

Clapham Common to Lavender Hill

Some eighty acres of Battersea's prime housing stock, ranged between the borough boundary at Wix's Lane in the east and Elspeth Road to the west, form the subject matter of this chapter (Ill. 13.1). Barring the shops and cafés of Lavender Hill and the odd school, the area is solidly residential.

The proximity of the common and the historically more fashionable settlement at Clapham has been hugely influential. Indeed, so strong is Clapham Common's pull and so close the relationship between the buildings and communities ranged around its three sides, that this area has long been regarded as an extension or offshoot of Clapham, rather than part of Battersea. It is further away from the common that Battersea becomes more recognizable, in the traffic and bustle of Lavender Hill and its peculiar shops, and in some of the terraced streets that run off it.

A series of fine merchants' villas strung out along the high ground overlooking the common dominated this area's early history from the 1750s to the 1820s, built over the fields that formerly lay between the two main east-west roads. A clutch of similar houses appeared along the south side of Lavender Hill by the early 1800s. That sense of *rus in urbe* started to fade in the 1870s as developers began to make inroads, bringing lower middle-class terraces to the district around Lavender Hill. With little land left locally and the demand for this kind of housing still growing, the big houses and green spaces facing Clapham Common became the focus of Battersea's last great phase of building activity from the late 1880s to the early 1900s, spawning street upon street of densely packed late-Victorian terraces and flats.

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For a few decades the varied appearance of the building fabric – the mansions in their grounds and the strings of smaller terraced housing – was reflected in a diverse social character that must have been typical of many of Victorian London’s rapidly changing suburbs. This was still considered a ‘good’ area in the early 1900s, when it was ‘not uncommon’ to see twenty or thirty children being led to and from Wix’s Lane School by maidservants. By the 1930s City clerks, local tradesmen, shopkeepers, artisans and labourers ‘of the better type’ predominated; poverty was not unknown but ‘generally it is courageously hidden’.¹ Since then the area, like its counterpart between the commons to the south-west, has seen post-war depression give way to gentrification and a spectacular rise in house-prices.

This chapter begins with an account of the Clapham Common North Side villas, both standing and demolished, that shaped so much of the area’s character. This is succeeded by an east-west gazetteer of later developments that followed, including the houses and shops fronting Lavender Hill. A more general account of Lavender Hill as a whole can be found in Chapter 10.

Clapham Common North Side villas

There was little significant building development here before the mid eighteenth century, though by then mansions for rich City merchants had already peppered the common’s borders to the east and south, nearer to Clapham village.

The watershed came in the 1750s and 60s, a boom time for London suburban building generally. First came the Sister Houses, a matching pair of speculative villas of c.1755 built by the merchant Isaac Akerman to frame a grand vista opposite the mansion established by his father at Battersea Rise. This brought the ideal of the fashionable Clapham villa to the common’s

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north-western reaches and set a standard for others to aspire to. Then in 1763–5 Lord Spencer broke up and sold the former Bolingbroke holdings here, which he had only just acquired, including the land fronting the common, facilitating further development.² Much if not all of that frontage east of the Sisters was purchased in August 1765 by Thomas Barry (d.1770), a Southwark hop merchant, as the southern boundary of a large estate spread out to either side of Lavender Hill. Here another grand house (The Hall) was added c.1770 beside the Sisters, while Barry and his family lived in a ‘neat low building’ further east. Then came the highpoint of the 1780s and 90s, when Barry’s widow Elizabeth presided over a peak in villa-building that saw some fifteen or sixteen new merchants’ residences erected facing the common, in what was generally known – along with the western frontage also being built up at this time – as ‘The Rise’. Several new houses took the name Springwell after a well (situated in the vicinity of the present No. 63) that until c.1789 supplied Clapham with most of its water. It was then closed and superseded by a new well of the same name on the common.³

In 1795, shortly after this burst of activity, Mrs Barry sold the remaining land overlooking the common to Mrs Davenport, owner of The Hall. Her much-enlarged estate was inherited by her son-in-law and daughter, Thomas and Elizabeth Susanna Graham, under whom further villa-building took place in the early 1800s. Within twenty years the process was complete and the North Side frontage fully built up (Ill. 13.2).⁴

By the 1860s a major Victorian intrusion had broken the ranks of Georgian houses on the neighbouring Clapham stretch of North Side, in the form of J. T. Knowles junior’s towering French Renaissance terraces flanking Cedars Road, where he also built rows of detached villas – still aimed at a superior class of Clapham tenant. During the 1870s and early 80s fingers of meaner suburban development began to edge their way towards the common from both north and west, but the North Side villas held their line and

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maintained their cachet. During this period the Metropolitan Board of Works saw 'no signs of any alterations in the Character of the property at this end of the common'. Benjamin Disraeli set his last, unfinished novel among the villas here in 1881, when it was still a 'pretty' suburb and its inhabitants 'chiefly rich merchants, directors of the Bank of England'. But the tide was irresistible and the decade and a half between the mid 1880s and early 1900s saw fourteen of the old houses fall to red-brick terraces and flats. 'Old and wealthy Clapham has gone to dwell in Kensington or Surrey', wrote Charles Booth in 1900, 'and the new Clapham of £40 householders has moved in from Kennington and elsewhere'.⁵ Today, only seven of the villas survive in the area covered by this chapter – enough to give some idea of the area's Georgian antecedents.

Cedars Cottage, Stonely Villa and The Limes (all demolished)

Nos 53–56 Clapham Common North Side and Salcombe Gardens occupy the sites of five mansions erected on the Barry estate during the late eighteenth-century boom.⁶ The first to go up, at the Wix's Lane corner, was built around 1780 for himself by Charles Wix, bricklayer, who lived there until his death in 1820, giving his name to the adjoining lane. This house was later rebuilt and known as Cedars Cottage. Next to it was another detached property, a trim classical villa with a central pediment and mansard roof. The wealthy City Alderman George Scholey lived here in the early 1800s before moving further west c.1808 to the Shrubbery (page ##). A later occupant was John Hatchard, founder of the Piccadilly booksellers, from 1821 till his death in 1849. Its later name was Stonely Villa (sometimes Stoneleigh) or Arniston House.

Then came a terrace of three wide-fronted brick houses known collectively as The Limes. Two evangelicals were among early residents here. Miss Rebecca Wilkinson, a religious author, lived in the western house c.1808–29. And Elizabeth Sanderson (widow of Sir James Sanderson, Bart, a former

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Lord Mayor), resided in the centre house c.1803–7. This was during her ‘scandalous intimacy’ with the maverick dissenting preacher William Huntingdon S. S. (for ‘Sinner Saved’), whom she married in 1808. Other residents included George Green, the Blackwall shipowner (c.1828–38); Jeanette Marshall, the diarist (1892–1902);⁷ and Robert Hudson, a magistrate, who eventually acquired all five houses. His descendants demolished them in the early 1900s for redevelopment (page ##).

No. 58, Eaton House School

No. 58 has been a school since the early 1900s, but its well-proportioned neoclassical façade, raised behind an entrance courtyard and gates, betrays its origins as a late-Georgian suburban villa of some pretension (Ill. 13.3). It was built c.1790–1 by John Farrer, a wholesale grocer of Great Tower Hill, on land belonging to the Barry family.⁸ The site was one of the biggest in this part of the common, with over 100ft of frontage, and subsidiary access for vehicles at the rear to Wix’s Lane. In addition to his imposing house, finished in pale stucco, with an entrance porch of ‘Tower of the Winds’ columns, Farrer also built a coach-house and stable adjoining to its east and laid out the grounds as pleasure gardens, later known for their golden pheasants.⁹

Farrer died in 1824, leaving his property to his widow, Ann. After her death the lease was purchased in 1831 by a solicitor, Robert Winter, who also acquired the freehold interest. Winter had been living at Bell House, a few doors along, since 1824, and seems to have been buying up property here as an investment. He lived at Farrer’s house until 1838, then sold it to Richard Catlow Bowden, a Lancastrian cotton merchant turned landed proprietor. (Bowden’s grandfather, an independent minister, had been a founder of the British and Foreign Bible Society and on the fringes of the Thornton–Wilberforce circle.) Bowden was to remain here until his death in 1866,

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following which his wife let the house.¹⁰ Her first tenant, in 1867, was Joseph Patterson Myers, son and partner of George Myers, the builder.

A lengthy schedule of fittings from Myers's time, and later photographs, offer a detailed portrait of a Clapham Common villa at this time. The two upper floors contained seven bedrooms and a dressing room. Generous basement facilities included a large kitchen, scullery, cellars, 'Gentleman's Room', and a separate footman's pantry. The principal floor had a French Louis-Quinze front drawing room, rear dining room, and an Elizabethan-style panelled library, with a matching stone fireplace (Ill. 13.4). As well as the stable and coach-house there were conservatories, greenhouses, forcing houses, a dairy and a gardener's cottage in the grounds. During Myers's residence the house was known as Byram (sometimes Byrom) House; he was followed there in 1882 by Edward Webb, a City wine merchant.

Latterly known as The Beeches, it ceased to be a private house in 1905 when it was purchased by Stanley Maxwell, headmaster of the Manor House School, Clapham. Maxwell moved the school here, demolishing the adjoining stables and coach-house to make room for a purpose-built extension in red brick and stone (E. Lidiard James, architect, 1905–6).¹¹ The school closed in 1938, since when No. 58 has been put to various educational uses, and what was left of its fine gardens were built over. It is now home to the independent Eaton House The Manor School.

