

Between the Commons 1

Cushioned between wide open spaces, far from the council estates and railways that crowd the north of the parish, this area is today best known for its gridded streets of Victorian and Edwardian housing, built up from the 1850s, constituting Battersea's latter-day middle-class heartland. That story is told in the succeeding chapter.

For 100 years before, this was a very different kind of district: a verdant, genteel suburb of large private villas, wooded grounds and farmland, through which ran the watercourse called the Falcon Brook, on the route of present-day Northcote Road (Ill. 17.1). It is with this lost elysium that the present chapter is concerned; in particular its villas, built by and for some of the capital's richest and most influential men. Of these, only five survive, on Clapham Common West Side. A neighbouring early Victorian mansion of the 1850s (also included here) is evidence of how late such social and architectural aspirations persisted. But by then the tide was turning and of the rest no physical trace remains, though the disposition of their grounds or estates greatly determined the layout of the Victorian and later streets that took their place.

The area was once agricultural, a mixture of arable land, pasture and meadow. Tenants of the lord of the manor in the early 1700s were gardeners, farmers, yeomen or labourers. Little building had taken place other than a farm complex (later known as Bolingbroke Farm) near the north-west corner, beside the Falcon Brook, approached from a lane off the main road (Battersea Rise), which itself had seen some ribbon development. This farm was probably the hub of a 100-acre holding known at this time as King's Farm, owned from around 1719 by Thomas King, afterwards by John King.¹

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Rich City traders did not venture this far south-west until c.1750, when John Akerman (d.1757), a glass merchant, took a house and land at the far west end of the common, formerly belonging to John King. The evolution of this house and its grounds into the celebrated Battersea Rise House and gardens and its association with Henry Thornton and the Clapham Sect are explored in detail below. Akerman was succeeded there firstly by his widow, then by his son, Isaac; the latter also took land opposite, on the common's north side, where he built the matching villas known as The Sisters, probably to designs by (Sir) Robert Taylor (see Chapter 13). By the early 1760s Akerman had been joined by others – namely Robert Lovelace, a wealthy banker; Christopher Baldwin, a West Indies plantation owner; and Thomas Bond, a timber merchant – each of whom took land on which to build a house.²

Change was accelerated with the acquisition in 1763 of this whole tract between the commons by John, Viscount (later 1st Earl) Spencer as part of his purchase of Battersea manor, and his decision shortly afterwards to break it up and offer it for sale. And so Akerman, Lovelace, Baldwin and Bond embedded their houses within freehold estates, some big, some small. Subsequent sales – of the Bolingbroke Farm plot to Samuel Hoare, merchant (1765), and of large swathes of fields to the south and west to Robert Dent, another City banker (1772) – disposed of any remaining Spencer land.³ Baldwin would later sell part of his estate to Henry Cavendish, in 1786. But thereafter, barring the trading of a few fields here and there, the pattern of landownership remained relatively static until the area was hit by waves of suburban redevelopment in the later nineteenth century.

When Baldwin sold his land in 1786 there were only eleven villas dotted around the ground between the two commons; by 1800 there were twenty-four; by 1838, twenty-eight. Along with the area north of Clapham Common and around Lavender Hill this had become a desirable spot for

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London's bankers and merchants. In addition to the elevated, well-drained ground, there were the attractions of the common itself, recently improved largely through Baldwin's own efforts, cajoling residents into providing funds, and using his influence as a magistrate to advance programmes of drainage, path laying and ornamental tree planting.

Given the pattern of landownership, the new villas of the 1780s–1820s were nearly all speculations by existing landlords, increasingly aware of the appetite for such buildings here; this was true for example of those erected on the estates of Lovelace, Dent and Cavendish, and Bond's descendants. The principal exception was Henry Thornton, who in 1792 bought the former Akerman estate and used his great wealth to build houses near his own in which to install like-minded evangelical friends and associates – though there was always a large social element to this (his use of the word 'chummery' to describe it is instructive) as well as a crusading one.

The area beside Clapham Common's north-west corner where the ground rose up from the valley of the Falcon Brook was known from the 1650s as 'The Rise', later Battersea Rise.⁴ It was a name used widely to denote almost any of the higher ground populated with villas on the south Battersea–Clapham borders, at times applied also to Lavender Hill or to Five Houses Road (now Bolingbroke Grove). Today the nomenclature is no clearer, the area being regarded more as an outlier of Clapham than as a part of Battersea.

It was to the far west, beside Wandsworth Common, that villas first began to fall to a new generation of builders in the 1850s and 60s. By 1890 the vanguard had reached Clapham Common, and within twenty years most of the illustrious houses there had been demolished for lower middle-class terraces.

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Clapham Common West Side and Battersea Rise

21 Clapham Common West Side (with High Trees and old Nos 28–31 West Side, demolished)

Bluest of blood of all the residents of Clapham Common was the experimental scientist Henry Cavendish, son of Lord Charles Cavendish and grandson to the dukes of Devonshire and Kent. In 1785 he took the biggest house on the south side of the common as a suburban retreat and base for his scientific studies and experiments.⁵ But this was not his original plan. Cavendish had first asked Christopher Baldwin if he would consider selling fifteen acres of vacant fields to the south of his residence, on the common's west side, with a view to building a large house there. This land had a frontage of over a thousand feet, equating to the sites of the present Hightrees House and 14–42 Clapham Common West Side (Ill. 17.1).

