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CHAPTER 15

West of St John's Road

The main block of land covered in this chapter lies between St John's Hill and Battersea Rise, bounded on its west by Boutflower Road and the railway, on its east by St John's Road. Though it has no special name today, it was dubbed St John's Park for promotional purposes by the developer Alfred Heaver in the 1880s, when its present character was largely set. For reasons of convenience, the earlier history of the segment of land between St John's Hill and Clapham Junction Station is also included here, as is part of the eastern frontage of St John's Road, otherwise covered in Chapter 14 (Ill. 15.1). In both cases, accounts of the present buildings, being largely of a commercial or public character, are to be found mostly in volume 49.

Perhaps because of its distance from the two commons, the area west of St John's Road failed to attract Georgian villas of the kind built around Lavender Sweep to its east. The Spencers held on to their freeholds here later than elsewhere in Battersea, some until the 1840s, when the land was still mainly agricultural. Before then development had been confined to small pockets of cottages and workshops: next to the Falcon inn on Falcon Lane; along the northern edge of Battersea Rise; and beside the Hydeburn or Falcon brook, which ran through the dip along the area's eastern margin beside a footpath later to become St John's Road.

On the north and west fringes the construction in 1836–8 of the railway was the harbinger of the next stage of development. The line was tucked down in a cutting, and trains at first were few. William Evill, a resident of St John's Hill for thirty years from 1851, contrasted the peaceful railway at that

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time, with its one stopping train a day from the nearby Clapham Station, to the 'whirling, shrieking traffic' after Clapham Junction replaced it in 1863.¹ Evill's was one of a scatter of minor middle-class villas and pairs or short terraces which began to appear from the early 1840s on both sides of St John's Hill, as the main road and district around it now began regularly to be called. In the next decade the Royal Masonic Institution girls' school opened next to the railway, which was doubled in width to accommodate a second line. New Wandsworth, a second short-lived station established in 1858, also lent its name loosely to the whole district, but it never fully caught on, though it was in sporadic use into the twentieth century.

The 1850s saw a brief flurry of building between the railway and St John's Hill in New (later Prested) Road of the kind of small-house development that overtook the low-lying streets further north in the 1860s–70s. The emergence of Clapham Junction wiped out most of these little dwellings within a few years, as the station and railway lines expanded; and the area as a whole generally proved resistant to this class of housing. When Alfred Heaver's St John's Park development spread over the surviving green spaces south of St John's Hill in the 1880s, it followed the lead of smarter streets south and east, spawning spacious and houses of lively red brick, most of them three storeys high and liberally ornamented. Nevertheless there are clues that Aliwal, Comyn, Eckstein and Severus Roads were always destined for subdivision. There was indeed multiple occupancy from the start, and houses in these streets remain less likely to attract single-family occupation than those nearer the commons. The transience of residents hereabouts may partly be due to the proximity of the station and a large Peabody estate.

Meanwhile, also under Heaver's imprint, the main streets of the area turned heartily commercial from the 1880s. On St John's Road, almost all of the older houses by the Falcon brook disappeared, while the sale in 1904 of

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Lavender Lodge, an old villa on its east side, allowed the completion of what had become a thriving shopping and market street. Similarly the lower end of St John's Hill had its villas and semis converted to or replaced by a series of business-related premises as this junction evolved into Battersea's new centre. The biggest architectural change thereafter was the replacement of the Royal Masonic Institution in the 1930s by the Peabody estate (currently scheduled for redevelopment), and the building in the 1980s of shops and offices at Clapham Junction, either side of the Falcon.

Early history

The whole of the future St John's Park and the area north of St John's Hill were once closes on the manorial lands acquired by Earl Spencer from Viscount Bolingbroke in 1763–4. The Falcon is the district's first recorded building, having stood in an earlier guise on its important crossroads site since at least 1733, if not well before. Around it then were mostly market gardens and gardeners' cottages.²

South of St John's Hill, by 1782 most of the land (except for the narrow strips on the Battersea Rise and future St John's Road frontages) was in the hands of Harbin Elderton, a musician, City broker and serial bankrupt. The eastern strip, between the Falcon brook and the path that became St John's Road, consisted of three marshy plots devoted to fishponds, which Earl Spencer's lessees were required to make available to his other tenants, 'to water their cattle ... and wash and cleanse their vegetables and garden produce there'.³

After Elderton's second bankruptcy in 1788 the big close west of the brook was occupied as a market garden by William Burridge, part of an

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extended Battersea family. After he died in 1829 it was broken up into seven fields and let, with only the westernmost retained for the family business. The two plots next to this fronting St John's Hill were taken by John Alder, tenant of the Falcon since 1810; one large strip adjoining the backs of the properties in Battersea Rise by William Mellersh, a Southwark publican who lived on the other side of St John's Road (page #); the rest by Matthew Whiting of Lavender Lodge.⁴

Between 1835 and 1843 the Spencers sold all their freeholds here to their lessees, prompting fresh changes of ownership. For example, John Alder bought the freehold of the Falcon and other adjacent properties, including the nearest pond south of St John's Hill. The market garden west of the Falcon was bought in 1835–7 by Charles Wix, a City oil and colourman, part of another extended Clapham–Battersea family. Whiting in particular consolidated his holdings by securing land by the brook in 1838, presumably to protect the western outlook of Lavender Lodge, and taking over the remaining Burrige meadow land east of the railway that same year. He also bought up Mellersh's land after his death in 1841.⁵

The Falcon

The Falcon is Battersea's most prominent hostelry and perhaps the liveliest surviving specimen of the prolific London pub architect H. I. Newton's designs. Built in 1882–3, it replaced an old inn of the same name.