Nos 59–61

Nos 59–60 and 61 occupy the site and incorporate remains of a pair of late-eighteenth century semi-detached villas, known respectively as Maitland House and Bell House. Both were built around 1790–2 as part of the concerted development of the Barry estate at that time. An early nineteenth-century

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view by Joseph Powell suggests that the pair originated as a single, symmetrical composition, with 'central' window features on the end (east) bay of Bell House (since wholly rebuilt). By then Maitland House had acquired its distinctive entrance porch of Tuscan columns supporting a bowed first-floor window, which survives today (Ills 13.4, 6). Maitland House, now 60 Clapham Common North Side, was built originally for one John Bleaden, but took its name from its next occupant, Ebenezer Maitland, a Coleman Street merchant, who lived here from 1796 until his death in 1834; his family retained an interest in both houses into the mid 1870s.¹²

Bell House was firstly the home of John Meyer (till c.1803) then of George Goodwin (till c.18??). A later occupant from c.1861 to his death in 1883 was John Charles Andreae, an indigo merchant and amateur photographer, who in 1845 had married the daughter of Herman Sillem, a fellow German merchant living on the west side of the common (page #). Andreae's son, another merchant of the same name, married into the Kleinwort banking dynasty.¹³

The buildings' present guise is due to the creation of Taybridge Road in the mid 1890s by John Cathles Hill and his partner C. J. Bentley, which necessitated the demolition of Bell House (see below). Early plans of June 1894 by Bentley's assistant L. S. Rogers show Maitland House and the attached service wing to its east surviving intact, but with a new house to its west, at the corner of Taybridge Road, on part of the Bell House site. Originally called New Bell House, this is now No. 61, a three-storey bay-windowed structure of a scale and with a roofline to match Maitland House alongside; it may contain some remnants of its predecessor. Rogers then decided to demolish the old service wing and add another new house on its site, this time of two storeys (Maudhurst, now No. 59), squeezed between Maitland and Byram Houses. Both were erected in 1894–5 and were given

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pale rendered fronts to form a coherent group with the adjoining houses here and at Nos 62 & 63.¹⁴

Nos 62 & 63

Nos 62 & 63 began life as a pair of flat-fronted semi-detached houses of c.1790. No. 63 may well be the 'small genteel house' erected by Samuel Lancaster around 1789 on land where the spring and well that supplied Clapham with its water had hitherto been situated. By 1792 a second house (No. 62) stood alongside.¹⁵ They can be seen partially hidden by trees on Joseph Powell's view, with steps leading up to central entrances (Ill. 13.5).

Early nineteenth-century residents at No. 63 included Anne Cunningham, the widowed mother of the Rev. J. W. Cunningham of Northside, adjacent (c.1810–14); and Maria Thornton, the long-suffering, abandoned wife of Robert Thornton, the black sheep of the Thornton clan, who moved here in 1815 after her bankrupt husband had escaped to France in 1814 and thence to America in order to evade his creditors. He never returned, dying in New York under an assumed name in 1826; she remained at No. 63 until her death in 1843. At No. 62 a long-standing resident was Richard Ogle, barrister, there from c.1815 to the 1850s.¹⁶

By c.1860 this pair of houses had become known as Springwell Lodge, but they later acquired the name Graham Lodge, or The Grahams, from their links with and ownership by the Graham family. From 1843 until c.1865, No. 63 was home to one of the Graham daughters, Miss (Elizabeth) Maria Graham, benefactress of St George's Church and schools in Battersea.¹⁷ What symmetry the houses once shared was destroyed by a later owner, Frederick Scrivens. In 1868 he made alterations, including the addition of a bay window (now of two storeys), at No. 62. Then or later he also repositioned its entrance,

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removing the house's east bay in the process. Similar though less drastic alterations were also made at No. 63, and both houses were extended at the rear; these changes appear to predate the creation of Taybridge Road in 1894–7. Scrivens family members lived at Nos 62 & 63 until the early years of the twentieth century and the two houses seem for a time to have been intercommunicating. Part of their rear gardens was sold in the 1920s for a new terrace on Taybridge Road (below).¹⁸

No. 64; also Springwell and Northside (demolished)

Springwell was a stuccoed villa of 1808–9 designed for William Henry Crowder (d.1830), a City attorney and solicitor, probably by James Burton. It comprised a three-storey main section with a central porch, and a two-storey annexe on its west side (Ill. 13.7). Surviving drawings by Burton show an up-to-date suburban idiom, with roofs overhanging the eaves, not the more traditional neoclassicism of the house as built; but there are enough parallels to suggest that he was its architect, working to a revised design.¹⁹ Crowder had leased the land here from the Davenport–Graham family several years beforehand, presumably with a house in mind, before acquiring the freehold to this and the adjacent site in 1808. He lived here with his wife and family until c.1828. Later occupants include the merchants Edward Burmester (resident c.1836–64), and John Stewart Oxley (c.1867–74), nephew of the Oxley family who since c.1850 had been living at Northside (the large house built on Crowder's land adjoining to the east), where he had spent his formative years. John Carr, the well-known biscuit manufacturer, was Springwell's last resident (c.1882–96).²⁰

Northside was erected a little later than Springwell, most likely around 1811, for John Cunningham (d.1812), father of the leading evangelical clergyman John William Cunningham, on land belonging to Crowder. A

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building already stood at the eastern end of the site – a two-storey cottage of c.1780 – where the family had been living since 1808, the year before Cunningham junior took up his curacy under the Rev. John Venn at Clapham.²¹ They incorporated this building into the new house at its eastern end as a kitchen and servants' wing. Northside was extended or possibly rebuilt around 1830 by a later owner, the bookseller John Harris the younger, who bought the house from Crowder in 1828 and lived there for 20 years. Stylistically, it was more picturesque than Springwell, with a rambling, varied frontage, in an Italianate-cum-Swiss chalet style (Ill. 13.7); a brick and timber Swiss chalet was at some point added in its copious grounds, which ran alongside and behind those of Springwell, and then, by a quirk of ownership, continued in a thin strip back along the west side of Springwell to the common, completely surrounding the neighbouring house. It was on this western slip of land that the Northside stables were situated. The house's interior included a Gothic hall, and a dining room with a coved ceiling. When it was put up for sale at auction along with Springwell in 1885, this had been redecorated at great expense in a Pompeian manner.²²

Both houses were sold in the 1890s and demolished for redevelopment. Only the battered eighteenth-century wing of Northside, where the Cunninghams once lived, survives today as 64 Clapham Common North Side; Nos 65–79, to its west, occupy the remaining frontage.

Nos 80 (formerly Springwell House) & 81

Springwell House was the last of the villas erected hereabouts on the north side of the common in the late-Georgian period. It was built in 1819 by Roger Lee (d.1855), a hop factor, then jointly in business with a relation, Joshua, in the Borough High Street district of Southwark, the centre of London's hop trade. Two older dwellings on the site were pulled down to make way for it.

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Like other houses near by, it took its name from the springs or wells in the vicinity. (A well was rediscovered in the front garden of Springwell House in 1919.)²³

Barring some prominent Victorian alterations to its main front, the house is characteristic of its era – squareish in plan, faced in stock brick with gauged brick window arches (at the sides and rear) and a double gambrel roof (Ill. 13.8). The ground floor arrangement, with a Doric entrance porch in the east flank wall leading directly into a staircase hall, enabled two interconnecting drawing rooms to command the main front, facing the common. At the rear were a library and dining room, and upstairs were four main bedchambers. The curved stairwell, with statuary niches, and an elegant scrolled iron balustrade are among several surviving original features (Ill. 13.9). As well as a detached stable and coach-house, the house also had large grounds, with a greenhouse, vinery, flower and kitchen gardens.²⁴

After Roger Lee's death, owners and occupants include John Bowman, an elderly East India merchant (resident c.1860–75), who most likely added the curious ornamental stone window surrounds, with broken pediments and masks, which now adorn the façade. Originally they were complemented by a balustrade at roof level, with a moulded name-plaque at its centre, topped by a shell pediment; these were removed following storm damage in the 1980s.²⁵

Bowman was followed at Springwell House by his brother Robert, a wine merchant (c.1875–82). The last private owner sold the house in 1913 to the London County Council, which was planning to open a school in the area. After seeing wartime usage as a hospital supply depot, the house was finally converted to educational use in 1919, and achieved prominence in the 1920s as London's largest municipal open-air school for tubercular children (vol. 49).²⁶ The school closed in 19## but the house remains in educational use as the independent Parkgate House School. The garden was taken for the nearby

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Susan Isaacs School, built by the Inner London Education Authority in 1972–3.

No. 81, a double-fronted stock-brick house adjoining to the west, is of less certain date (Ill. 13.10). Stylistically it belongs to the period *c.*1780–1820. It is likely to be the ‘cottage’ built here *c.*1782 by John Wood (d.1801), a gardener, under lease from the Barry family. William Bowden (or Bowdon), a City stockbroker, followed Wood’s widow Ann as the next resident from 1805 till his death in 1831. He may have added the large ground-floor bay window, or perhaps even rebuilt the entire house; he also acquired the freehold. Bowden’s sister Ann was married to the Rev. Edward Coleridge of Ottery St Mary, brother of the poet.²⁷

As well as the house, the site also accommodated a rear stables and coach-house block, with a hayloft and grooms’ room over; this has been converted to residential use. Later occupants include: John Thomas Betts (*c.*1846–55), a barrister turned distiller, whose father had resided in the 1830s and 40s at Broomfield, William Wilberforce’s old house; and John Doulton (*c.*1864–73), founder of the famous Lambeth pottery, who was succeeded after his death here in 1873 by one of his sons and business heirs, James D. Doulton. In Doulton’s time the house was known as Springwell Cottage but by the mid 1880s had been renamed Chester Lodge.²⁸

The LCC also acquired this property, in 1924, with a view to its demolition for a new school; but it survived, though the garden was taken by Springwell House School next door. A Classical-style side garage was part of a 1980s improvement scheme.²⁹

Northfields, Brewster Lodge, Kirkdale and The Eukestons (all demolished)

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These four detached residences, built on the Barry–Graham estate in the 1780s and 90s, were demolished during the creation of Forthbridge, Stormont and Marney Roads in the 1890s. Today 82–98 Clapham Common North Side occupy their sites.³⁰ First came Rose Lodge, or Northfields, the earliest of the group, built c.1783 for Walter Matthews, a City cheesemonger, and described not long afterwards as a ‘genteel square house’ of grey stock brick. Later occupants include the builder Samuel Grimsdell and his family (c.1844–64). West of this stood a smaller house of c.1793, first occupied by James Brant, then for the early half of nineteenth century by Mary Shewell, a spinster and fundholder; its name Brewster Lodge came from a later occupant, Sarah Shewell Brewster. Then came Kirkdale, of c.1787, built by or for Charles Richard Harford, an insurance broker – a ‘neat’ building, also of grey stocks. This house had connections with the tea trade through its later occupation by John Aldred Twining (c.1826–45) and the tea broker William Weston (c.1854–66). Lastly, The Eukestons was built in 1792 by the builder and contractor Thomas Poynder for his own use, and was still in his family’s ownership at the time of its demolition. Later residents here included: William Wainwright, a sugar refiner (c.1855–70); and Allen Ransome, the Ipswich-born engineer whose ironworks were on the riverside at Battersea Foundry (c.1871–81).