At first Baldwin showed no interest but Cavendish persisted, and by June 1784 the two men seemed to have reached agreement. Cavendish was to build his villa on Baldwin's 'back field', not immediately fronting the common, from which it would be approached by a private road – in the manner later followed for Broomfield (c.1795), William Wilberforce's house. By July Baldwin had cut the grass in this field, to allow the ground to be laid out and foundations dug, but in the end nothing happened. Cavendish's emissary to Baldwin during negotiations was John Hanscomb, a Clapham carpenter and builder, whom Cavendish presumably intended would build his new villa. Instead, Hanscomb and his partner and fellow carpenter Richard Fothergill were given the job of making alterations to the rented house on the south side, later known after its occupant as Cavendish House.

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The scientist seems to have engaged the two men at the time as his architects, surveyors, builders and agents.⁶

But still Cavendish persisted with his purchase of Baldwin's fields, which finally changed hands in 1786, for £5,000. Cavendish's motivation was now speculative development. By May 1790 he had negotiated a lease of all the land to Hanscomb & Fothergill, in association with Thomas Poynder, an eminent City bricklayer, who between them agreed to spend £10,000 over eight years in building good-quality houses.⁷

The first four to go up, immediately south of Baldwin's mansion, were all built in 1794–5, though Hanscomb, Fothergill and Poynder were not the lessees. By then they had found new owners willing to take on building leases directly from Cavendish and erect houses, though the three men may well have acted as contractors. The new owners were (from north to south): John Towgood, a City banker (recently married to a sister of the poet Samuel Rogers), who erected a large detached mansion with a long garden (later 31 West Side, see Ill. 17.2); Thomas Jarvis, a Charing Cross undertaker, who built a semi-detached pair (later Nos 29 & 30), one of which he took as his own house; and Anthony Horne, a Bankside coal merchant, who built the fourth house (No. 28). Horne's Quaker family had been wealthy coal factors for generations and were keen supporters of Wilberforce's abolitionism. All the houses were of stock brick, mostly of three stories over basements, and, though grouped quite closely together, were set back decorously from the common behind front gardens and carriage drives.⁸ Later occupants include: No. 29, Herman Sillem, European and West India merchant (c.1824–48); John Stephen Jarvis, silk merchant (c.1872–98), who named it Devon House: No. 30, Edward Vaux, merchant and insurance broker (c.1810–21); Henry Ravenhill, iron manufacturer (1854–94): No. 31, John Shewell, solicitor and stockbroker (c.1815–20); and John Kirton Gilliatt, Virginia merchant, MP for Clapham (c.1834–56). The biggest residence, at No. 31, came down in the 1890s for new

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housing; the others hung on until just after the war, when they were demolished for Marianne Thornton School (vol. 49).

To the south, despite the terms of the agreement, the rest of Cavendish's land remained undeveloped till 1805–6. The first of the two houses here, **High Trees**, which stood at the far south, seems to have been built in 1805 by Hanscomb & Fothergill for Benjamin Wright, a wealthy Russia merchant, recently married to Elizabeth Evans, a Tooting heiress. It followed the other houses in size and layout, with a carriage drive, long garden and good stabling. Wright died there in 1816, his widow remaining until her death in 1841. Subsequent occupants include: Robert Jones, timber merchant (c.1846–77); and John Mackrell, a retired solicitor (c.1888–1909). Prior to demolition in the 1930s the house and gardens were used by the Broomwood Wesleyan Church as a social and sports club.⁹

The only house to survive from this burst of construction on Cavendish's land is the present **21 Clapham Common West Side** (formerly known as Heathfield). The last of the six to be built, in 1805–6, it seems always to have been regarded as the plum, both in terms of its architectural quality and its unusually generous 3½ acres of pleasure gardens, set to one side, rather than behind the house in the usual manner. The house has a well-proportioned, symmetrical front, faced in yellow stock brick, with a curved Doric entrance porch (Ill. 17.3). It has for some time been attributed to James Burton but it is now clear that this is wrong, deriving from a misidentification of this site with land further north, where Burton and a partner built houses in the 1790s (81–84 *Clapham Common West Side*, below). No. 21 was almost certainly built by Thomas Poynder, who was its first lessee in 1805, though not for his own use. He later bought the freehold, in 1828, the house having failed to sell at a Cavendish family auction the previous year.¹⁰

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Poynder (d.1837) emerges as a significant figure in the London building world, with interests in lime and cement manufacturing and stone quarrying, as well as his bricklayer's, brickmaking and contracting businesses. He and his son later branched out into speculative development, and they also worked for Sir John Soane. By the 1790s Poynder had done well enough to move to a large house on the north side of Clapham Common (The Eukestons, page ##). Poynders Road, running off the south side of the common, is named after him.¹¹

Inside No. 21, the highlight of the house was its spacious, pillared entrance hall, leading to a curving main staircase lit by a window in the south wall (Ills 17.4, 5). A large rear reception room led onto a loggia, with a veranda, overlooking the back garden. Upstairs were six first-floor rooms, leading off a generous landing, with about seven more on the floor above. As with all the Cavendish houses, a conservatory was attached (on the south side of the house, beside the pleasure gardens) and there was a capacious basement floor for kitchen, stores and other services.

