enquiry about the estate were made in 1976-7, but rejected by Government. A first campaign of remedial works did little to improve the overall environment.⁶⁰

In 1984 the *South London Press* alleged that a third of the tenants were on the housing transfer lists, and labelled the Doddington 'the Estate of Terror' on account of its high crime-rate, one councillor who lived there having been burgled three times. A Wandsworth member of staff remembered: 'The council officers themselves had lost confidence in the estate. They just couldn't cope with the sheer volume of problems'.⁶¹ Wandsworth Council, by then under Conservative control, now decided to tackle the problem by simultaneous estate improvements and privatization. Flats were marketed and sold at rockbottom prices, and improvements costing £17 million inaugurated in 1986, following a report from the architects

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Lyster, Grillet & Harding and much consultation with the tenants. A lengthy process of renewal now took place under these architects (partner in charge, Luis Renau; job architect, Paul Notley). It lasted from 1986 to 1993, and proceeded in stages on the Doddington section from west to east. Most tenants remained in the blocks during the process. The architects found the flats spacious and mostly weatherproof, but their environs dire. The most radical change was the demolition of the vandalized car-parks between the blocks, and their replacement mainly with gardens. The lift and staircase towers were reclad, some of the link bridges removed, and all the windows replaced with double glazing; shallow bay windows were fitted in the first portion refurbished where tenants requested them, but later on were omitted. Additions at the base of the blocks took a weak, polychromatic brick form with blue corrugated roofs – at total odds with the original aesthetic, but for that reason acceptable to the tenants. In the upper portions, paint was applied to dissipate concrete drabness. The overall effect, if chaotic, is friendlier than what it replaced. In the centre of the renovated Doddington section a circular public space was decked out with some droll sculpture (Ill. 6.19), previously shown in Battersea Park and among Paula Haughney's first commissions (1991).⁶²

A combination of these improvements and of sales has lifted but not quite tamed the Doddington. The reputed aim of Wandsworth Council in 1987, to create a place where 'a middle class couple can come back to late at night and buy some pâté and a bottle of wine', seems less far-fetched now, given changes in habits of consumption and housing costs.⁶³

Harling Court, Latchmere Road

This three-sided block of Battersea Council flats in two tones of brickwork dates from 1959–60; the builders were M. J. Gleeson Ltd. Its name

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commemorates Alderman H. Harling, a long-time fixture on Battersea's Housing Committee. Harling Court replaced some prefabs put up on the site of badly bombed houses here, according to a plan mooted in 1954. The first design rose to seven storeys, but this was reduced to four containing 72 dwellings. The balconies to the upper flats line the outside of the block, leaving the better rooms a good view of the open courtyard garden towards Latchmere Road.⁶⁴

Wilditch Estate

Tucked between the Latchmere Estate and the south-eastern bulge of Culvert Road north of Sheepcote Lane, this is one of the dourer local post-war housing estates. It was designed under Battersea Council but built by Wandsworth.

Plans made by the Borough Engineer's Department for clearing and rebuilding a rough triangle of artisan houses with addresses in Brougham Street, Wilditch Street, Culvert Road (west side) and Sheepcote Lane (north side) came before Battersea Council in 1959. They followed the mixed-development model, balancing terraces and shops of between three and five storeys, compact blocks of low-rise flats, and a sixteen-storey tower. The final solution comprised 172 dwellings. The estate's construction in 1965–8 by Wandsworth's Building Works Department was afflicted by delays and deficiencies.⁶⁵ The low-rise elements consisted of three groups of cross-wall terraces (over shops at 50–66 Culvert Road, independent at 68–90 Culvert Road and 90–104 Sheepcote Lane); three squat blocks of brick flats at 18–52 and 54–88 Sheepcote Lane and 92–126 Culvert Road; and five bungalows for the elderly at 38–46 Culvert Road. In the centre rises the 16-storey tower, Weybridge Point.

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Space was reserved at 48 Culvert Road for a community hall, the current Wilditch Centre, and a design made in 1965. A revised version was built much later, in 1975, by F. & H. F. Higgs under Wandsworth's Borough Architect. Weybridge Point was wholly reclad in 2006–7 as part of a refurbishment for Apollo London Ltd by the AK Design Partnership.⁶⁶

St James's Grove

St James's Grove today is just a stub road north of Latchmere Recreation Ground. The housing at its north end, bounded by Battersea Park Road and Culvert Road, is barely recognizable as the remnant of a small but visually challenging estate built by Wandsworth Council in 1969–71, with Clifford Culpin & Partners as architects.

In 1964 a clearance area hereabouts was declared by Battersea Council.⁶⁷ Two years later Wandsworth Borough Council, the new local authority, appointed Culpins as architects. They came forward with a scheme for 140 flats and maisonettes in three five-storey blocks and a high tower, all aligned north–south and linked by a pedestrian deck, in order to provide 100% parking on a tight site of barely 2½ acres. Since the costs per dwelling turned out to be too high, the architects reduced the ceiling heights but raised the tower. The compulsory purchase order, which covered the top half of St James's Grove, the whole of Leirim Grove, and the frontages to Battersea Park Road and Culvert Road, was not confirmed till 1968. Wandsworth's newly elected Conservative administration then insisted that the job should not automatically go to the Council's Building Works Department. So the contract went to tender and eventually in March 1969 to Walter Lawrence & Sons Ltd.⁶⁸

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The completed estate was a late example of the punchy, high-density architecture of the 1960s. The planning was brusque, turning its back on the surrounding streets, the main entrance being from Culvert Road. All four blocks were aligned, and linked by the pedestrian deck which fanned out round the tower to provide a play area and open space over garage roofs. Further garages backed up against Battersea Park Road. The maisonette blocks (two of them numbered in Roydon Close, the easternmost as 14–32 Culvert Road) were of crosswall construction, while the tower, named Castlemaine and twenty storeys high, was of load-bearing concrete with exposed floor slabs and open corner balconies.⁶⁹

Radical improvements to St James's Grove were mooted by Wandsworth Council in 2002–3, when Baily Garner, surveyors and architects, brought forward a scheme for removing the pedestrian decks, refurbishing and refacing all the blocks, relandscaping the area, and opening up the estate again to the south. Further flats were also planned in place of the garages against Battersea Park Road. The result has been to create a new external environment, with building elevations in smooth render. Castlemaine in particular has received a complete facelift; the new flat-surface rain cladding encloses all the balconies and is finished in blue and white, while the top of the tower has received a slick new 'collar' masking the plant room (Ill. 16.20). The three extra blocks towards Battersea Park Road were added in 2008–9, to the designs of Dovetail Architects for Higgins Homes. Faced in yellow brick, they were given the high-flown names of Nebula, Artemis and Sirius for marketing purposes, the whole being called the Orion development. The formal addresses are more prosaic: Lloyd Court, Challis House and Merryfield Court.⁷⁰