The Hall, later Mayfield (demolished)

Like the Sister Houses to its west, The Hall was one of the few North Side mansions of sufficient grandeur to have gardens and grounds extending all the way to Lavender Hill. It was built around 1770 by John Davenport (d.1789), a woollen manufacturer and army clothier of The Strand, master of the Merchant Taylors’ Company and draper to the king. Davenport probably acquired the ground for the house from Lord Spencer or the Barry family, to whom Spencer had recently sold all the land east of here as far as Wix’s Lane.³¹

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It was a good-sized house – bigger than the Sisters villas in their original form – and in the usual Clapham Common manner was set well back from the road behind a curving carriage drive, and partly obscured by trees. A Victorian illustration shows it as a well-proportioned Palladian building with a prominent bow to its west front (Ill. 13.11).

After Davenport died his widow Elizabeth stayed on at The Hall until her death in 1806, when it passed to their only daughter and heir Elizabeth Susanna, wife of Thomas Graham (d.1813) of Edmond Castle, Cumberland. She was to be its principal resident until her demise in 1844. Graham was a lawyer, the son of a Cumbrian landowner. With his younger brother, (Sir) James, he had taken over the lucrative London legal practice of their uncle James Coulthard, specializing in society family disputes. Their confidentiality and ability to resolve such cases outside the courts brought them considerable wealth.³²

The Davenports and Grahams were prominent figures locally, having acquired much of the considerable Barry estate, with its many newly built merchants' villas. Younger members of the family when they left The Hall set up home in some of those villas: John Graham lived at Rose Lodge (later Northfields) in the 1830s and early 40s, (Elizabeth) Maria Graham at The Grahams (now 63 Clapham Common North Side) in the 1840s–60s. But The Hall was very much the social, cultural and administrative hub of the estate.³³

A journal compiled by Elizabeth Susanna as a young woman in the early 1780s shows the Davenports on easy social terms with their neighbours, there being endless accounts of tea with the Vassalls, Baldwins, Thorntons, Lovelaces, Dents, Eyres and others. The family were also avid concert-goers and patrons of the arts. Francesco Roncaglia, the Italian castrato, was a regular house-guest at The Hall during his second visit to England for the

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1780–1 opera season. A grand musical fête held at the house by Mrs Graham in 1818 featured luminaries of Italian opera – the bass Giuseppe Naldi and the tenors Manuel García and Pierre Begrez – and guests included the Dowager Countess of Mexborough, Lady Rivers, Lady Dalrymple, the Bishop of Chester and Baron de Stein.³⁴ The Grahams also amassed a fine art collection at Clapham Common, with works by Domenichino, Bassano, Van Dyck, Angelica Kauffmann, Francis Nicholson and Sir Edwin Landseer, the last of whom was an acquaintance of Thomas Henry Graham, the eldest son and heir. Mrs Graham was also an artist herself, and an author, her works including *Eighteen Maxims of Neatness and Order*, under the pseudonym Theresa Tidy, which ran to 24 editions; and a child's grammar reader, *Voyage to Locuta*, in the form of a Lilliputian parody.³⁵

After Mrs Graham's death the house was occupied principally by her second son, John. He divided his time between The Hall and an estate he had acquired at Eastbourne, where the Graham family traditionally spent their summers and where he had met his wife, the daughter of the local MP.³⁶ By the mid 1850s John Graham had retreated to Eastbourne for good. The Hall was occupied briefly in the early 1860s by José Perez Lozano and his brother Manuel, Cadiz-born merchants trading from Crutched Friars in London. It was acquired in 1866 by Ebenezer J. Bristow, a solicitor, who made several alterations, renamed the house Mayfield, and quickly began selling and letting plots at the north end of the grounds for development (Stormont and Sugden Roads). The house was eventually sold and demolished in 1886 during a later phase of redevelopment; 99–104 Clapham Common North Side now stand on its site.

Sister Houses (including Gilmore House, 113 Clapham Common North Side)

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For nearly 150 years these two villas and their grounds formed one of the area's great landmarks. They owed their existence to the merchant Isaac Akerman, son and heir of John Akerman (d.1757), the German immigrant glass-maker and merchant who had set up home in a house at the common's north-west corner (later Battersea Rise House), as early as the 1740s, well before the area's popularity had begun to rise (page #).

The Akermans were eager to preserve the fine prospect from this house, which faced north across open fields towards Lavender Hill and beyond to the low hills north of London. In 1755, shortly before his death, John Akerman set about improving his mansion, and the next year Isaac safeguarded the view by framing it between two matching villas on the north side of the common, on a strip of ground leased from Lord Spencer. This ran all the way between present-day Clapham Common North Side and Lavender Hill, and included Washingham Lane, which hitherto had connected the two main roads; an alehouse called the Fox, facing the common, was demolished for the improvement.³⁷ Because of their similarity these villas acquired the name Sister Houses, or the Sisters; they were later known individually as Sister House (east, demolished) and The Sisters (west, now Gilmore House, 113 Clapham Common North Side). The identification elsewhere in this volume of Sir Robert Taylor as the architect of contemporary improvements at Battersea Rise House for the Akermans (page ##) brings him to the fore as the likely designer of the Sisters, placing them among the select few buildings in Battersea by an architect of the first rank.

The houses bear many of the hallmarks of Taylor's distinctive mid-century villa style, widely regarded as his major contribution to English architecture (Ills 13.12–15). The simplified, astylar elevations, with wall surfaces broken up by projecting canted bays, providing views over the neighbourhood; and the compact, geometrical planning, with only four main rooms to the principal floor (one of them octagonal), grouped around a

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staircase hall, obviating the need for corridors – all are features that recur in his villas of the period, for example in the 1750s at Harleyford Manor and Barlaston Hall; and again in the 1760s nearer to London at Danson House and Asgill House. Also, the Akermans were entirely typical of the *nouveau riche* seam of City bankers, merchants and government contractors for whom Taylor was working; although in this case the intention seems to have been to let the houses, not live in them.³⁸

Taylor's composition was an elegant, symmetrical solution to the Akermans' requirements, the two houses mirroring each other exactly, either side of the view, with beyond them two matching ranges of one-storey stables, with bell-turrets, of the same materials and style (Ills 13.12, 13). Surviving early and probably original external features of the houses were the ornamental busts in circular niches on the canted bays: those on the present Gilmore House (The Sisters) represent Shakespeare and Milton.

The two houses were finished but still empty by the end of 1756. The very first occupant was a Martin Gobbel (or Goebbel), at The Sisters from early in 1758 until the beginning of 1760, when he was succeeded by Mrs Susanna Delacruse.³⁹ Subsequent occupants of this house were: Robert Woodfield (1763–71); John Roberts (1772); and John Walter (1774–82). Bankruptcy forced Walter, a coal buyer and member of Lloyds, to move away, but he later found success and fame as founder of *The Times* newspaper; he is commemorated by a Blue Plaque, erected in 1977.⁴⁰ He was succeeded in 1783 by William Chivers, a wealthy wine merchant, who spent his retirement at Clapham Common tending his well-stocked garden. In 1807 he was murdered when his gardener, William Duncan, a tall Scotsman, thrust the blade of his spade violently into Chivers's face following a disagreement about the pruning of a vine. Duncan somehow escaped execution and was transported for life.⁴¹

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The neighbouring Sister House remained vacant until 1760, when it was taken by Elizabeth Newnham, who remained in residence until 1771; she was succeeded by Robert Browne (c.1771–79), and William Francis (c.1780–1805). Francis, a bachelor, left the house to his housekeeper, Mary Hardwick; she continued to live there in some style after his death with a few loyal servants, from 1806 until c.1817.⁴² She was followed by Noah Chivers (c.1817–25), the nephew and heir of William Chivers of The Sisters, who by then owned both houses.