The first occupant was George Pindar, or Pinder, a principal in the Charing Cross firm of Greenwood & Cox (later Cox & Co.), agents and paymasters to the British army (resident c.1807-22); he was followed by John Britten, a City clothworker, latterly with his son, the solicitor John Meek Britten (c.1823-43). Later residents include: Thomas Merryman Coombs, silk merchant (c.1844-64); Edward Colman, mustard manufacturer (c.1864-78); and John Cobeldick (c.1904-14), the West Country builder-developer who bought and demolished several old mansions near by and covered their sites with suburban housing – but not, for some reason, this one. However, under Cobeldick part of the pleasure gardens disappeared beneath the middle-class semis of Sumburgh Road and the eastern end of Thurleigh Road (c.1905-8); the remainder was probably sold off, as it was later added to the site of High Trees to make room for the 1930s flats of the same name. By then No. 21 had

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been converted to apartments, before in the 1950s it became a residential home for former actresses fallen on hard times. Sold in 1999 for £3.25m – a record price at the time for ‘Clapham’ – it has since been converted back to single family use.¹²

The Grange, Broxash, Leveson Lodge & Broadlands (all demolished)

These four detached villas occupied the frontage now taken up by 43–68 Clapham Common West Side, with gardens reaching back as far as present-day Wroughton Road.

The Grange, the oldest of the three, owed its origins in the early 1760s to the West India merchant and Surrey JP Christopher Baldwin – a pioneer of settlement and improvement in the area. Baldwin was born c.1720 in Antigua, his family having been early settlers, and owned estates and plantations there and in nearby Dominica. Like many Antiguan planters he migrated to London where he had established a merchant’s business by 1750, when he married Jane Watkins, daughter of the Chief Justice of Antigua. The City remained his family home until around 1762.¹³

By then he had taken a lease of three fields on the west side of the common, at its south end, amounting to about thirteen acres, and erected a house with stables and gardens. Once Lord Spencer let it be known that he was willing to sell his newly acquired land here, Baldwin began negotiations to buy the freehold of these and several adjoining fields, eventually in 1765 paying Spencer £1,520 for nine fields (over 38 acres). These stretched back to the Falcon Brook, with a frontage extending to Balham (now Nightingale) Lane. At this time Baldwin’s house was known as ‘Laurentum’.¹⁴

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This choice of name for his villa underlines Baldwin's intentions at Clapham Common. He aimed to create for himself an idyllic suburban retreat from city life in the spirit of the patriarchs of ancient Rome, notably Pliny the Younger, the description of whose coastal villa among a colony of similar residences at Laurentum, near Ostia, was well known to classical scholars. The seclusion of this west side of the common would have appealed, with at the time only the Akerman family at Battersea Rise House, and Isaac Akerman's tenants in the Sister Houses for near neighbours.

Like the ancients, Baldwin was also interested in the relationship between his house, its garden and the surrounding countryside. A skilled gardener and farmer, he cultivated exotic plants and experimented with new ways of growing animal-feed crops, inventing in the process a new type of hoe-plough for mowing, which was manufactured and made available to the public by a Clapham wheelwright.¹⁵ Baldwin was proud of what he had created, later describing his fields as 'the delight of my heart', and when pressed upon to give up land for building said 'the very idea of doing it, makes me start'. He was also interested in science generally, assisting Benjamin Franklin with his well-known experiments with oil to still troubled waters on one of the Clapham Common ponds.¹⁶

Laurentum was a neat mid-century Palladian villa, with two principal storeys between a semi-basement and mansard attic, the main front enlivened by a small central pediment, entrance steps and door surround. A view of c.1800 shows it set behind a carriage drive, framed by shrubberies and neatly clipped trees (Ill. 17.6). Under later owners the pediment was taken down and the house extended to either side and at the rear.¹⁷

Despite maintaining his Caribbean interests, Baldwin was beset by financial worries. His Clapham Common estate was heavily mortgaged, and though reluctant at first in 1784–6 he sold much of the land south of his house

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to Henry Cavendish. Baldwin finally left Clapham Common around 1801 for Bentley, near Farnham, where his deceased son's wife lived, and where he himself died. The Grange, as his house became known, was taken around 1802 by Thomas Ravenhill, a City banker, in whose family it remained until the 1860s. The last owner and resident from 1872 was the German import merchant Frederick William Roller. The house was demolished in 1896 for the building of Broxash and Kyrle Roads.¹⁸

Some of the still-vacant land north of The Grange was sold by the Ravenhills in the early 1800s and two more villas erected there. These were later known as Broxash, to the south, and Leveson Lodge.

Broxash went up first, in 1806–7, built by the artistically inclined stockbroker Benjamin Oakley (d.1844), a friend of Sir John Soane's and a man said to be 'fond of building'. No illustration of the house is known, but it was apparently the work of an 'eminent' architect and, rarely, was in 'the Chinese style'. In addition to nine bedrooms, dressing rooms, and the usual suite of reception rooms, it boasted a 'beautiful Gothic Music or School Room' and a greenhouse with folding doors opening to a large billiard room. It was whilst living there that Oakley was taught painting by Turner.¹⁹ Oakley left around 1811, and later occupants of Broxash included: George Bridges, import merchant, subsequently Lord Mayor (c.1811–12); William Mercer, factor (c.1812–15); and Edward Hodges, insurance broker (1817–34). In 1835, when known as Cottage House, it was bought by a wealthy widow, Ann Thwaytes, whose descendants, the Cooke family, retained it into the 1890s.²⁰ **Leveson Lodge** was built by the Clapham builder John Loat around 1809, when it was leased to Charles Barclay, of the Quaker–evangelical Southwark brewing dynasty, who stayed until 1824. A later resident was John Bird Sumner, Bishop of Chester (later Archbishop of Canterbury) from c.1830 to 1836. A leading evangelical, he would on occasion minister at Holy Trinity, Clapham. The house's name derived from Sumner's successor, William Leveson Gower

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of Titsey Place, Limpsfield, and his family, relations of the Dukes of Sutherland, who were residents from the 1830s until the 1880s. Both houses were demolished along with The Grange in 1896.²¹