That name presumably derived from the crest of the St John family. Though it is first found in 1733, it seems likely that it was applied to an inn or farmhouse that had existed well before then at this strategic crossing where the turnpike road passed over the Hydeburn brook, which at some point also

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took the inn's name. The Falcon's isolation made it a useful landmark, often cited in reports of attacks by highwaymen on travellers along the turnpike.⁶ A piece of whimsy led to the recording of the old inn's appearance and setting. Its tenant under the Spencers from the 1780s was one Robert Death. Displayed on a signboard, the name looked comic enough to elicit some verses from Edward Trapp Pilgrim in the *European Magazine* in 1785 ('Lines on a publican, named Death'), reprinted in 1801. The amateur artist John Nixon took up the joke, drawing a caricature that was reproduced in the magazine and, perhaps in its original form, displayed in the Falcon for years. It shows 'Undertakers regaling themselves at Death's Door Battersea Rise Surry' – no doubt a fictional scenario (Ill. 15.3). The background is sylvan: trees shade the transom-windowed house, while travellers tackle St John's Hill behind.⁷

The Falcon changed hands three times in 1808–10 following the demise of Death and his widow, passing finally to John Alder, a Clapham victualler.⁸ Having acquired the freehold at the Spencer sale in October 1835, Alder extended the Falcon shortly afterwards, rebuilding or refronting it in brick with two canted bays, and converting the adjoining minor buildings on Falcon Lane into four cottages. Alder and his son George then leased the site to a succession of tenants, losing a small portion of the garden in 1863 to the West London Extension Railway. Their last lessee before redevelopment was George Ferris, who in the 1860s extended the frontage northwards with a plain stock-brick wing, and built six more small cottages in the garden, behind the Falcon brook, which shortly afterwards was suppressed into a sewer.⁹

In a deal involving a new publican, John Tavener, and the local builder George Nathaniel Street, the site was reconfigured and the pub rebuilt in 1882–3 on a curving frontage at the corner. At the time a contributor to *Notes and Queries* contrasted the 'very picturesque' and 'low-pitched' old tavern

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recently removed with the 'gin palace' that had 'just opened its palatial doors'.¹⁰ Street also bought the Falcon Lane cottages, rebuilding all but the largest as three-storey houses and shops. Before the last cottages could be demolished, one of Street's new gable walls crashed on to them in a gale, burying the family of John Hemmersley (or Hammersley), ostler at the Falcon, just as he was reading to them 'a letter that the old man had received from a soldier son in the Indies'. All were pulled out alive.¹¹

The pub itself was built to Newton's designs by R. & H. Pickersgill (Ills 15.5, 6). It is a robust piece of London pub architecture in the Franco-Italianate taste, with cement dressings complementing the external brickwork, and a redundant mansard turret perched behind an ornamental gable at the corner. There was at first much pewterer's work inside. The interior today may reflect alterations of 1896 by Turtle & Appleton, builders.¹² Fluted cast-iron columns with capitals of various patterns open up the space and permit a central bar to serve two ample rooms, the back one having formerly been a billiard room. Florid oakwork is set off by fetching glass panels depicting falcons amid decorative patterns, and later vignettes of the pub at stages in its history. The Falcon Hotel, as the new establishment was called, flourished under the Taveners. In 1883-4 Pickersgill added for them a pair of three-storey houses and shops adjoining to the west, possibly also to Newton's designs, at 4 & 6 St John's Hill (since demolished). Six more went up in 1901 around the corner at 148-158 Falcon Road, on the site of Ferris's old cottages. Mrs Tavener, by then widowed, also added a large billiard room at the rear of the pub, which by 1911 could boast a resident staff of a manager, eighteen barmaids and other servants, as well as John Tavener junior. Tavener finally sold the Falcon to the Wenlock Brewery in 1921 for £70,000, as much as £120,000 having reputedly been offered for it previously. Its success was put down squarely to its location: 'The sources of trade were exceptional owing to its practically unopposed position'.¹³ The buildings added around the Falcon, including Mrs

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Tavener's billiard room, were demolished in the early 1970s in anticipation of redevelopment, which came in the 1980s (see below).

St John's Road

Until the 1820s St John's Road was a watery and nameless field path (the name began to be used only in the 1850s). The few houses abutting it were on the rising ground along its east side, and dated from the late eighteenth-century development of the Lavender Sweep area (see page ## and Ill. 14.2). They consisted of two smallish houses at the north end (on the site of Arding & Hobbs), both owned by John Beaumont of Lavender Sweep, and at the south end some tiny houses built by William Mellersh, owner of the adjoining house (now 68A Battersea Rise).¹⁴

On the west side, the ponds between the road and the Falcon brook were drained some time after 1810, probably by John Alder of the Falcon inn, who proceeded to build a curving terrace of seven small cottages at the south end, next to the Battersea Rise corner, called Regent Place, with gardens leading down to the brook (see Ill. 14.2). At the top end of the road, Alder erected another terrace of eleven tiny cottages, just south of the Falcon, this time set well back from the road behind a green and backing directly on to the brook. By 1835 he had added two small semi-detached pairs at either end. These cottages were occupied mainly by agricultural labourers, market gardeners and laundresses, who would have made use of the brook's water, and by coachmen, presumably in the service of the local villas. The remainder of the west side was acquired by Matthew Whiting in 1838 but remained open, allowing access from Lavender Lodge (on the east side) via a path across the brook to Whiting's meadow beyond.¹⁵

After John Alder's death in 1842 his son George began building more ambitiously here and in St John's Hill. A tax collector, George Alder was involved in various improving activities locally in the 1850s and 60s as an overseer of the poor, treasurer of the Battersea Literary and Scientific Institution, member of the Local Examinations Board, and trustee of the Reliance Benefit Building Society.¹⁶ He began by demolishing his father's fifteen cottages at the north end of St John's Road. Over several years in the late 1840s he built in their stead nineteen two-storey houses, set closer to the road and broken up into rows of seven and twelve (Ill. 15.13). The first four houses of the twelve – known as 1 & 2 Whynot Villas, and 1 & 2 Tryand Villas – survive, much bashed about, as 16–20 St John's Road. Whynot Villas had picturesque gables with decorative bargeboards and semi-circular lunettes over the central first-floor window, which survives at No. 16 (Ill. 15.7). Tryand Villas had balustraded cornices and stucco surrounds, vestigially present at No. 20. Further down the terrace, two of the smallest houses also had whimsical names – 1 & 2 Two Brothers in 1861.¹⁷ Between 1871 and 1881 four more tiny cottages called Hermitage Gardens were built on a narrow east-west strip at the south of this terrace, but they were soon entirely hemmed in.