After Noah Chivers, Sister House was taken by Henry Pritchett, an apothecary, who lived there from c.1827 until c.1833. He was followed by Robert Barclay, of the well-known banking family (c.1835–7); George Field (c.1838–54); and then, from c.1856, the public-works contractor Charles Thomas Lucas, of Lucas Bros, who in 1859 bought the house and its grounds from the Bower family following the death in 1858 of the estate owner, Mrs Elizabeth Bower (née Chivers). Lucas was responsible for some major additions and erected a large complex of conservatories, forcing houses, sheds for animals and other such buildings in the grounds. This interest in gardening and agriculture was also evident at Lucas's country seat, Warnham Court, near Horsham, where he had made similar additions.⁴³ Lucas eventually moved on, and the last residents of the house were Ambrose Basset (1867–77), who began redeveloping the estate in the 1870s with housing at either end of a new connecting road, Sisters Avenue; and Thomas Wallis (1877–94), a linen draper. In 1891 Wallis also bought The Sisters when it came up for sale, giving him ownership of both mansions and all the remaining gardens and grounds left untouched by Basset. When Wallis himself died in 1894 the whole estate was bought at auction in a single lot for £21,800 by John Wilson, a Newcastle-based builder who had recently developed Thirsk and Longbeach Roads.⁴⁴ But perhaps Wilson overstretched himself, for he very quickly sold it on to Herbert Shepherd-Cross, MP, who

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demolished Sister House as part of his redevelopment of what remained of the estate in the mid 1890s (page ##).

As for The Sisters, later residents there for the forty or so years after William Chivers's unfortunate death were: Richard Rothwell, a Cheapside linen draper and City Alderman (c.1807–21), followed by his widow (to 1827); John Richards (1828–32); Mrs Selina Mary Grote (1832–4), widow of George Grote, the banker, and mother of the historian of the same name; and John Gawlor Bridge, goldsmith (c.1836–42), whose firm, Rundell & Bridge, made the coronation crown for George IV.

Gilmore House, 113 Clapham Common North Side. The subsequent history of The Sisters, now Gilmore House, can be taken from Mrs Bower's death in 1858, when ownership passed to her son, Edward Chivers Bower. Its tenant since 1843 had been John Hodgson, a tobacco broker. At the time of Mrs Bower's death, Hodgson was hoping for an extension to his lease and a rent reduction in recognition of considerable alterations and additions he was about to make. Acting on an agreement with her son, Hodgson entered into a contract worth £1,500 with workmen, who had got as far as removing his furniture and one entire side wall of the house when Bower's marriage threw all into confusion, putting its ownership in the hands of trustees as part of his wife's settlement. But any legal obstruction was removed, and Hodgson remained happily in residence until 1870. His improvements of 1858 can be identified with the present west wing of the house, where the addition of two extra bays in a matching style created a symmetrical main façade, and allowed Hodgson to move the entrance from the old west wall to the south front. A new outer hall and passage led to the old inner hall, where Hodgson seems also to have replaced the main stairs. At the same time he inserted a door at the back of the house, opening from the rear drawing room into the gardens and grounds, decorated with a semi-circular portico of Ionic columns supporting a half-dome (Ills 13.14, 15).⁴⁵

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Hodgson was followed at the house briefly in the early 1870s by John Boger Hole, a Foreign Office Civil Servant. His successor from 1873 was Joseph Quick – perhaps the second generation waterworks engineer of that name. It was Quick who made the other major addition to the house, in the form of the present east wing – a three-bay extension in a markedly lighter brick, and with taller windows, a higher parapet and a separate hipped roof (Ill. 13.14). This work, carried out for Quick in 1874 by Downs, Williams & Company of Southwark, also included some smaller rooms at the rear and a conservatory.⁴⁶

Unlike Sister House, The Sisters survived the rampant redevelopment going on around it in the 1890s, partly through luck, but largely through conversion to institutional use as a residential training centre for deaconesses of the Rochester & Southwark Diocese, under the guidance of Head Deaconess Isabella Gilmore (1842–1923), one of William Morris’s sisters.

Widowed relatively early in life, Mrs Gilmore had trained as a nurse at Guys’ Hospital in London.⁴⁷ On the recommendation of a matron at Guy’s she was invited in 1886 by Bishop Thorold of Rochester to found and take charge of a new order of deaconesses to minister to the London poor in his diocese. Battersea was chosen as her centre of operations, partly because the clergy there were less resistant than elsewhere, partly for its poverty. A house was taken at 11 Park Hill, Clapham, in 1887, to which in 1889 was added a centre for pastoral work at 107 Maysoule Road; but before long the residence was found to be too small and too far removed from Battersea.

Mrs Gilmore herself described seeing The Sisters being emptied of its furniture and put up for sale in the summer of 1891 as she walked across the common, following the death of the Rev. Henry Ralph, its last private occupant. Discovering that it had been bought by Thomas Wallis, who lived

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at Sister House, she persuaded him to let the building to her personally for the new institution, the diocesan council then becoming her sub-tenants. After some redecoration and conversion, the deaconesses moved to The Sisters from Park Hill on 19 November 1891. At the official opening a fortnight later a new chapel was dedicated in one of the rooms. When Wallis died, Mrs Gilmore was again fortunate that, before the new owner, John Wilson, could buy up her lease and throw her out, Herbert Shepherd-Cross took the house off Wilson's hands. An old acquaintance, he sold Mrs Gilmore the freehold for around £4,000, even contributing £100 towards the purchase fund.⁴⁸

The new institution grew steadily, training ladies in the tough streets of north Battersea for pastoral and missionary work further afield. A 'Preventive Home' to rescue poor girls from bad homes and prepare them for domestic service operated for about eighteen years in an adjoining house at 113 Elspeth Road, bought by Mrs Gilmore; and a chapel designed by Philip Webb was added in 1896-7 (see below). Mrs Gilmore retired in 1906, but the work carried on at the house – renamed in her honour in 1934 – until 1970. It was then purchased by Gilmore House Ltd, a new housing association formed by Christian businessmen, and converted to a hostel for overseas married students and their families. Any remaining interior fabric of interest was lost as Gilmore House was 'carved' into sixteen flatlets, and its setting badly compromised by the addition of three unimaginative modern accommodation blocks built hard up against it: two student wings at the rear, one facing Elspeth Road (incorporating parts of a lecture wing added on the site by the deaconess institute in the 1930s); and a warden's block at the front, facing the common – which the Borough Architect mistakenly thought would 'not destroy the unique and charming character' of the existing building. The architects were J. D. Ainsworth & Associates of Croydon.⁴⁹

In 2000 the site was purchased by developers Lynton Properties, but their high-end scheme for conversion to luxury flats fell foul of the recession,

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forcing a delay in completion until 2009 and more and smaller flats at cheaper prices: 'The number of chandeliers has had to be cut throughout', a spokesman told *The Times*. As part of the scheme their architects Buller Welsh extended the former Warden's block beside Gilmore House to provide two flats, and reclad it in a faux classical style (Ill. 13.14). The unsightly rear blocks have also been retained.⁵⁰

The Philip Webb chapel. Religious worship was a key part of the deaconesses' routine, there being five services a day, usually presided over by Mrs Gilmore. Initially a large drawing room was commandeered for a chapel, with a simple raised dais at one end for a sanctuary, its walls and woodwork painted red. Madder chintz hangings and other Morris & Co. furnishings given by her brother for the chapel at Park Hill were adapted and re-used.⁵¹ But with growing numbers and increasingly cramped conditions, a new chapel was sorely needed. The outcome was a late and rare ecclesiastical work by Philip Webb, personally funded by Mrs Gilmore, and of exceptional interest for its innovative late Arts and Crafts architecture and the high quality of its fittings, mostly designed by Webb or Morris & Co. Though the chapel survives, unfortunately it was stripped of most of its furniture in the 1970s for use as a recreation hall for students residing at Gilmore House, and more recently was converted to a studio apartment (with a flat below) as part of the 2007–8 redevelopment scheme.⁵²

Isabella Gilmore's reminiscences offer an insight into the evolution of Webb's remarkable design and its execution.⁵³ The opportunity to build the chapel arose in 1894 when she inherited a 'substantial' sum of money on the death of her mother. It was her brother William Morris who suggested his friend Webb as architect when they discussed the project some time later. Webb then visited the Institution (he was apparently 'delighted' with the old part of the house, which he dated with considerable accuracy to 1750) and discussed Mrs Gilmore's intentions with her. 'I want something perfectly

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simple', she told him, 'the green of a field and a great big silver cross'. Webb, though he replied that she had given him 'a difficult job', seems to have understood implicitly her desire for something imbued with the spirit of the countryside and free of the conventions of late-Victorian church style and planning. Neither did she want elaborate decoration: her taste had an element of austerity, 'mingled with her love of beauty', which suited well Webb's Arts & Crafts sensibilities.⁵⁴

Webb directed building operations throughout the spring and summer of 1896 with the contractors John Garrett & Son of Balham Hill, who are said to have had about fifty men working on the job.⁵⁵ Tucked away at the back of the house, on the site of Joseph Quick's conservatory, the building was largely hidden from view. It had a plain Arts & Crafts exterior, in yellow stock brick and roughcast, with a high arcade of semi-circular windows between pilasters, and a red pantile roof (Ill. 13.15). There were two chambers: an upper one forming the chapel itself, and a lower one comprising cellars, scullery and heating chamber. Passageways linked the building to the house, where Webb also made several improvements, reconfiguring an adjoining scullery and dairy.

Inside, the chapel was a simple open rectangular space, with a recess (for a harmonium) at its south-west corner (Ills 13.15, 17). Despite opposition, Mrs Gilmore insisted on having the pews arranged as tiered benches facing inwards across a central aisle, as in a collegiate chapel. Webb designed these in oak with screens of open trellis work, a feature repeated in panels in the open timber truss roof. This use of recurring motifs, and Webb's restrained colour scheme – of brown and green, with all the woodwork, including the high wainscoting on the walls, either lightly stained or painted green – brought great unity to the interior, enhanced by the specially designed fixtures and fittings at the east end (Ill. 13.16).