Of the origins of **Broadlands**, less is known. It was built c.1794 on land that had been part of the Akerman estate, and both these facts, coupled with its generous eleven acres of walled pleasure grounds, could suggest that it was another house built by Henry Thornton as part of his evangelical 'chummery' (see below). The gardens adjoined those of Thornton's Battersea Rise House to the north; the private road to Wilberforce's Broomfield ran along its southern boundary. However, the thesis becomes unlikely when one considers its first resident was John Wedderburn of Spring Garden, Jamaica, a prominent plantation owner and senior partner in the London West India house of Wedderburn, Webster & Company.²² Subsequent residents of the house, at one time known as Park House, included the Wilson family – Francis Wilson (c.1807–14), a wealthy philanthropist, followed by his son, the devout Baptist and evangelical John Broadley Wilson (d.1835). The last occupant, Captain Walter Meller, a soldier and philanthropist, was there from c.1855 until the 1880s. Broadlands was then purchased by the developer H. N. Corsellis, under whom the eastern end of Broomwood Road was built on its site.²³

81–84 Clapham Common West Side (with Beechwood and Maisonette, demolished)

This is the only group of late-Georgian houses to have survived on the west side of the common, and as such is an important reminder of the area's heyday as a high-class suburb. All four were built in the 1790s on land belonging to the family of Thomas Bond (d.1776), the Lambeth timber merchant who had built himself a large residence here around 1766. He seems to have had no family connection with Benjamin Bond (d.1783), the

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prosperous Turkey merchant who lived in a mansion on the common's south side at about the same time.

In 1765 Bond took a lease of a house with about nine acres of ground at the common's north-west corner, promising to spend £500 on building a new one.²⁴ This was the mansion later known as Front Hall or **Maisonette**, where Bond resided until December 1775, shortly before his death, when he leased it to William Vassall, newly arrived with his large family from Boston. A West Indian by birth, from an old East London family of adventurers and settlers, Vassall had been forced to flee Massachusetts on the outbreak of war with England in order to maintain communication with his Jamaican sugar plantations, his sole source of income. His new house was well-appointed, fitted up with statuary and chimneypieces of Sienna marble. Vassall thought it 'very comfortable desent & Commodious', and, though homesick, seemed happy with life at Clapham Common except for the high cost of food – 'it is the most expensive & excessively dear place to live in that is in the whole World', he wrote.²⁵

In 1792 Bond's descendants agreed with the builder-developer James Burton and William Hughes of Clapham to let the remaining ground south of Maisonette for building. Burton had recently become familiar with the area, having taken lodgings here in 1791 in the hope of improving the poor health of his daughter Emily (she died shortly afterwards), and by the next year had bought a 'cottage' at Wandsworth Common, which he altered for his own use at considerable expense. Hughes was also involved in property on the south side of Clapham Common. He and Burton had collaborated some four or five years earlier, building houses on the north side of Newgate Street in the City, in 1787–8, on part of the site of the old gate and prison.²⁶

Together they were responsible for erecting the present **81–84 Clapham Common West Side** between about 1792 and 1796, though Burton seems to

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have withdrawn from the partnership by 1794 in order to concentrate his resources on developing the Foundling Hospital estate in Bloomsbury, leaving Hughes to complete the contract. Given its close relationship to the other four, a larger, detached house at the south end of Bond's land, first occupied c.1795–6 by George Pinder and later known as **Beechwood**, may also have been by Burton and Hughes.²⁷

Though style and planning vary between the four surviving houses, it is evident that they were built as a speculative group (Ills 17.8–10). All are faced in the same pale golden-brown stock brick, with minimal dressings, and all have prominent double-height bows or bays at the rear, to afford views over the long gardens. Also, shared pedimented coach-houses and stable-blocks were built spanning the boundary walls between Beechwood and No. 81, and between Nos 82 and 83, the latter surviving. No. 84, being the fifth house in the sequence, missed out, and so had its own neoclassical stable-block built at the end of the rear garden (which also survives), with a driveway ranged along the side of the plot.

Two of the houses (Nos 81 & 82) were built as a semi-detached pair, the others as detached residences, and generally were of two storeys, with basements and dormers (though the attics at No. 82 have since been made into a third floor). No. 83, a larger, three-storey house, may once have been similar; but if its full upper storey is an addition, it cannot be much later in date, going by the roof structure above. This is also the only house to have a veranda to the rear – a picturesque addition of cast iron with a tented canopy (Ill. 17.11). A little movement was given to the otherwise plain elevations: Nos 81 & 82 share a central recess, whereas at No. 83 the centre breaks forward. Nos 81–83 seem always to have had their entrance doors and hallways ranged to one side, though the present Ionic porches are later additions, probably of the 1840s or 50s, when alterations are known to have been made to several of

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the West Side houses. The staircase balustrade at No. 83, though Georgian in style, is probably of similar vintage.²⁸

No. 84 is the only one of the group always to have had a more symmetrical plan with a central entrance and hall, which retains some original decoration. Its northernmost bay and semi-circular ground-floor window are later additions, also of the mid nineteenth century.