By the early 1880s there were some shops in St John's Road, but much of the street was populated by gardeners, building workers, laundresses and even a cowman.¹⁸ Over the next decade it was completely transformed by the ambitions of the speculator-builder Alfred Heaver. In 1881 Heaver acquired the northern half of the east frontage for building, as a result of the sale of the estates of the Lavender Sweep villas (page ##). Four years later he purchased from the Whiting brothers the whole of their father's meadows on the opposite side of the road, with similar intent. That gave Heaver most of the frontage on both sides, leaving only the southern end on the east side, still

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occupied by the Lavender Lodge villa and the garden of Mellersh's Battersea Rise villa.

With the help of the Wandsworth District Board of Works, which widened and straightened what had been hitherto a highly irregular lane, Heaver proceeded within a decade to transform St John's Road into part of a major south London crossroads of commerce (see vol. 49). Today St John's Road is a thriving if bus-choked shopping street – a palpable point of transition between the rawer topography of Battersea northwards and the genteel communities which soon assert themselves to the south, on both sides of Northcote Road.

Battersea Rise (north side)

This part of Battersea Rise is unique hereabouts in retaining some of its early character of small buildings and back courts, despite the fact that none of the present fabric predates the 1870s, and has been altered considerably by bomb damage and post-war reconstruction.

Development began intermittently from the mid eighteenth century along a shallow, wedge-shaped strip running west from the Falcon brook almost to Boutflower Road (then known as the 'by road to St John's Place'). Its west end is still occupied by this stretch's most distinctive building: the former Railway Tavern (Ills 15.8, 9), later the Dog and Duck (now just the Duck). A forge had occupied this site before 1810 when Ann, widow of James Hawkins, a blacksmith, sold the lease to William Finch, victualler, of the Half Moon, Putney. Having added three houses by 1831, Finch acquired the freehold at the 1836 Spencer sale. A beershop was being run in the end house

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by 1846, when Finch's son Thomas rebuilt it with one of the adjoining houses as an inn, adding four two-storey cottages with tiny shopfronts to the east (later 100–106 Battersea Rise). The forge business (at Nos 96–98) was a 'veterinary forge' in 1869, but by the turn of the century part had become a fish-and-chip, and the 'Old Forge' was empty and to let.¹⁹

The inn itself was first known as the Universe, but by 1849 had become the Railway Tavern, reflecting its owner's desire to elicit trade from passengers at Clapham Common Station, further west along Battersea Rise. The location certainly helped secure the tavern's licence, the sessions' chairman and local landowner Matthew Whiting arguing that it stood in a well-populated neighbourhood and would be a convenience to those using the station.²⁰ For such reasons the Railway Tavern was briefly considered by the new-minted Wandsworth Board of Works in 1855 as the location for its offices and was favoured by its first Ratepayers' Association. In the event a site further east just beyond St John's Road was preferred.

By this stage the Battersea Rise frontage and hinterland were building up. In 1861 the tavern's landlord Thomas Sturgess acquired a thin strip of land behind, where he built a pair of semi-detached houses (Sturgess Cottages, approached via a back alley behind the pub), designed by John Tarring, 'the Gilbert Scott of the Dissenters'; and also a two-storey house north of the pub (later 112 Battersea Rise).²¹ Backing on to Sturgess Cottages and perhaps also by Tarring but on separate property was a similar pair (Albert Cottages), built by a butcher, George Kitchen, with separate access from an alley further east. The cricketer Ted Pooley, England's first test-match wicketkeeper (and possibly first match-fixer), lived at 1 Albert Cottages in 1871.²²

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Sturgess was able to augment the narrow site of the Railway Tavern with the strip between the pub and the alley to Sturgess Cottages in 1869, so that once the district became fully built up, what had been a minor beerhouse could be rebuilt by Turtle & Appleton in 1893–4 as a swanky ‘railway hotel’, with rubbed-brick decorations.²³ It was equipped with a large billiard room to the rear and a club room, home for many decades to the Battersea Chess Club.

East of the forge, buildings that had existed since the mid eighteenth century included two houses held by John Jay, a Southwark skin merchant, in 1787. These were acquired at the 1836 Spencer sale by Charles Thornton, a carrier, and his father Thomas, victualler, who added two houses alongside (later 92 & 94 Battersea Rise) and then, perhaps encouraged by the Railway Tavern, in 1847–8 reconstructed Jay’s two houses as a beerhouse, the Rising Sun (later No. 90). This was eventually sold in 1910 to the brewers Watney, Combe & Reid who rebuilt it in 1926 to the designs of their in-house architect, G. G. Macfarlane in a spare neo-Wren manner.²⁴ The whole frontage here (Nos 86–112) was severely damaged in the Second World War and acquired by Battersea Borough Council, which demolished everything except the Railway Tavern and No. 112. East of the pub, the Council’s Works Department in 1954–5 built the present appropriately scaled row of stock-brick three-storey shops with flats over at Nos 86–98.²⁵

Leaving aside the site of Nos 76–80, the remainder of the Battersea Rise frontage as far east as St John’s Road was acquired at the Spencer sale by William Gordon Picking, builder and carpenter. He added two small houses (later Nos 86 & 88), and further east, where the Falcon brook crossed Battersea Rise at a sharp angle, three more houses set well back from the road (later Nos 70–74). These survived until 1907, when they were replaced by a Putney builder, S. G. Merrett, with a restrained regular frontage of red brick with stone dressings and gables. Eleven years after Picking’s death in 1864 his

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assets were divided among his numerous relatives. The Battersea Rise business was taken over by James Picking, probably a nephew, and it was he who in 1876 built the surviving No. 82 (named Ashwell Cottage after his Hertfordshire birthplace), later adding No. 84 alongside. The intervening plain brick shops at Nos 76–80 were built in 1884 on a former bakery site acquired by Thomas Matthias, a Welsh house-decorator and carpenter. In 1891 Matthias added a three-storey factory of irregular outline at the back (No. 80A). Having been occupied for nearly thirty years by Spiller, Boulton, piano manufacturers, and later by a brewers' supplier, it was converted in the 1980s into loft apartments and a yoga studio.²⁶