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The focus there was Mrs Gilmore's 'great big silver cross'. This was designed by Webb in 1897 and made in repoussé patterned silver laid on wood by Robert Catterson-Smith, another associate of Morris, and former head of the Birmingham School of Art. It was suspended on a reredos with a central panel bearing a cross in the shape of a tree, its foliage reaching into the outer panels. Behind this was an arched recess laid with green and brown tiles. A pair of candlesticks was acquired to match the cross. One of the finest Webb pieces was an oak altar table made to his designs by Garrett & Son in 1897, with fretwork panels of stylized leaf motifs. Two-dimensional foliage patterns like these were common to Webb's later work, and apparently could be traced back to his appreciation of the black-and-white marble patterning on the church of San Miniato in Florence, which he studied during an Italian tour in 1884–5.⁵⁶ There was also an oak lectern and Webb himself found two Chinese vases to stand behind the altar, telling Mrs Gilmore their blue was 'just the colour'. Most of the fittings were ready for the chapel to be dedicated by Bishop Talbot of Rochester in April 1897. A little later, in 1898–9, Webb designed a superfrontal to match, with gold crosses, oak leaves and intertwined gold threads on a red ground; this was embroidered by Mrs Gilmore's niece, May Morris. (The altar table, superfrontal, lectern, cross and candlesticks are now in the V&A Museum, as is Webb's design for the superfrontal, bequeathed by May Morris.)⁵⁷

The excellent Morris & Co. stained glass, which survives in situ, was added later. First in 1911 came a six-light window from a design by Burne-Jones in the central south window, depicting Martha and Mary, its delicate trees and lilies (painted mostly by Titcomb and Stokes) complementing Webb's interior. Then in 1912, to mark the Jubilee of the revived deaconess order, the two chancel roundels were filled with glass depicting figures of red-winged angels, copied from Burne-Jones's great Nativity window in Birmingham Cathedral, to which were added in 1913 a larger roundel of a

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praying angel in the west wall, designed by John Henry Dearle. All three were dedicated by the Bishop of Kingston in June 1913.⁵⁸

Later development: Wix's Lane to Stormont Road

Wix's Lane

Wix's Lane marks the boundary of the old parishes of Battersea and Clapham between Lavender Hill and Clapham Common, taking its name from the bricklayer who lived in a house at its south corner in the 1780s and 90s (see above). Before Wix's time that spot was sometimes known as Bromwell or Bromell's Corner.⁵⁹ This account considers only those buildings on the lane's Battersea or west side.

Like many such roads, Wix's Lane most likely originated as a track along a field boundary, and for a long time was little more than a footpath, especially at its north end, leading to Lavender Hill, where it is still accessible only to pedestrians. By the 1770s the land to its west was part of the Barry family's estate. When a half-dozen or so villas were built there in the 1780s and 90s fronting Clapham Common, they were given dog-legged gardens so that householders could enjoy access to Wix's Lane (see Ill. 13.2). Leases included rights of carriage along the lane in return for a contribution towards its upkeep. And so stables, coach-houses and outbuildings sprang up along the west side, as well as a row of six small cottages, inhabited by gardeners and coachmen.⁶⁰

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When speculative house-building began to spread south from Lavender Hill in the 1870s and 80s, openings were made on to Wix's Lane from two of the new residential roads (Garfield and Freke); but redevelopment towards the common did not come until the early 1900s. A large plot beside Freke Road with a 275ft frontage to Wix's Lane – once part of the gardens of Byram House – was taken by the London School Board for a new school, Wix's Lane School, which opened in 1903. The rest of the frontage as far as Clapham Common was redeveloped for the Hudson family in 1903–5 by the builder Arthur Edgar Balls of Queenstown Road with a long row of lowly two-storey red-brick cottage flats. Now 1–67A Wix's Lane, these are characteristic of the period, with paired entrances under wide arches, grouped between projecting bay windows, giving the impression of pairs of small terraced houses. Tenanted by the 'respectable' working-classes, each flat had its own sitting-room, three bedrooms, bathroom, scullery, and WC.⁶¹

Balls also built the taller houses and flats fronting the common. Those at **53–56 Clapham Common North Side** (of 1903–4) were designed as single houses, though they were quickly adapted and let out in floors; whereas **1–18 Salcombe Gardens** at No. 57 (of 1905) are purpose-built flats, and had bigger front bays as well as more room in their rear gardens for longer back extensions, and so fetched higher rents.⁶²

North of Nansen Road: 1870s developments around Lavender Hill

Taybridge (north end), Freke and Gowrie Roads, and Nansen Road (north side). The houses here, and also on the north-eastern flank of Stormont Road (below), were erected on the biggest of the landholdings developed in Victorian times at this end of Lavender Hill. Known as the Lavender Hill Park estate, it was once part of the large domain north of Clapham Common owned by the Barry and Graham families, from which several portions – e.g.

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Lavender Terrace, Rush Hill House and some of the villas on Clapham Common North Side – had been sold off.

By December 1871 the rump of the estate, of some ten acres, had come into the ownership of John Westwood, a businessman then living in Alley Park, Dulwich, where he was also engaged in speculative development.⁶³ Despite the recession Westwood quickly set about improving his land. In April 1872 a simple street plan was devised for him by the Clapham architect J. Barnett. Early street-names commemorated great English poets but were soon dropped; and so confusing has been the changing and interchanging of names here that as far as possible only the present ones have been used in the text which follows. However, two main adjustments should be noted: the northern end of Taybridge Road was until 1901 numbered as part of Marmion Road; and Nansen Road was originally a westward continuation of Freke Road.⁶⁴

Several houses went up immediately in 1872 but the majority date from the late 1870s.⁶⁵ The characteristic house-type in these roads is the simple two-storey terraced cottage, with a single ground-floor bay, which occasionally gives way to taller three-storey variants, as at the western ends of Gowrie Road (south side) and Nansen Road, and the upper ends of Taybridge and Stormont Roads. Lower middle-class housing like this was common to south Battersea in the 1860s and 70s and indicates the type of tenants Westwood thought he could attract.

Housing also spilled on to the main road: **111–123 Lavender Hill** (formerly Stormont Terrace, 1872) once sported the same ground-floor bays as the side-streets, but these were later removed for shopfronts. The other, longer main-road block at **29–55 Lavender Hill** (Marmion Terrace, 1874–5) was commercial from the start. Of stock brick, with decorative dressings of moulded stone supplied by the well-known sanitary engineer and ceramic-

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ware maker George Jennings of Lambeth, these parades were the work of Mark Chamberlain, a local builder, and carry on from the similar shops he had just built on the adjoining Rush Hill House estate (see below). This run included a corner pub, The Craven, at No. 65, faced in a contrasting red brick (since plastered over). At the same time Chamberlain also built similar houses near by at 2–18 Taybridge Road and 33–41 Stormont Road.⁶⁶

It was also Chamberlain who erected stables, coach-houses and workshops in mews streets behind the shops (Craven Mews and Marmion Mews, both now redeveloped). A wider than usual house at **3 Taybridge Road** (later Taybridge House) was from c.1875 the frontage to the yard and Marmion Works of the builder James Holloway (d.1889), entered via an archway alongside. The present buildings in the yard date from the early 1900s, by which time the site had become a motor-car manufactory.

At Dulwich, Westwood enhanced his estate by donating land for a church, and he did the same here, giving a site in Gowrie Road, at the foot of Rush Hill Road, to the Rev. J. Erskine Clarke of Battersea for a new church near Clapham Common. This was St Matthew's, erected in 1876–7 to designs by William White. Never successful, it closed in 1941 and was bombed shortly afterwards. Council flats of 1952–3 (11–13 Gowrie Road) stand on its site.⁶⁷

Garfield Road. Building having got under way on the Lavender Hill Park estate by the spring of 1872, it was not long before the four old houses of Lavender Terrace and their grounds, adjoining to the east (covered in Chapter 10), were snapped up later that year for £7,000. The new owner was the Artizans', Labourers' & General Dwellings Company Ltd and the purchase was made almost simultaneously with that of the much larger landholding north of Lavender Hill where the company built its revolutionary Shaftesbury Park estate of workers' dwellings. The company always regarded the ground here, between Lavender Hill and the common, as too valuable for the type of

Draft

workmens' cottages it was engaged in elsewhere. Perhaps the purchase was simply an investment; perhaps it was linked with the series of fraudulent land transactions that brought scandal to the company and the trial and imprisonment of its senior officials. At any rate, for a decade most of the land lay dormant, the houses of Lavender Terrace being let to tenants, though that at its western end (Eversleigh House) was occupied by William Swindlehurst, the company's Manager and Secretary, who was living there in July 1877 when he was arrested and charged with fraud.⁶⁸

Early in 1882 a development scheme was devised by Rowland Plumbe, consultant architect to the Artizans' Company, for whom he was designing its new estate at Noel Park, Hornsey, at around the same time (1881–3). Plumbe suggested building shops on Lavender Hill in front of the old houses, which were to have their centre removed to allow a new curving residential street to be driven through them to Wix's Lane – named by the company Garfield Road, presumably in honour of the recently assassinated American president James A. Garfield. James Holloway, whose Marmion Works adjoined the site, won the contract for making up the new road, and later agreed a 90-year building lease for all the houses there. At this stage the company was still keen to retain Lavender Terrace, by then lying empty, for conversion to flats, and to build the shops in front itself. However, in the end the old buildings were demolished and Garfield Mews erected on their site behind the new shops, **15–19 & 21–27 Lavender Hill**, all built by Holloway in 1883 in a stock-and-red-brick Queen Anne revival manner, to Plumbe's designs.⁶⁹ Holloway re-used several large late-Georgian windows from Lavender Terrace in the rear walls of some of the shops and Garfield Road houses.