No. 83 was the first to be completed, in 1793–4, while Burton was still actively involved, and must have been the ‘neat modern built House and Offices’ at Clapham Common ‘now finishing’ that he advertised in the press in March 1793. By April 1794 it was in the occupation of James Jopp, a Lombard Street merchant with connections to the Jamaica trade through a related company there (Bagle & Jopp). Jopp remained until 1796 or 1798, and was followed, from c.1799, by George Hyde Wollaston, a merchant and banker formerly based in Genoa. He and his wife resided at No. 83 until their return to Italy in 1802, though they came back to Clapham Common shortly afterwards, to live at Beechwood.²⁹

The pair at Nos 81 & 82 was first occupied around 1796–7. No. 82 was later the London home of Sir Charles Trevelyan, the colonial administrator, in 1841–3, then recently appointed assistant secretary to the Treasury. Trevelyan was connected to the Clapham Sect milieu through his wife, Hannah More Macaulay, daughter of Zachary Macaulay. He then moved to No. 84 and was succeeded at No. 82 from c.1847 to c.1869 by Sarah and Mary Anne Hibbert, daughters of William Hibbert and nieces of George Hibbert, slave factors and West India merchants, both of whom resided at Clapham Common; George especially was an active and vocal opponent of Wilberforce’s reforms. During their stay the Misses Hibbert built the Hibbert almshouses in Wandsworth Road (1859), in memory of their father. No. 84 was the last house to be finished and occupied, in 1798.

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Other residents include: *Beechwood*, G. H. Wollaston (c.1804–40); Field Marshal Sir George Pollock (1854–72), hero of the Khyber Pass and relief of Jalalabad; *No. 81*, Adelina Patti, opera singer (1875); Herbert Shelley Bevington, leather and fur merchant (1896–1926); *No. 82*, Charles Andreae, German cotton merchant (1869–89), who gave it the name Frankfort House; *No. 83*, Thomas Wood, City merchant, stockbroker and auctioneer (c.1803–33); Edward I'Anson, architect (c.1845–7); Sir William Augustus Fraser, Bart, MP, politician and author (c.1878–98), who named it Leannach Lodge; *No. 84*, Richard Thornton, wealthy Baltic trader (c.1815–28); Sir James Mackintosh, historian and statesman (c.1829–31); Charles Trevelyan (1843–7); *Maisonette*, John Peter Gaubert, merchant, director of the Ouglitch Paper Mill, Upper Volga (c.1850–8); Cam Sykes, husband of Emily Thornton, Marianne Thornton's niece (1859–61).

Beechwood was demolished c.1899 for new housing in and around Culmstock Road; *Maisonette* was purchased in 1858 by Henry Sykes Thornton of Battersea Rise House, with which it was demolished in 1908. Encroaching lower middle-class development robbed the surviving large houses of their allure, and after 1900 most succumbed to institutional use; doctors' surgeries were popular in the early 1900s. In 1907 *No. 83* became Carlyle College, a private preparatory music school for girls (also later at Glenelg, see below), and was subsequently converted to flats. *No. 84*, also known as *Western Lodge*, has been in use as a hostel for homeless poor men since 1931. A chapel was added in 1932, to designs by Elgood & Hastie. *No. 81* was converted to a motor garage (*West Side Garage*) at about the same time, and until relatively recently had unsightly lock-ups strewn about its rear garden.³⁰

But since the mid 1990s the area has experienced an influx of wealth and renewed interest in such properties as single-family residences, and Nos

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81–83 have been restored with some sensitivity. The re-conversion at No. 83, the biggest of the sites, was carried out in 2009–11 by the classical experts Robert Adam Architects for the multi-millionaire businessman and philanthropist Michael Hintze, and includes a new garage at the front of the house (in a style intended to complement the original stable blocks) and an indoor swimming-pool and gymnasium block in the rear grounds.³¹

85 Clapham Common West Side

This large, detached early Victorian house, originally known as Heath View, is included here as it represents the last hurrah in the building of big private villas between the commons. While it was going up the first of the area's lower middle-class street developments (Chatham Road) was already under way.

Heath View was erected in 1858–9 by Joseph Cable, a Clapham builder, on land formerly belonging to Maisonette, William Vassall's old residence (above).³² Cable's opportunity came through a deal brokered by the architect Edward I'Anson, district surveyor for Clapham. In 1857 I'Anson acquired Maisonette from its owner, J. P. Gaubert, and then sold it the following year at considerable profit to Henry Sykes Thornton of Battersea Rise, who was keen to extend and secure his estate (see below). Cable had been occupying part of the Maisonette grounds, and it was agreed that land at their south end should be walled off and excluded from the sale. It was here that Heath View was built, on land then still in I'Anson's ownership, suggesting that he may have been behind the whole enterprise. Also involved in the deal were the Rev. William Whitear of Croydon, and Fitzwilliam Comyn and David Cree, partners in a City solicitors' firm, who provided the finance. (I'Anson later rebuilt their Bush Lane offices, in 1866.) At the time of the Heath View speculation Cable was offering freeholds in the area for 'Gentlemen' priced at

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between £2,500 and £20,000. Whatever he was up to he must have over-reached, as by November 1858 all his property was in the hands of creditors.³³

I'Anson's role in the house's creation was central, but it is unlikely he had much to do with its design (Ill. 17.13). For though imposing in its bulk, with plentiful stuccoed classical dressings to its pale brick elevation (including a Doric entrance porch), its poorly arranged façade and rudimentary internal planning do not suggest an architect of his refinement, if an architect at all. A coach-house with rooms over was later added on the south side.