Socially, this stretch of Battersea Rise makes an interesting contrast with St John's Road. As a main-road frontage, it had already seen minor development when the latter was just a field path. Between the 1820s and 1880s their social and architectural trajectory was similar, marked by cottages and small businesses, shops and beerhouses. But whereas in St John's Road large swathes of undeveloped land suddenly became available in the early 1880s, in Battersea Rise fragmented ownership meant that development and redevelopment were piecemeal. Apart from bomb-damage reconstruction, there has been little large-scale rebuilding. Individual shops such as a foot clinic and a hi-fi components supplier have supplanted older trades but at a similar small scale. Planning consent to demolish James Picking's Ashwell Cottages for a four-storey block of flats, if carried through, will largely put paid to all that.²⁷

Severus, Comyn, Aliwal, Eckstein
& Boutflower Roads

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This area was transformed from meadow land and gardens to an estate of five streets and 225 houses in a four-year burst of building under Alfred Heaver in 1885–9. St John's Park, as he called it, was to be Heaver's second-largest Battersea venture, after Falcon Park (page #). In July 1885 his architect C. J. Bentley submitted a plan for the estate, before Heaver's purchases were completed. The price was reported as £16,000 by *The Builder*, which added that 400 to 500 houses were planned for the ground. The bulk of the land involved was acquired from the Whiting family, but also included was George Alder's former house on St John's Hill, which gave useful main-road access from the north. To the south the site adjoined the rear of Battersea Rise, and to the east St John's Road.²⁸

The most difficult aspect was to the west where Heaver acquired a limited frontage towards what was to become Boutflower Road. Although Matthew Whiting had previously secured a licence to turn this lane into a proper road, in 1885 it was still 'but an irregularly formed footpath with posts across its entrance', while the railway crossing beside the Masonic School was only a footbridge. The Metropolitan Board of Works therefore withheld formal permission for Bentley's layout until April 1886, when reassurances about widening the road to 40ft had been given.²⁹

Heaver suggested Markfield, Winton, Manbury and Danehurst as names for the roads but clearly was indifferent, as Bentley requested the MBW to substitute others if Heaver's were found 'unsuitable'. In the event the names became, obscurely, Aliwal, Comyn, Eckstein and Severus Roads. Boutflower Road was a local choice, commemorating Henry Boutflower Verdon, first vicar-designate of St Mark's Church across the road, who died young in 1879.

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By October 1885 roads, sewers and even houses were already building. The kinks in Eckstein and Comyn Roads served to skirt land that Heaver sold that December to the Masonic School for its grand new Alexandra Wing and Centenary Hall (1889–90).³⁰ Heaver leased and often also mortgaged plots to a range of builders, many of whom he worked with before or afterwards. Some houses were begun by one builder but leased to another, sometimes before the houses were completed. For example, the whole of the south side of Comyn Road was begun by John Rowe, but half (Nos 5–35) was taken over by Edward Coates, another long-term associate of Heaver's, who also took Nos 2–4 and 12–20 opposite, built by William Pierce.³¹

Aliwal and Comyn Roads, built up in 1885–7, are the most coherent of the St John's Park streets (Ill. 15.10). They show that Heaver's designer – Bentley or possibly someone different – offered two main alternatives for the elevations, distributed randomly, one with flat-fronted bays topped by straight gables, the other with canted bays and capped roofs. In Aliwal Road the houses are two storeys high, but they rise to three in Comyn Road, where the top storeys of the canted type are not bayed. They are arranged in mirrored pairs, contrived so that on the flat-fronted type the slated porch-hoods run right across between the bays as lean-to features, while on the canted type they are hipped and do not engage with the bays. All these hoods are carried on corbelled colonnettes and deep brackets.

Both house-types abound in applied decorative carvings such as capitals and lozenges, but the flat-fronted type catch the eye, boasting cornices edged with occasional gryphons or dragons over the ground-floor bays, and pretty vertical plaques besides the doors (Ill. 15.11). The distribution of such features, irrespective of who built a particular group of houses, suggests that Heaver was probably supplying these materials to his builders.

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This pattern changes somewhat in the northern portion of St John's Park, which was mostly built later, around 1887-9. On the north side of Comyn Road, Nos 22-38, together with 1-35 Eckstein Road behind, follow a different type, with round-headed porches and relief carving in the spandrels. Eckstein Road is less uniform, while the west side of Severus Road (Nos 2-14) sees the introduction of double-fronted houses on shallow sites, doubtless intended as multi-occupied flats from the start (Ill. 15.12). Despite this drop in ambition, some decoration on fronts is maintained throughout.

Outside the general run of the St John's Park houses is the frontage along Boutflower Road, a valuable position partly overlooking the northernmost fragment of Wandsworth Common. Here Nos 1-4 and 5-17 of 1885-6 adopt a Queen Anne idiom of stock brick with red-brick dressings better attuned to the normal stamping ground of their Chelsea builder, Charles Hunt.³² Nos 5-17 have shaped aprons beneath the second-floor windows, a wrought-iron balcony running the length of the terrace, and carved heads over the centre of the ground-floor bay windows. Here as elsewhere in St John's Park, lashings of paint on fronts have robbed the houses of their former bricky dignity. Beyond Aliwal Road, Nos 1-4 were built as shops but converted to residential use in the 1990s.