Holloway's progress was rapid, completing all the buildings between late 1883 and early 1885. Plumbe had provided a range of red-brick housing types: some tall, rather plain-looking three-storey blocks on the west side; and more traditional two-storey bay-windowed terraces, with pretty Queen Anne-

Draft

style door surrounds. Especially fine is the row of three-storey houses at Nos 19–35, incorporating a great range of decorative features, a varied roofline, and some imaginative glazing patterns (Ill. 13.19). Though these have the air of flats, they were designed as houses, and for the most part were occupied as single homes. The street as a whole was largely lower middle-class, harbouring minor clerks, insurance men, tradesmen, and shopkeepers.⁷⁰

Rush Hill Road. Another of the Lavender Hill sites to change hands in 1872 was that of Rush Hill House, sold at auction that summer (page #). This villa and its grounds formed a pocket within the Lavender Hill Park estate (above) with its own 300ft of frontage to Lavender Hill. The developer here was a Gray's Inn solicitor, Henry Shadwell Willett, operating in conjunction with Thomas Graves, a plumber of St Marylebone who had come to Battersea as a builder to take part in this localized flurry of land trading.⁷¹

There was a north London flavour to the whole enterprise. Graves built only one house himself, sub-letting most of the ground to James Mulvey, a Euston Road printer-compositor, who built the houses of Rush Hill Road in 1874–5. The straightforward street layout was probably prepared by H. C. Bunkell, a Holloway builder turned auctioneer and estate agent, who made the original application to the MBW in 1873.⁷² No link was made with John Westwood's Lavender Hill Park estate, then being laid out to the south, which would have given Rush Hill the advantage of being a through road rather than a cul-de-sac. The plot in Gowrie Road which could have provided such a connection was the one given by Westwood for a new church (above).

Now deprived of their pierced balustrades, Mulvey's tall, plain, stock brick houses are rather barrack-like and forbidding, but they quickly proved popular with the lower-middle classes. These were quite large properties, generally with three or four bedrooms and two reception rooms, but no bathrooms.⁷³

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Of greater architectural interest are the two ranges of houses and shops flanking the road's entrance, at **57-71** and **73-83 Lavender Hill**, both erected in 1874 by Mark Chamberlain as part of Willett's and Graves's development, and originally known as Rush Hill Terrace. The three-storey eastern run at Nos 57-71 was built with shopfronts and was later continued by Chamberlain on to the frontage of the adjoining Lavender Hill Park estate, at Nos 29-55 (Marmion Terrace, above). Both runs share the same stock-brick facing and pretty moulded-stone dressings by Jennings of Lambeth, and look like a single build but for the straight joint still visible between Nos 55 and 57.⁷⁴

Chamberlain's other, bigger, four-storey range at Nos 73-83 was built as housing, which by and large it still is, Lavender Hill, then as now, being only partly commercial this far east of Clapham Junction. This group is especially imposing, with double-height bays to the semi-basement and raised ground-floor front rooms, steep entrance steps, and more good-quality decorative stonework around the doors and windows, and in the chunky cornice, all of it again supplied by George Jennings (Ill. 13.20).⁷⁵

Though all this work took place in the mid 1870s, Rush Hill House – or at the least a habitable part of it – was still in occupation till the summer of 1886, when the last resident died. It was then sold at auction and Crombie Mews built on its site. The large red-brick shop parade west of Rush Hill Terrace at Nos 85-97 (Crown Parade) was built in 1889 on land outside the Lavender Hill Park estate, adjoining Essex & Company's wallpaper mill (now Battersea Business Centre, see vol. 49).⁷⁶

South of Nansen Road: later development towards the common

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South of Nansen Road, the owners of the big houses and gardens on this stretch of the common held out to the developers until 1890. In that year the first of them fell when Northfields House and its L-shaped grounds were acquired by the builder and brickmaker John Cathles Hill. Scottish-born, Hill had been in London since his early twenties, and by this date had experience of successful suburban development on a large scale in Crouch End and Haringey. At Northfields, he was joined as co-owner and co-developer by the City architect Charles J. Bentley. Formerly based in Wandsworth, Bentley was well versed in house-planning locally. He quickly went to work on a street layout, and between the summer of 1890 and 1895 several builders erected all the houses on the south side of **Nansen Road** (Nos 1–59), in **Fontarabia Road**, present-day **Marmion Road** and **Forthbridge Road**, as well as in the adjoining portion of **Taybridge Road** (Nos 54–76) and on the site of the old house on **Clapham Common North Side** (Nos 82–85). Bentley's assistant, Leopold S. Rogers, did much of the legwork, and probably provided basic guidance to the builders, of whom the most productive were the Kervens (W. E. & C. J.), the Stringers (George H. and his sons George H. & Alfred W. J.) and Joseph Palmer. Hill followed his usual course, raising substantial sums in a series of concurrent mortgages, a practice that later in life would prove his undoing.⁷⁷

Nearly all the houses were in standard two-storey terraces, with splayed bays. A livelier row at **48–72 Forthbridge Road** (c.1891) breaks the mould, with finial-topped gables, bands of contrasting brick, and shallow rectangular bays with tripartite windows; it was designed by the architect Herbert Bignold. Some street-names suggest Hill's Caledonian origins. Fontarabia, along with two other proposed names refused by the LCC (Scrivebaye and Lutterward), derived from Sir Walter Scott's epic poem *Marmion*.⁷⁸

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In 1894, as work at Northfields was drawing to a close, Hill and Bentley became involved in another estate near by on the north side of Clapham Common, centred on Maitland House and Bell House. By sacrificing the western half of the latter, as well as the long, narrow gardens behind both houses, Hill and Bentley were able to drive a new road south from Marmion Road to the common. This was known as Taybridge Road, a name later also applied to the north-south arm of Marmion Road; the noticeable kinks along its route follow old property boundaries. And so all the houses on the road's lower east side, now numbered **61-163 Taybridge Road**, date from 1894-7. Heard Brothers of Harbut Road were the most active of several builders involved. (Nos 135 & 137 were rebuilt in a pseudo-Victorian style in 1987.) At the same time Rogers remodelled Maitland House and added new houses either side of it (see *59-61 Clapham Common North Side*, above).⁷⁹

Also in 1894, two other large mansions and their grounds standing immediately west of the Maitland House estate – Northside and Springwell – were sold to the Wandsworth solicitor H. N. Corsellis. In the past Corsellis had often relied on the Stanbury family to design and build his estates; but by this time John Stanbury, the family's chief builder, had moved out to Worcester Park in semi-retirement, and was in a position to join Corsellis as co-developer, leaving most of the construction work to lessees.⁸⁰

Generally shrewd, Corsellis and Stanbury were at their most efficient here, overseeing within three years the erection of around 180 houses on an estate of just six acres, beginning with **90-126 Taybridge Road** (1897-8), followed by all the houses in **Tregarvon Road** (1897-9), at **65-79 Clapham Common North Side** and finally all of **Jedburgh Street** (both 1898-1900). The pared-down, virtually identical two-storey red-brick terraces in the side-streets were built by Frank Eaton of Cicada Road, Wandsworth (on another Corsellis estate). Only in the bigger houses overlooking the common, built by Stanbury and George Abbott of Brixton, was more effort put into

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appearances, in the way of gables, first-floor balconettes and moulded brick aprons. Despite this unforgiving approach the development did well, and the high demand for such houses locally encouraged the Mitchell (City of London) Charity to buy most of the estate freehold in May 1900 as an investment, at a price of £32,500. The pair of shops jutting out into the roadway at **78 & 80 Taybridge Road** (of 1897) and the four houses behind at Nos 82–88 (of 1900) seem to have been part of this development; their obtrusiveness was dictated by a small, irregular salient of land, once the hindmost part of the grounds of Northside.⁸¹

In 1928 parts of the rear gardens of 62 & 63 Clapham Common North Side were sold and the short terrace of six white-faced, bow-fronted houses at **128–136 Taybridge Road** built there by Fawcett & Company of Clapham.⁸²

Stormont Road

Of all the streets hereabouts, Stormont Road has the most complicated history, having been built up at various times between about 1870 and 1896 across three different Victorian landholdings.

As so often in this area, the northern end came first, in the early 1870s. On the east side, the big imposing pair of stuccoed houses at Nos 1 & 3 – with columnar entrances of unusual ambition (Ill. 13.21) – was erected c.1871–3 as part of a long terrace (Nos 1–33) on the western fringe of John Westwood's Lavender Hill Park estate (see above). Only this pair survived bomb damage and post-war rebuilding. A 1960s LCC block (Antrim House), comprising a maternity and child welfare clinic with maisonettes above, and low-rise council housing of 1971 now occupy the other sites. Two other pockets of three-storey housing at this end of the road – Nos 33–41 (of 1875), built by Mark Chamberlain, with yet more of his trademark Jennings' moulded lintels,

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and Nos 43–45 (1876, Thomas Graves, builder) – were also part of Westwood’s estate.⁸³

The land on the road’s upper west side, however, belonged to the gardens of Mayfield, Clapham Common, home of the solicitor Ebenezer Bristow. He had been planning to build houses at the north end of his grounds, in Sugden Road, off Lavender Hill, since 1868 (see below), but had held off, presumably because of the building recession. The first activity here came in 1875 at **125–135 Lavender Hill** (originally 1–6 Somers Villas), half-a-dozen detached two-storey houses on the frontage between Stormont and Sugden Roads (Ill. 13.25); and **137–143 Lavender Hill**, a shorter run of taller terraced villas west of Sugden Road – all built by John Martin of Clapham, probably as his own freehold speculation. These were all converted to shops in 1895–6.⁸⁴ Then in 1876 Bristow agreed to sell another plot at the north-west corner of Stormont Road to the London Congregational Union for a new church. A hall and Sunday school were built first, in 1878–9, followed by the church itself in 1883–4. Both were demolished and replaced in 1969–70 by a brick-clad church (now the Evangelical Church of Yahweh), and a Brutalist concrete boys’ club, the Devas Club.⁸⁵