Heath View's first occupant in 1860 was Arthur F. Hewitt, a solicitor, with his wife and children. Later residents of note were William Newmarch, FRS, the banker, economist and statistician (c.1866–9), and John Carr, biscuit manufacturer, of Peek Frean & Company (c.1869–82). In the 1910s and 20s the house served as a private medical institute; it was later, from 1965, a club, but by the early 2000s had fallen into disuse. Around 2010 it was bought in connection with the restoration of No. 83 near by, for which an electricity substation has been built in the front garden of No. 85 (to designs by Robert Adam Architects). The house has since been sold to a private owner for around £5 million, and at the time of writing (2012) was being modernized and heavily extended.³⁴

Battersea Rise, Broomfield (later Broomwood) and Glenelg (all demolished)

Battersea Rise – sometimes called Battersea Rise House to distinguish it from the surrounding district – is pre-eminent among the demolished houses of Clapham Common West Side. It achieved renown as the hub of the Clapham Sect and of its adherents' efforts towards (in William Wilberforce's phrase) 'two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of

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manners'.³⁵ Between 1792 and 1815 the house and its spacious grounds were owned by Henry Thornton, the banker and MP who provided much of the movement's organization and funding. Wilberforce, charismatic leader of the anti-slavery campaign, at first shared the house with Thornton, his cousin and friend. After both men married, Wilberforce moved for eleven years to Broomfield, one of two neighbouring houses built on Thornton property, the other being Glenelg, home of another ally, Charles Grant. The three houses are considered together in this account.

Battersea Rise remained in Thornton hands until 1907, hallowed as the shrine of the 'Clapham saints'. It was then sold for development along with its immediate neighbours including Glenelg (Broomfield had been demolished in 1904). Though attempts to preserve the house failed, its memory has been perpetuated in books by great-grandchildren of Henry Thornton, Dorothy Pym's *Battersea Rise* (1934), and E. M. Forster's *Marianne Thornton* (1956). Like all the literature on the Clapham Sect, starting with the essay by James Stephen which invented the term, these accounts are rich in 'domestic biography', but less forthcoming on the evolution of Battersea Rise and its satellites. Nor is the archival record generous, leaving much to be pieced together.

The house taken by Henry Thornton has often been described as 'Queen Anne', and it is possible that its core had been built in the early eighteenth century. It is recognizable on Rocque's map of 1746, with a projection on its north front, facing due north towards a lane (Wassingham Lane) that linked the area's two main east-west roads. By 1751 if not before it was in the possession of John Akerman, a City glass and china merchant who was among the pioneers in promoting diamond-cut glass; his will, signed that year, refers to 'my House on Clapham Common'.³⁶ In 1755 Akerman may have added to it; at any rate he confirmed his possession by acquiring a lease from Lord Bolingbroke of three acres with a messuage or tenement, coach-

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house and stables, described as previously belonging to John King, whose predecessors had held property here since c.1719.³⁷ Akerman died not long afterwards in 1757, leaving this small property to his wife.

By then his only son, Isaac Akerman, also a City merchant, was expanding his father's domain. In 1756 he leased from Bolingbroke a strip of eight acres running north from Clapham Common through to Lavender Hill, undertaking to build two substantial houses.³⁸ These became the so-called Sister Houses, of which one survives as Gilmore House, 113 Clapham Common North Side. They are discussed on page ##; but it must be mentioned here that the avenue set symmetrically between them, on the site of Wassingham Lane and offering an open view northwards 'over Chelsea to Hampstead', was arranged on axis with a path across the panhandle of Clapham Common leading to the front of Battersea Rise. This formality bespeaks rare architectural ambition.

The Sister Houses and the staircase of Battersea Rise (see below) both strongly recall the City-based Sir Robert Taylor's work. In the view of the Taylor scholar Richard Garnier, who endorses this attribution, Taylor's first work at Battersea Rise, including the stair, was probably for John Akerman and dated from around 1755. The front or north range then followed on after his widow died in 1763 and Isaac Akerman moved in. This hypothesis is based on the fact that Akerman junior is recorded to have 'enlarged a cottage to an excellent house...with plantations before and behind', and on stylistic grounds.³⁹

Akerman next profited from the flurry of sales which followed the transfer of the Battersea manor from the Bolingbrokes to Earl Spencer, buying in 1765 the freehold of the lands he already held under lease along with some others. Eventually he held forty acres on the west side of Clapham Common, exclusive of the Sisters site.⁴⁰

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The younger Akerman was a figure of minor public standing, but difficult. In Battersea he quarrelled bitterly with the vicar over the use of the church vaults, where he was buried in 1792. Five years earlier he had sold his house and grounds and moved to Hampton Court. The auction notice refers to 'an excellent spacious dwelling-house, containing an elegant suit of rooms, fitted up in the genteelest stile, with suitable bed-chambers and dressing rooms', also a dairy, greenhouse, double coachhouse, stabling for eight horses, a 'lofty grove' shading the approach to the house and sheltered by plantations; also gardens 'laid out in the present taste, with lawns, canals, serpentine gravel, and shrubbery walks of more than a mile in extent, fully cropped, and stored with choice fruit-trees', beyond which came a 15-acre paddock and four meadows. This was the origin of the famous Battersea Rise garden.⁴¹

The purchaser from Akerman in 1787 was John Lubbock the banker, later first baronet. During his ownership Humphry Repton illustrated the front in Peacock's *Polite Repository*, but there is no evidence that he altered the house or grounds. Lubbock soon sublet to Gerard ('Single Speech') Hamilton, MP, who remained the tenant until Henry Thornton's purchase in 1792.⁴²

When Thornton came to view Battersea Rise (as the house was by then called) in May 1792 he brought William Wilberforce and Charles Grant with him. This was no accident. As Wilberforce explained, 'I am to share it with him [Thornton], and pay so much per annum towards expenses'. An intimacy had grown up between the cousins earlier in Bath where, Wilberforce's diary records, they agreed 'to spend the day so as to afford the hope that they might live together most rationally'. The word recurs in 1791 when they lodged together in Bath, 'leading a rational kind of life, and relishing not a little the quiet retirement it allows us, after the bustle to which we have both been so long condemned'.⁴³

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The allusion is to the political and parliamentary context in which the pair were operating. After early successes the anti-slavery campaign had suffered setbacks, despite support from Wilberforce's friend Pitt; fresh forethought was necessary. There was also the Sierra Leone Company, founded in 1791 by Thornton and others to rescue the shaky African colony for freed slaves started not long before. And with the French Revolution entering a darker phase, anxiety was growing in evangelical circles about prospects at home if morals and religion were not strengthened.