Of all the St John's Park houses, Boutflower Road's were the only ones to enjoy continuous single-family occupation and servants. Aliwal Road apart, most of the houses indeed may have been frankly conceived of as tenements with a separate household on each floor, as their deep back extensions for upper-floor kitchens suggest. This distinguishes St John's Park from the neighbouring areas to its south and east. Severus Road, built by Samuel Bowes in 1888-9, shows a typical social trajectory for St John's Park. In 1891, of the twenty occupied houses, six were in single household occupation, three had domestic servants and the average household was 6.7

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people. By 1901 that had risen to 8.25 (fifteen people resided at No. 9) and there were no servants. Ten years later the tone had risen again, with fewer occupants and boarders but no servants, a reflection perhaps of a more formal division into flats. Although there were, given the proximity to Clapham Junction, a large number of clerks and others evidently employed in the City, among boarders and occupants of two or three rooms, building workers predominated. There were also many dressmakers and milliners working at home, employed presumably by the many drapery establishments, and a disproportionate tally of musicians, actors and picture-palace attendants, reflecting the several theatres and cinemas locally.³³ The high-street houses and shops at 13–19 St John's Hill, on the Severus Road corner, date from the same period and follow entirely the estate 'style'.

There have been few architectural changes in St John's Park since it was built. The expansion of shops along St John's Road has caused the loss or incorporation of houses on the east ends of the residential streets, but there has been none of the conversion back into single houses found nearer Clapham Common. Nevertheless rising property values have seen the typical borough-wide extensions and loft conversions, and development of small patches of unbuilt or garage space: an example is Aliwal Mews, built on the long back gardens of 70–74 Battersea Rise, but reached from Aliwal Road (Simon Hands & Associates, architects, 2001). At the other end of the same road a small irregular plot next to No. 47 used for many years for car repairs has been developed with a two-storey house (No. 49) with modish wood cladding to the ground floor, an exposed steel lintel and white-painted render above, to the designs of Urban Link of Newport, Isle of Wight.³⁴

St John's Hill (east end)

The name St John's Hill is seldom found prior to 1850. Before then Wandsworth Road was the general term for the whole road westwards of the Falcon as far as Wandsworth, most of which is described in Chapter 16. But its easternmost slope, partly covered in this chapter, was routinely referred to by the vague term 'Battersea Rise', making it easy to confuse with the parallel road of that name further south. Today, none of the early housing described below survives, the area around Clapham Junction Station having been transformed entirely by railway expansion and commercial rebuilding in the later nineteenth century, and again by further commercial redevelopment in the twentieth – subjects covered in detail in volume 49.

Villas and other houses of the 1840s–50s

The acquisition of the Spencer freeholds by tenants precipitated spasmodic building along the main road. On the north side this began in the late 1830s when a dairy complex was established on the former market garden beside the Falcon inn.³⁵ Occupying the upper slope towards Plough Road, villas of the 1840s followed the pattern already established beyond the railway bridge by St John's Lodge, 54 & 56 St John's Hill, and Holly Lodge (page ##). Three semi-detached pairs were erected here: Junction Houses and Laurel Villas (also known as 1–4 St John's Terrace), of 1846–7, built by Thomas Burtenshaw for Thomas Cole, a Waterloo Road pawnbroker (Ill. 15.15); and, higher up, Bolingbroke Villas, the work of William Wright, a carpenter. Between these two holdings Burtenshaw also provided a detached residence for Cole, known as Belmont Lodge. All these houses sported ground floors of channelled stucco, with round-headed windows and projecting porches.³⁶ Bolingbroke Villas were demolished in 1860s for Clapham Junction station; the rest were swept away by its subsequent expansion, notably the London,

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Brighton & South Coast Railway's new entrance building of 1908 and yard to its west.

East of Cole's semis, a terrace of three houses (1–3 St John's Place) went up around 1850, leading to the corner with New (later Prested) Road. No. 2 St John's Place was home in the 1860s to the map publisher Edward Stanford, who married the daughter of his St John's Hill neighbour William Hewer in 1871. No. 1, on the corner of New Road, was converted to a beerhouse around 1863, known as the Windsor Castle. The present pub of the same name on that site (now 36 St John's Hill) is a 'brewers' Tudor' rebuilding of the 1920s (see below).³⁷

Prested Road today is a mere stump between the Windsor Castle and the Clapham Junction shopping centre. But for a few years around 1860 it ran for sixty yards and boasted more than thirty small houses (Ill. 15.2). It was largely the creation of Philip Knight, a carpenter, and his Kennington neighbour Daniel Sturdy. In 1846 they took a lease from Samuel Wix of the former market-garden ground beside the Falcon, including a short frontage to Falcon Road. At that date this was a fair-sized amount of ground, bounded to its north by the two-track main line of the London & South Western Railway. The LSWR's Richmond branch, begun that year on the far side of the tracks, did not affect Sturdy and Knight's New Road, as it was first called. But the subsequent addition of further lines by two separate companies to the south of the LSWR, leading to the creation of Clapham Junction Station in 1863, first squeezed and then effectively blotted out this development.

Sturdy, Knight and another builder began in the later 1840s by laying out a private road twenty-five yards long running north from St John's Hill, building two pairs of houses on the west side and four more opposite, close to the St John's Hill corner. At its southern end Knight added another house in

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1860, in which he himself lived briefly. They and other builders also started work on several small houses hard up against the LSWR line, including three tiny cottages built in 1849 on Falcon Lane. The first check came with the West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway, planned in 1853 and carried out in 1857–8. The Falcon Lane cottages were acquired and destroyed, as were some small houses built by Edward Fisher, a retired silk merchant, at the north end of New Road and some of the gardens to Cole's villas further west.³⁸

By the time the West London Extension Railway acquired its bill in 1859, drawing the lines yet closer to St John's Hill and making an exchange station inevitable, it must have been clear that any housing built here would be short-lived. Nevertheless New Road continued to be extemporized with further dwellings, zigzagging north-eastwards to join up with a path along the railway line that led to Falcon Lane. John Eades, a Millwall timber merchant, began twenty-two cottages in that year but was insolvent by 1860, perhaps overestimating the speed with which compensation would be forthcoming. The road was densely inhabited at the time of the 1861 census, with 141 inhabitants, of whom fifty-three were in employment and seventeen worked on the railway. The next year, however, the LBSCR (which had absorbed the WELCPR in 1859) acquired twenty-six of the houses, probably with a view to future station buildings, though little was immediately built.³⁹ This ripped the heart out of New Road, leaving only a short southern spur and northern access road for the station, and a mere six dwellings. The road was renamed Prested Road in 1887, and with the LSWR's addition of two more lines at Clapham Junction in the late 1890s was later reduced to just one house (Knight's, which survived until the 1960s), though a range of single-storey workshops was added by Alfred Heaver in 1897 on the spur opposite the station. Part of the site was eventually redeveloped in 1882–3 as stables for the South London Tramway Company. The New Road speculation seems not