At about the same time that he gave the hall and church site, Bristow also sold the plot to its south, where four houses were built in 1877–9: the present 4–8 Stormont Road, and also No. 2, demolished for the rebuilt church. All four appear to have been a rare speculation by the builder and architect Robert Austin, designer of the houses on the Shaftesbury Park estate. Not surprisingly, Austin’s builders here had Shaftesbury Park connections: Nos 2 & 4 were built first, in 1877, by Bax & Ward, who had erected houses for him in Latchmere Road, where they were based; and the builder of Nos 6 & 8, in 1878–9, was William Goodman of Eversleigh Road.⁸⁶

Draft

At the time of this development, Austin seems to have taken to using the surname Edgar, presumably in consequence of his dismissal by the Artizans' Company following their well-publicized fraud scandal, in which he was implicated (page #). Perhaps because of the brouhaha, Austin placed ownership of at least two of the Stormont Road houses (Nos 6 & 8) in the name of his daughter Henrietta Priscilla, or of his wife; both were then also using the surname Edgar and living at No. 4. Possession had reverted to Austin by the time of his death in October 1883.⁸⁷

Austin's houses here, with their stock and red-brick livery, Gothic-style detailing and pointed door arches, have the air of Shaftesbury Park about them (Ill. 13.23). Nos 6 & 8 were built as an asymmetrical pair of semis, Nos 2 & 4 as double-fronted single houses, though they were not necessarily occupied as such, and as at Shaftesbury Park seem to have been built without bathrooms. One of Austin's sons, Alphonso Josiah Austin, who had followed his father into the carpentry trade, died at 8 Stormont Road in 1879, aged only 34. The congregational church later bought No. 2 and converted it to a boys' club (the Stormont Institute). This it remained until it was demolished for the new church, with the Devas Club absorbing the club's function.⁸⁸

The trio of red-and-stock brick houses adjoining to the south, at 10-14 Stormont Road, were added in 1885 by W. J. Goldsworthy, a builder of Strathblaine Road, St John's Hill.⁸⁹

Until 1894 the site of the southern arm of Stormont Road was occupied by the Clapham Common villa called The Eukestons, then owned by Sir John Dickson-Poynder, Bart., of Hartham Park, Wiltshire, son of the builder-developer Thomas Poynder. No longer resident at Clapham, Dickson-Poynder decided to cash in and develop the little estate, which he first augmented by acquiring the neighbouring villa properties to the east, known as Kirkdale and Brewster Lodge. Between January and April 1894 plans for

Draft

redevelopment were prepared for him by the architects and surveyors Lee & Pain, of Lincolns Inn Fields.⁹⁰

The result was two long rows of standard terraced housing built in 1894–6, continuing Stormont Road to the common, now numbered 47–133 and 16–100 but until December 1894 known as Eukestons Road. Builders here included Joseph Lower, of Sugden Road and W. E. & C. J. Kerven.⁹¹ Nos 20–46 Marney Road were also part of this development (see below).

As well as the modern buildings at the road's north end there are pockets of 1950s bomb-damage replacement housing to the south, at Nos 24–32 and 98–100, both by Battersea Borough Council.⁹²

Sugden Road to Elspeth Road

Sugden and Marney Roads

This ground was once part of the long gardens behind the house known as The Hall, or Mayfield, fronting Clapham Common. Plans by Mayfield's owner Ebenezer Bristow for a new road here were in train by 1868, but no work took place until 1877. In its original form Sugden Road was a dead end about 380ft long, lined either side with attractive detached and semi-detached houses, of c.1877–8 (Ill. 13.24). Those on the east side, now Nos 2–22, built under lease from Bristow by Newton & Triggs of Clapham, have paired round-arched door surrounds and a light, Italianate manner; those on the west (Nos 1–19, by George Small of Avenue Road, Clapham) have pointed gables and a chunkier Gothic feel. Most were semis, with four main rooms

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and good-sized gardens; early occupants were a familiar mix of clerks, legal men, master tradesmen, usually with at least one resident servant.⁹³

Bristow tried twice, in 1879 and 1881, to extend the road, but met resistance from the MBW. He eventually sold up in 1886 to H. N. Corsellis, who, with the help of William and John Stanbury, demolished the mansion and laid out a continuation of Sugden Road to the common. They also squeezed in another new road alongside to the east, opening into Stormont Road; this was named Marney Road after the Corsellis family's ancient Essex homeland.⁹⁴ In 1886–8 their builders, who included Samuel Rashleigh, James George and John Edward Grey, quickly threw up the 180-odd houses at 21–133 & 24–128 Sugden Road, and 2–8 & 1–107 Marney Road, all in tightly packed two-storey terraces with the tiniest of back gardens; by 1910–11 many of these properties were being rented in floors as flats. J. E. Grey was also the builder of the distinctive row of tall gault-brick dwellings on the site of the old house at **99–104 Clapham Common North Side**, of 1888.⁹⁵

When some years later the lower end of Stormont Road was developed on the Dickson-Poynder estate alongside (see above), where space was tight several of the houses on its west side were built presenting their back gardens to Marney Road, to the annoyance of residents there.⁹⁶ Further south, where the ground broadened out towards the common, Dickson-Poynder and his architects found room enough to squeeze in one more terrace of houses, now **20–46 Marney Road** (of 1894–5).

Thirsk and Longbeach Roads

Three old detached houses once stood here facing Lavender Hill: Combe, Linden and Ashley Lodges (see Ill. 10.1). Increasingly hemmed in by the new streets emerging around them, they were sold for redevelopment in 1892 to

Draft

John Wilson, a builder and contractor of Heaton, Newcastle upon Tyne. Wilson was aided by a relation, Joseph – also a builder (presumably a son) – who was based firstly in Putney, then from January 1894 at Combe Lodge itself. Early plans suggest the Wilsons initially intended to build only a single road (Thirsk Road) running south from Lavender Hill across the estate, with a spur on its west side leading towards the Sisters estate, which Wilson briefly owned. But they later decided to wring more from the land by squeezing in a second (Longbeach) and building tall blocks of apartments or ‘tenement houses’ where the roads converged.⁹⁷

Construction took place in 1893–5, the two busiest builders being Edward Tremble and William Dawson, both of Putney, with whom Joseph Wilson, who built several houses himself, presumably had connections. It was Wilson who also erected the shops with dwellings above at **147–175 Lavender Hill**; their red-brick fronts and decorative pointed first-floor window arches echo the more spirited shop parades of the late 1880s further down Lavender Hill. No. 155 has a fine original shop-front (Ill. ?).⁹⁸

Most of the houses were in standard two-storey terraces, but for such a small estate there is surprising variety and quality. Several houses, as at the north end of Thirsk Road (Nos 1–7), were double-fronted, with incised cement surrounds to the paired doors; and the run at 23–51 Longbeach Road with bargeboarded gables (James E. Wade, builder) has small coloured lights set into the ground-floor windows, and other attractive details. But the most interesting group are the flats built by Tremble at the meeting of the two roads, identifiable from their tripartite (and occasionally quadripartite) groupings of windows. Those at 12–22 Longbeach and 19–23 Thirsk Roads look like broad-fronted two-storey houses, but for the twin narrow entrance doors and shared numbering (19, 19A and so on). At 24 Longbeach Road (Heaton House) the scale leaps to three storeys as the roads squeeze tighter together (Il. 14.25); this block is joined at the hip to an almost identical one

Draft

behind at 25 Thirsk Road. The culmination is the group of six flats at 26–36 Longbeach Road, with façades to each road and the six entrance doors bunched together near the corner. Early occupants of this block included the families of a schoolmaster, a Civil Service clerk, and an etched-glass artist. Within a few years it was reported that the houses here ‘seem to let well and the neighbourhood [is] likely to attract tenants’.⁹⁹

Sisters Avenue to Elspeth Road: the Sisters estate

All the late-Victorian streets here stand on the grounds of the Clapham Common mansions known as the Sisters. One was demolished, the other survives as Gilmore House, 113 Clapham Common North Side; both are discussed in detail above.

The estate was split in two in 1858 following the death of its owner Elizabeth Bower. Her son Edward Chivers Bower inherited the western house (The Sisters), with over eight acres of ground though he did not live there; and in 1859 he and the trustees of his mother’s will sold the western house (Sister House) and its grounds to Charles Thomas Lucas.¹⁰⁰

It was on this latter holding that speculative development began in the 1870s under a new owner, the merchant Ambrose Bassett, who bought Sister House and its gardens from Lucas in 1867. This purchase may have been made with development in mind; if so, like his immediate neighbour Ebenezer Bristow at Mayfield, Basset had to wait several years for building conditions to become more favourable. In 1876 his surveyors, Weatherall & Green, drew up plans for a new road from Clapham Common curving behind Sister House and running north to Lavender Hill, to be called Sisters Avenue. At this stage Basset seems to have been planning to let ground for building along its whole length; but by April 1877 he had sold the house and its

Draft

immediate grounds to Thomas Wallis. This concentrated development at the northern end of the new road, beside Lavender Hill – though part of the Clapham Common frontage was also built up at this time, in the chunky, old-fashioned four-storey and basement terrace of stock brick and stucco at **Princes Gardens, 105–109 Clapham Common North Side** (Charles Kynoch, builder, 1878).¹⁰¹

First to go up at the northern end of the estate were the big four-storey houses spanning the entrance to Sisters Avenue at **177–195 Lavender Hill**, with three floors of splayed bays, built in 1877–8 by Levi J. Rudeforth, a Peckham slater. Shortly after this most of the ground behind was let to two builders: James Rankin of Shepherd’s Bush, who built the large semi-detached pairs at Nos 9–45 and 14–40; and Edmund Wood of Stamford Hill, who was responsible for the terraces of enormous bow-fronted villas at Nos 1–7 and 2–8. All were built between 1879 and 1881. (The builders of Nos 10 & 12 are not known.)¹⁰²

The Sisters Avenue concept was ambitious, with houses of a much wider frontage and bigger scale than was usual to Battersea at this time fronting a road 45ft wide. It has been suggested that these aspects of the development had to some degree been dictated by Wallis, then newly ensconced at Sister House, as a way of ensuring that his new neighbours were of sufficient status.¹⁰³ Wood’s houses in particular, with their basement areas, Tuscan entrance porches and stuccoed classical details – which include Wood’s own monogram above the top-floor windows in the tall gables – have more in common with big west London town mansions of the 1860s than South London suburban terraces of the 1880s (Ill. 13.26). Wood may well have been influenced by the villas on the east side of Altenburg Gardens, built by Hiscox & Williams in the late 1860s (page ##).