So the thought of a longer experiment in cohabitation with particular ends in mind had clearly been growing in Thornton's and Wilberforce's minds. This became possible after John Thornton, from the second generation of the Thornton banking dynasty to reside in Clapham, died in 1790, leaving a fortune from the Russia trade. By then Henry, his youngest son, had built up his independence as a partner in the bank of Down, Free & Thornton. Along with part of his father's money, he inherited his serious-mindedness about religion and family life, and his philanthropy. His brothers Samuel and Robert Thornton were also wealthy merchants and MPs, with villas along Clapham Common South Side. Henry Thornton now followed their lead with a twist, by creating on the forty acres a community of high-minded friends, his 'chummery', who would live 'rationally' together for portions of the year outside the parliamentary session, planning, studying, debating, praying and, sometimes, relaxing.⁴⁴

Thornton installed himself at Battersea Rise in September 1792, when Wilberforce presumably also arrived. Additions to the house were complete by April 1794, to judge from an insurance policy. Meanwhile plans were progressing for accommodating further friends within the compound in the shape of twin subsidiary houses: the future Glenelg just west of Battersea Rise, and the future Broomfield with a larger enclave at the south end of the

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property. These were austere, early neoclassical villas, five bays wide and three storeys high. The ground for Glenelg was being marked out in August 1792, and it was nearing completion in September 1794. Broomfield must have proceeded simultaneously, as both houses were occupied in 1795.⁴⁵

Thornton's oversight of these satellites was limited, although they remained in his freehold ownership. Glenelg was planned and paid for by Charles Grant, who had been in on the idea from the start. Not long back from India, Grant was powerful in the East India Company's affairs and had been drawn into the Thornton-Wilberforce circle during their summers at Bath. Broomfield was at first noticed in the press as a house built by Thornton for Wilberforce. So there was perhaps some thought for a future in which Thornton and Wilberforce might acquire families, as Grant already had. In the event Broomfield's first tenant was the widower Edward James Eliot, MP, brother-in-law to Pitt and Wilberforce's stout friend and supporter. Then after Eliot died young in 1797 and the cousins both married, Wilberforce moved permanently into Broomfield.⁴⁶

For the authorship of the two houses and the Battersea Rise additions, only one piece of evidence survives. Broomfield was later published (as Broomfield Lodge) in *New Vitruvius Britannicus* as by J. T. Groves, in 1792 an up-and-coming young architect (Ill. 17.17). As this house and Glenelg were near-identical in elevation (Broomfield had a Doric order to its projecting portico, while Glenelg's was Ionic), they obviously shared a designer. The same cool, classical language can be detected in the Battersea Rise additions, which can also be attributed to Groves. He later acquired a reputation at the Office of Works for indolence, spite and fraud, alien to the puritan ethic of his Clapham Sect employers.⁴⁷

No plans survive for Battersea Rise, so its arrangement must be inferred from photographs and descriptions. In Lubbock's time it was called

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'a large handsome house built with grey stock bricks and finished in the modern taste'.⁴⁸ The front, probably by Taylor and of the 1760s, was three storeys high and five windows wide, with a gracefully simple centrepiece of stone or cement, vermiculated voussoirs, small Doric columns framing the entrance and a single pedimented window above. The rooms at its two ends with side-facing bow windows were also seemingly part of Isaac Akerman's house. Thornton retained all this, but he enhanced the plain back, till then narrower than the front, with flanking two-storey wings and further bow windows; on the ground floor, that to the west lit the famous Battersea Rise library.

Inside, many features of the Akerman house were kept. These included the two reception rooms on the ground floor facing the front, later called the dining room (to the west) and the schoolroom (to the east); the main corridor driving through the house from front to back, marked at intervals by timber Ionic columns, engaged or free-standing; and the Taylorian principal stair, cantilevered with shaped tread-ends to the stone steps, graced with S-curved iron railings, and culminating in a Venetian window offering borrowed light to the first-floor corridor. Behind the staircase came a medley of spaces which, if Dorothy Pym's memories are credited, went back to John Akerman's 'cottage'.⁴⁹

The Thornton house's *pièce de résistance* was the library in the south-west position. Part of the 1790s additions, it was higher and longer than the front rooms. It was latterly called the Pitt Room because of the Thornton family tradition that William Pitt designed it. The story is plausible, as Pitt was close to Wilberforce when the room was created, and interested in architecture. The room's external profile, with the bow window corresponding to its counterpart at the other end of the garden front, must have been determined by the architect. What is always attributed to Pitt is the bowing of both ends of the library. Perhaps his contribution was to suggest

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that the inner as well as the outer end should take that form. A later anecdote goes that when Gladstone, no fan of Pitt, was told the latter had designed an oval library for Battersea Rise (it was, of course, not oval), he exclaimed 'An oval library! The very worst shape for a library that the human mind could conceive'.⁵⁰