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to have harmed its originators: Sturdy left £60,000 when he died in 1873, Knight £14,000 when he died in 1879.⁴⁰

While the impending arrival of Clapham Junction suggested compensation to opportunistic builders, it also brought increased commerce, and most of the frontage between New Road and the Falcon was built up in the late 1840s and 50s by Philip Knight with shops, known as Commerce Place and Devonshire Place (later 28–34 and 8–18 St John's Hill respectively). In between, two adjoining pairs of semi-detached mini-villas were built in 1850: Tyrol Cottages and Granby Cottages (later renumbered 20–26 St John's Hill).

A similar pattern of mixed villa and commercial development was also taking place on the south side of St John's Hill. In 1842–3 George Alder, owner of the Falcon, built himself a 'compact, detached residence' with a coach-house and stable on the site of the present 15–19 St John's Hill, then added a larger villa to its west in 1851. Alder briefly ran the latter as a beerhouse before leasing it as a private house (Crosby Lodge) to Thomas Danby, a fringe manufacturer, who eventually bought the freehold.⁴¹

Further up the hill, not far short of the railway bridge, Alder in 1847–9 bought two undeveloped parcels of land from Matthew Whiting. He leased part of the larger, eastern parcel to the carpenter William Wright, who erected a semi-detached villa-pair, similar to his Bolingbroke Villas opposite. Resident in one of these from 1851 was William Evill, who later acquired the freehold and leasehold interests to both houses.⁴² Evill was the son of another William Evill, a silversmith of Bath who with a partner had bought and successfully developed J. Schweppe & Company, the soda-water manufacturers. William junior trained as a civil engineer, but in 1848 joined his father in his takeover of Orlando Jones & Company, patentees for extracting rice-starch for use in laundering. They moved the business from Whitechapel to the Battersea

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riverside at York Road (see vol. 49), where Evill junior first lived. He continued to manage the company after moving to St John's Hill, and was to be a keen supporter of church extension locally and of St John's Training College. Resident from 1856 in the other of Wright's villas was William Connor, the Irish surgeon who was the examining doctor for Sarah McFarlane's corpse following her notorious murder by Auguste Dalmas on Battersea Bridge in 1844. Under the terms of his lease, Connor also took the remaining vacant part of Alder's eastern parcel, where he built a 'substantial brick messuage with stabling' named Knockmaroon, presumably after his Dublin home.⁴³

In 1858–60 Evill took a lease of Alder's other, western parcel, where he built a large new house called Lyncombe House, 'after the beautiful valley in which my wife lived in Bath'. This was attached to the west wall of Wright's villa-pair, which thereafter became known as Lyncombe Villas. As Evill's family grew to twelve children he took over parts of the villas' gardens and on several occasions made additions to Lyncombe House, including a 'capacious' music room, where his huge musical brood and associates from St John's College formed an orchestra. One such extension, in 1875, was designed by E. C. Robins, architect of three Battersea churches.⁴⁴ The sites of Lyncombe House and its neighbours have been twice rebuilt, and since the 1930s have been occupied by the Peabody Trust's Clapham Junction Estate.

One further independent villa, west of here, was of very short duration. This had been built in 1848 beside the LSWR line on Matthew Whiting's freehold by Richard Ashby, a Bishopsgate builder, for Ann Gay, a coal-meter's widow, and her son, John. In 1853 it was acquired by the WELCPR, which needed to widen the railway cutting for its track. A detached coach-house was swallowed up but the house remained perched on the

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cutting's edge, occupied by a succession of railway employees until its demolition in 1862-3.⁴⁵

Between Alder's land at the bottom of the hill and the plots he had bought higher up lay a field of about 270 sq.ft in the freehold of James Arnold from 1838.⁴⁶ There were still fruit trees on this land when Arnold concluded a building agreement with Henry Hart Davis in March 1845. Davis was a prolific local speculator, whose only surviving houses in the parish (now 181 & 183 Battersea Bridge Road) were built around this time, on land also owned by Arnold. Davis initially agreed to build just two semi-detached pairs, in a handsome if old-fashioned manner (Ill. 15.14), with attached coach-houses and stabling, to cost at least £1,400. But his difficulties elsewhere saw him extending four times the agreed completion dates, and reducing the house sizes. Eventually Davis set about subletting the land. By October 1847 he had conceived the idea of St John's Avenue, a road leading south through the site of present-day 39 St John's Hill to the full depth of Arnold's field. Modest houses were to line both sides of this avenue, with a cross-road planned for the back land.⁴⁷

The only tangible progress came at the east end of the development, where a strip was leased in 1847 by Joseph Allen, a Covent Garden victualler. This first house was meant to be a tavern or hotel, and was to be 'Gothic', on the home-made Tudor lines sketched on one of Davis's agreements for his abortive Earl Spencer Place development (see page #). When offered unsuccessfully for sale in 1848, it was covered in but probably unfinished, and said to be 'intended for a hotel, but equally suited for a school or private residence'. The ground floor boasted a spacious front entrance hall and a 27ft dining room 'fitted with enriched cornices and centres and two marble chimney pieces, and six other rooms intended for bar parlour, coffee room, tap room &c'.⁴⁸