Draft

Old-fashioned or not, Wood's villas filled up quickly with tenants. Several early heads of households were retired, or in their fifties and, not surprisingly given the size of the houses, had large families and servants. Many enjoyed income from property or the railways. The draper Henry Arding, of Arding & Hobbs, lived at No. 1 in the 1890s. Rankin's smaller properties also proved popular. Residents of note here include the stained-glass artist Francis P. Barraud (No. 17, c.1881-91), and the architect Henry Jones Lanchester (No. 31, 1891). At No. 15 in 1891 was the former society beauty Olive, Lady Sebright (d.1895), and her son Sir Egbert Sebright, Bart., by then fallen on hard times, largely due to her gambling 'madly ... both at home, and on the Stock Exchange'.¹⁰⁴

In the mid-1890s, with the demand for smaller properties in the area on the rise, Wood's houses were acquired by the developer George Aplin Nichols, who employed the builder George Ugle to convert them to flats. In places Ugle added back extensions, but even without them was able to squeeze as many as eight flats (usually two to a floor) out of Wood's villas. Rents varied from around 8s a week for a two-room ground-floor flat, to 13s a week for four rooms, kitchen and bathroom on the first floor, bringing Nichols as much as 77s 6d a week, or £210pa, for each house. By the post-war period these often dark flats were severely run down, riddled with damp, squatters and rats. Four on the east side (Nos 1-7), which had lost their entrance porticoes, were purchased and restored as flats by Solon Wandsworth Housing Association in the late 1970s and early 80s.¹⁰⁵

With this north part of the Avenue built up by the late 1870s, matters then stalled for just over a decade, the two Sister houses surviving together in relative if no longer splendid isolation. Then in the early 1890s came a sea-change. Firstly, in July 1891 the developer H. N. Corsellis bought The Sisters and the extensive gardens behind it from the Bower family for the considerable sum of £32,500, of which £5,500 was for the old mansion and its

Draft

immediate grounds. The house must have been acquired very shortly afterwards by Thomas Wallis of Sister House, as it was he who let the building to Isabella Gilmore for use as a Deaconess Institute (page #). Behind and beside it John Stanbury built over 200 houses for Corsellis with astonishing speed in just over a year, in 1892–4, at **1–115 & 2–82 Elspeth Road, 1–79 & 2–60 Mysore Road and 114–116 Clapham Common North Side**, as well as shop parades at **201–223 Lavender Hill**.¹⁰⁶ The houses were uniformly of the family's customary red-brick splayed-bay terraces, with only a modicum of decoration. Corsellis quickly recouped some £11,000 by selling the freeholds of 1–47 and 2–70 Mysore Road to R. C. & C. H. Garton, owners of the saccharum factory on York Road. A V1 rocket in Lavender Hill caused considerable destruction at the top end of these streets, as well as in Lavender Gardens adjoining, hence the clutch of post-war buildings there: boxy Battersea Borough Council flats of 1961–4 at **1–7 Mysore Road and 2–20 Elspeth Road**, and the contemporary council offices at **207–209A Lavender Hill** (since recast as modern offices and apartments). The sites of 1–11 Elspeth Road and 219–223 Lavender Hill were left vacant, and utilized in the 1960s for road-widening, and to improve traffic flow across Lavender Hill to and from Latchmere Road.¹⁰⁷

The few patches of still vacant land did not remain so much longer, for when Wallis died in 1894 his estate was acquired by John Wilson of Newcastle, but sold on quickly by him to Herbert Shepherd-Cross. He wasted no time in having plans devised by a local surveyor, Frederick Henry Harvey of Andoe Road, for two new 'Groves' – Marjorie Grove and Winifred Grove (the latter now incorporated into the lower end of Mysore Road). By the end of the year these had been approved and houses were beginning to go up there and in the southern stretch of Sisters Avenue. A handful of builders dominated this development, chief among them the local men Alfred & Arthur Coomber and Henry Edmond Cockell, and also William Oldfield Webster of Paddington.¹⁰⁸

On the Sisters estate the terraces they built c.1894–8 at **1–29 & 2–36 Marjorie Grove, 81–115 & 72–106 Mysore Road** (part originally Winifred Grove), **47–77 & 46–58 Sisters Avenue**, and also **84–102 Elspeth Road**, behind Gilmore House, were, like those by Corsellis, of relatively narrow frontage. But in places greater height and some exuberant façades provide a far livelier streetscape. Shaped gables, iron balconettes, bay projections and cast decorative panels are all used to good effect. Particularly fine are the pargetted gables at 22 & 24 Marjorie Grove, of 1895–6, built by Alfred Coomber; and also the fairy-tale turret at the corner of 96A–106 Mysore Road (formerly 12–22 Winifred Grove), a terrace of 1896 probably designed as well as built by F. H. Harvey himself (Ills 13.27, 28).¹⁰⁹ (Other houses were lost during or after the war and replaced by council flats, at 38–40 Marjorie Grove and 60–78 & 79–89 Sisters Avenue; there are also more modern houses at 91 & 93–101 Sisters Avenue.)

Flats also featured prominently. **Avenue Mansions**, another work of 1895 by Alfred Coomber, dominate the frontage between Sisters Avenue and Marjorie Grove. These were planned as two discrete but adjoining blocks, each containing eight flats. The stock-brick exterior is enlivened by good-quality ironwork, and plentiful stucco ornament, on the balustraded parapet, window surrounds, and especially in the playful decorations to the tiers of square bay windows (Ill. 13.29).¹¹⁰

Robert Taylor's Sister House finally came down, and on its site was erected another block of flats – **Grove Mansions, 111–112 Clapham Common North Side**, of 1896, the most substantial of the new suites of apartments built facing the common. John Lewis (or Louis) Schiefer, a New Yorker, was the builder and possibly also developer of this four-storey range in red brick with stone dressings and features, including pediments and big, curving entrance arches (Ill. 13.30). The son of German immigrants, Schiefer was active in

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London and its environs in the 1890s before returning to Brooklyn. Like Avenue Mansions, Grove Mansions were built as two blocks of eight flats, with separate entrances. Though one of Schiefer's applications describes them as 'residential chambers', they were not truly so, there being no communal facilities. Early occupants included several well-off widows, childless couples and small families, sometimes with their own live-in servant.¹¹¹

The final Sisters estate development was **Alverstoke, 110 Clapham Common North Side**, a late-Victorian suburban mansion in red brick and roughcast, with a roofline of half-timbered gables (Ill. 13.31). It was built in 1895–7 by Sir Henry Herbert Bartlett, head of the leading East End public works contractors Perry & Co., of Bow. Early drainage plans suggest that initially the house might have been intended as Bartlett's own residence. This is plausible: in 1892 Bartlett had moved from Tredegar Square, close to the works, to a big house in Wimbledon, but stayed there only briefly. His family home between then and 1900, when he took a large house in Cornwall Gardens, Kensington, is not known. A socially awkward man, who disliked company and preferred the countryside to city life, he may have been attracted by the open spaces of Clapham Common.¹¹² However, Bartlett never lived there, and the house may simply have been one of his many shrewd investments of the period. Its first occupants in 1897 were Frederic Julius Macaulay, director of the London & South Western Railway, his wife and their five servants. Macaulay had a yearly tenancy, for which he paid Bartlett £160 a year in rent, and lived here until his death in 1912.¹¹³

Alverstoke, however, is best known as the home of the firebrand local politician John Burns from 1914 until his death in 1943, a period spent mostly in retirement following his withdrawal from the House of Commons in 1918. This rambling, spacious house was especially suited to Burns (by then beneficiary of a generous annuity from Andrew Carnegie) and his huge collection of books and topographical works, mostly on London history,

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thought to be the finest private collection of its kind. By the time of his death there were some 20,000 works kept there, with books lining 'the rooms, the passages and the staircase and in some cases ... three deep on the shelves'.¹¹⁴ Latterly confined to what had become a dark, 'cheerless' house, boarded up with air-raid screens, Burns, a widower since 1936, towards the end cut a sad, Miss Havisham type of figure, with his thousands of dusty books 'instead of a mouldering wedding-cake'.¹¹⁵ The collection was split up and sold after his death in three auction sales in 1943–4. Such was the strong feeling for Burns that the LCC, once the war was over, waived its usual 20-year rule to allow a Blue Plaque to be erected to him. However, the council insisted that the words 'Trade Union Leader' be removed from the original design of July 1949, leaving only the single word 'Statesman'. It was unveiled in February 1950.¹¹⁶

By then the main part of the house had been converted to half-a-dozen flats, plus a further two-bed flat in the single-storey eastern wing. Its character and open setting were undermined in 1985 when that wing was demolished and a tall, thinly postmodern brick extension block added hard up against it, providing another nine flats and parking spaces (by Stefan Zins Associates for Oakarch Properties).¹¹⁷