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Following Davis's bankruptcy in 1850 his solicitor, Francis Redhead Smith, took over the lease of the whole field and sublet Gothic Villa, as it came to be known, to William Collyer, of Battersea Rise, to 'complete and beautify', but 'the lessee ... did nothing to them but abandoned them forthwith'. It was offered for sale again as the Railway Hotel but appears never to have functioned as such. After a short tenancy Smith leased it once again, to Charles Machin Wyatt, a local builder, who added a coach-house and stables. Wyatt also took the two plots fronting St John's Road either side of the intended St John's Avenue, roofing in four houses on one plot by 1852 before he too disappeared.⁴⁹ Finally in 1854 Christopher Forrest, a Bethnal Green builder connected with Smith, took over both the plots fronting St John's Hill. He duly completed the two terraces on the remainder of the lease, now only 88 years, by June 1855. Set well back from the road, the eight houses of what was known as St John's Terrace (later 29–43 St John's Hill) consisted of grouped pairs, probably plain and part-stuccoed. The only trace of St John's Avenue left was a 60ft gap in the middle. The land to the rear remained partly meadow and partly spacious grounds for Smith himself who, perhaps wearying of the saga, moved into Gothic Villa with a burgeoning family ultimately numbering eight children, including Francis James Smith, architect of, *inter alia*, Nine Elms Baths.⁵⁰

In 1871 the larger houses at either end of this stretch of St John's Hill still had longstanding occupants such as Sarah and Susannah Alder, Thomas Danby, F. R. Smith, William Connor and William Evill, all with large gardens and at least two resident servants. But by now a coal merchant's yard occupied the eastern extremity. Next door was a marble works (formerly a livery stables), while one house in St John's Terrace had two households and in another a retired butler took in boarders. A decade later the villa-culture was unravelling. The Alders were all dead, their house at first converted to a

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photographic studio, then demolished for the development of Severus Road; the adjoining paddock was built up shortly afterwards with a bank, piano shop and music hall fronting St John's Road (see below); and a shed-like factory had been built in 1875 on the marble works site by the billiard-table makers Stevens & Son (Ill. 15.13). Evill left for Worcester Park in 1880, having sold up his properties for an extension to the Royal Masonic Girls School; Smith too had moved out to Beckenham, while the Alders and Connor were dead. But it was not quite yet true, as Evill wrote later, that 'St John's Hill was ... fast becoming a dreary monotonous waste of bricks and mortar'.⁵¹ The social balance at St John's Terrace was as before, and James Connor had taken over his father's house and medical practice in 1879. By 1891 the picture was different, however. Only two villa-dwellers remained, resisting development: Thomas Danby at Crosby Lodge and James Connor at Knockmaroon. They succumbed in 1895 and 1903 respectively. By then St John's Terrace had been demolished and rebuilt by Forrest with the present 29–43 St John's Hill, a more commercial terrace of red-brick houses and shops with emphatic stucco embellishments. And the billiard-table factory was rebuilt in 1889 as a three-storey edifice used variously as a billiard hall and auction rooms, with shops in front, which survives as Wessex House, 1–3 St John's Hill.⁵²

Subsequent rebuildings on both sides of this stretch of St John's Hill have been driven primarily by the needs of Clapham Junction Station, by commerce and by entertainment. It is a messy and complicated story, and told here only briefly. On the north side a longstanding pedestrian path giving access from St John's Hill to the station was widened by the LCC in 1912 and named Clapham Junction Approach, and by 1914 was lined with a row of quasi-Arts and Crafts shops with maisonettes over, designed by Trehearne & Norman, architects.⁵³ A cinema (later called the Empire) had opened on part of the defunct LCC horse-tram depot site off St John's Hill by 1910, and from the early 1930s a patch of open space to its rear was in use as a fairground. By the

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1950s the Post Office had established a sorting office in some sheds here. All of this was demolished and the whole area around the station blighted for more than a decade from the early 1970s by precipitate developers, who sent in the wrecking ball long before funding or planning permission to rebuild had been secured. The only buildings to survive the onslaught were the Windsor Castle and Falcon public houses. Redevelopment came finally in 1984–8 when, with the exception of the Falcon at the corner, the whole of the site bounded by Clapham Junction station, Falcon Road, St John's Hill and Prested Road was rebuilt with a rather pedestrian four and five-storey office block in red and brown brick, by Holder Mathias, architects, incorporating a shopping centre approach to the station from St John's Hill. More recently a joint proposal by Land Securities and Delancey to redevelop Clapham Junction raised a spectre over the area, its uncompromising design (by Collado Collins) featuring two intrusive 42-storey residential towers over a multilevel shopping mall. But this scheme was thwarted in 2009 by a combination of local and council opposition and global economic realities. However, in September 2012 the owners appointed Allford Hall Monaghan Morris to conduct a feasibility study of the Collado Collins design with a view to resurrecting it.⁵⁴

LATER BUILDINGS

Windsor Castle, 36 St John's Hill

The Windsor Castle originated as one of a terrace of three private houses known as 1–3 St John's Place, built around 1850 on the corner of New (later Prested) Road. No. 1 became a beer retailer c.1864 and had taken the name 'Windsor Castle' by 1871. From the turn of the century, with the opening of

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the New Grand opposite, it was said to be 'a theatre-patronised pub, catering for actors and actresses'.⁵⁵ It was rebuilt in its present form in 1931–2 to the designs of Frank Moore Kirby (1876–1953), in-house architect for 45 years to the brewers Courage & Company. The rebuilding followed Courage's takeover in 1930 of the brewers Noakes & Company, which itself in 1918 had absorbed the previous owners, Nevile Reid & Co. Ltd of Windsor, plausibly the originators of the name.⁵⁶

The rebuilt Windsor Castle is in the inter-war 'brewers' Tudor' used by Kirby for many Courage pubs of the 1920s and 30s, with tall brick chimneys, rectilinear decorative timber-framing and leaded windows, coupled with a practical glazed terracotta-tiled facing to the ground floor (Ill. 15.16). It was also typical of the 'improved' pubs of the period in having more family-friendly features, such as comfortable seating and catering facilities. The St John's Hill frontage has a self-contained public bar while, to the rear, entered from Prested Road, is a saloon bar, which opens into what was originally a large 'saloon lounge and luncheon room'. Both rear rooms have three-quarter height wooden panelling, and the lounge has a strikingly fancy open-truss roof with posts and curvy struts of rustically adzed blackened wood. A staircase behind the saloon's bar gives access to cellars and, above, two floors of what was staff accommodation. A small off-licence, its former door still evident next to the Prested Road entrance, has been rebuilt as WCs, and the rear garage-yard has been reinvented as a beer garden. Otherwise the Windsor Castle is little altered, though the Collado Collins' plan for Clapham Junction would see it demolished for a new station entrance.⁵⁷

Barclay's Bank, 7–11 St John's Hill

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This large, five-storey red-brick office block with shops was built in 1983–4 for Barclays. It replaced an earlier corner bank building, at what was then Nos 5 & 7, as well as the adjoining Munt's piano warehouse with a large hall behind (Munt's Hall, later the Ruby, Battersea's last cinema) at Nos 9–11 (see vol. 49). The demolished bank had been a grand affair, of four full storeys with curved corners, much stone enrichment, crowning pediments, and a projecting ground-floor frontage with more pediments and granite Tuscan columns. It was erected in 1888 as a branch of the London & South Western Bank (which amalgamated with Barclays in 1918), to designs by Tolley & Son, architects also of the original Arding & Hobbs department store.⁵⁸

Territorial Army HQ, 27 St John's Hill

Today this building is the headquarters of a territorial regiment, the London, formed in 1993 from four London territorial companies. Its origins go back to 1880 when the 4th Volunteer battalion, East Surrey Regiment, was formed from a merger of the 7th Surrey Rifles (1859) and the 26th Surrey Rifle Corps (1874), the latter formerly of Shaftesbury Park, where it had a parade ground, drill hall and armoury.⁵⁹

The East Surrey volunteers began by taking over Gothic Villa, with its substantial garden behind St John's Terrace, as their headquarters in 1882. In 1896–7 Sydney Stern, Baron Wandsworth, acquired the freehold for the battalion, and a 1,200 sq.ft building, probably a drill hall, was added across its back to designs by his surveyor, B. T. L. Thomson; both men served as colonel of the volunteers at various times. In 1901–2 a new three-storey headquarters building was added in front of Gothic Villa, facing St John's Hill, to the designs of H. Wakeford & Sons.⁶⁰ Of red brick, with stone dressings, including pilaster strips with Ionic capitals and a jaunty castellated parapet, the new

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building had double-height canted oriels to the front and a cartway leading through to the parade ground (Ill. 15.17). In 1910 the drill hall was turned into a clubroom and a large new drill hall erected in the south-east corner of the site, for what by then was the 23rd (County of London) Battalion. The former coach-house of Gothic Villa had meanwhile become an armoury. Since then various utilitarian structures have been added around the periphery of the parade ground, most substantially in 1984, when a three-storey building with mess rooms took up the whole western boundary and the original drill hall adjoining Gothic Villa was rebuilt. Some fragments of the villa may survive behind the front range.⁶¹

Peabody Estate

Sitting on the crown of St John's Hill, above Clapham Junction, is the largest surviving philanthropic housing scheme in the parish (Ill. 15.18). Its somewhat bleak quadrangles of flats were built in the mid 1930s by the Peabody Trust or Fund, which continues to run the Clapham Junction Estate, as it is known. It belongs to a period of renewed energy on the part of the Fund, whose original momentum had slowed after its intensive tenement-building campaigns of the late nineteenth century.⁶²

The 5½-acre triangular site has only a short frontage to St John's Hill, the rest being edged by Comyn and Eckstein Roads eastwards, by Boutflower Road southwards and by a swathe of railway tracks to the north-west. Its previous occupant, the Royal Masonic School, moved out to Rickmansworth in 1934, in which year the Peabody Fund concluded the purchase for £57,000. The site was promptly cleared apart from the two school entrance lodges of the 1880s on Boutflower and Eckstein Roads, which survive, and a tender of £193,881 was accepted from the builders Holland, Hannen & Cubitts in

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February 1935. The first eleven blocks were complete and being occupied by November 1936, the rest by the end of 1937.⁶³

The architect of the scheme was Victor Wilkins, principal Peabody architect since 1911.⁶⁴ His best work had been the mixed flats and cottages of the Trust's Hammersmith Estate. Clapham Junction belongs to a phase when costs were controlled more tightly, but its layout is more spacious and imaginative than the contemporary Dalgarno Gardens Estate in North Kensington. At Clapham Junction, Wilkins laid out its 341 flats in mostly five-storey blocks, fitting a large open-cornered quadrangle into the centre, two smaller semi-closed courts to the south and east, and three ranges completing the remaining edges. Drying rooms and sheds for prams, cycles and coal were slotted in between the blocks and along the perimeter. The larger squares and triangles were grassed, with one reserved as a playground, wired in with chainlink. Wilkins later said that the richness of the frontages of the blocks he designed for the Trust was related to the price paid for the land. Clapham Junction is built in a stripped-down neo-Georgian brick style, but with occasional decorative brick courses and balcony embellishments, and shallow pediments to the centre of the blocks, which step back slightly giving some articulation.⁶⁵

Typically for Peabody blocks of the period, these were not advanced for their date. Access was by balcony, and there were baths only in the kitchens. In compensation, rents were low, varying from one room at 5s a week to four rooms at 16s 6d. So genuinely poor tenants were able to live there: pensioners and unskilled labourers made up the bulk of the tenants when the estate was new. Proper bathrooms were authorised in 1966 and finally completed in 1976, and the windows were replaced in 1996.⁶⁶

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In 2007 the Fund decided to redevelop the Clapham Junction Estate on the grounds that it suffered from 'poor space standards and open areas, and too many places that encourage antisocial behaviour'. A limited architectural competition was won by Hawkins Brown Architects, with a plan which, by proposing tall blocks (up to twenty-one storeys) along the railway boundary, would almost double the number of flats to 650 without reducing the amount of open space. Revision has reduced the maximum suggested height to twelve storeys, and the number of flats to 550. The scheme, if carried through, will also provide a greater proportion of three-bedroom or larger flats, some of which will be sold privately. It further proposes to integrate the estate with its surroundings by extending Eckstein and Comyn Roads into the site, but to demolish both the picturesque gate lodges. Planning permission was granted in July 2012 for a slightly revised scheme for 527 flats.⁶⁷