Changes were made to the library's furnishings over the years, as it became the house's main reception room, but the original wallpaper was always proudly maintained. The next most notable interior was the schoolroom, which had a rococo frieze and ceiling and a fetching marble fireplace, probably all part of the 1760s work. Upstairs were a mythical 34 bedrooms.⁵¹

As Battersea Rise evolved, it became an amalgam of cherished rooms, possessions and Thornton family memories. The one unifying factor was the garden. In his seminal essay of 1844, 'The Clapham Sect', Sir James Stephen recalled it as the meeting point for the community of Clapham adherents and their children in debate or play, and depicted the key members issuing forth into it from their surrounding houses. Wilberforce's 'fair demesne', he wrote, 'was conterminous with that of Mr. Thornton; nor lacked there sunny banks, or sheltered shrubberies, where, in each change of season, they revolved the captivity under which man was groaning, and projected schemes for his deliverance. And although such conclaves might scarcely be convened except in the presence of these two, yet were they rarely held without the aid of others, especially of such as could readily find their way thither from the other quarters of the sacred village'. Colquhoun's biography of Wilberforce fills this passage out with a romantic idyll of friends and families 'streaming from adjoining villas or crossing the common', to join further-flung visitors like Hannah and Patty More.⁵²

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The Thorntons were deeply attached to the garden. In 1801 Henry Thornton's wife Marianne sketched for Hannah More a vignette of twenty children eating strawberries under a tulip tree, while the Rev. John Venn of Clapham 'gave us an animated lecture on the duty of parents'. Almost the only reference to Battersea Rise's amenities in her husband's correspondence is to its abundant peaches and nectarines. To the women of younger generations the garden meant possession and safety. 'How you will miss the lawns and groves where you have lived so long', sympathized a relation when Marianne Thornton junior felt compelled to leave in 1852; and when the house later came close to being sold, another wrote: 'I'd set my mind on once more being drawn round that garden before I died'.⁵³

In front of the house was the deep drive typical of Clapham Common villas, with stables to the west. Behind, a loosely circular path provided the main circuit for exercise, with flanking shrubs and trees, especially on the western side towards Glenelg. There was possibly a fence here between the properties during the early days, but no wall. Later, a winding path through the middle of the 'opulent lawn' was discontinued, and the eastern shrubbery thickened up. South of these pleasure grounds came kitchen and fruit gardens flanked by meadows and a cowshed, before the grounds of Broomfield were reached. These last ran both north and south of the house, which was reached via a drive between the villas of Clapham Common West Side. Much the fullest description of the Battersea Rise grounds comes from Dorothy Pym, who visited often in the 1890s. She names many flowers and shrubs, and underlines the high standards of horticulture and maintenance: 'the paths at Battersea Rise were as speckless and spotless as the carpets themselves'.⁵⁴

The golden age of Battersea Rise lasted about fifteen years, until Wilberforce moved away in 1808 (the year after Parliament finally voted to outlaw the slave trade). While Thornton and Wilberforce were bachelors, business kept them away for much more than the summer months. When

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they were in residence there was plentiful company, sometimes disturbing the planned opportunities for quiet and study. 'I find that I must as little as is really right ask people to Battersea Rise to stay all night', wrote Wilberforce in 1794, 'as it robs and impoverishes the next morning ... in this way I lose my time, and find indeed that less is done at Battersea Rise than elsewhere'.⁵⁵

The dynamic changed after Thornton married Marianne Sykes in 1796 and Wilberforce married Barbara Spooner in 1797. The community's tone became uxorious and domestic, and its rhythm year-round. The Thornton and Grant spouses grew close, and drew in other Clapham families like those of Zachary Macaulay and James Stephen. Wilberforce's children also participated, Barbara Wilberforce less so. The Wilberforces in fact first took Broomfield on a short tenancy during Edward Eliot's lifetime, moving in permanently only after he died. 'My wife's health absolutely requires a villa', Wilberforce wrote in 1798.⁵⁶ When Joseph Farington the painter stayed there in 1806, Barbara Wilberforce told him that she visited very little locally, as William's 'object when in the Country was privacy'. During his weekend at Broomfield, Farington records a stream of guests invited by the good-natured emancipator belying his resolutions for quiet; serious talk during mealtimes and walks in the 19-acre grounds; and the string of servants – seven women and six men – lined up for prayers twice a day. By then Wilberforce may have been tiring of suburban Broomfield. In 1807 he described the environs to a correspondent as a 'poor mimicry of the real (live) country'. Next year the Wilberforces moved to Gore House, Kensington, closer to town.⁵⁷

The Grants had already left Glenelg for a London house when Charles Grant became an MP in 1802, but it was only in 1815 after Henry and Marianne Thornton died in quick succession that the community dissolved. Between the two deaths there was just time for Marianne Thornton senior to erect a Coade stone urn to her husband's memory in the Battersea Rise shrubbery.⁵⁸ Sir Robert and Lady Inglis moved in as guardians of the

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Thornton's nine orphaned children, remaining there until they were advanced in adulthood. The eldest son, Henry Sykes Thornton, became titular head of the clan, and continued the family's evangelical connections, participating in various religious initiatives in Battersea. But the guardianship of the family's intellectual and moral traditions passed to his older sister, Marianne Thornton.

In 1852 a rift occurred when Henry Sykes Thornton elected to marry his deceased wife's sister, Emily Dealtry – technically still an illegality. It was this which led Marianne Thornton to leave Battersea Rise for Clapham village. Her brother returned to the house from Denmark with his second wife, and their children remained in possession after his death in 1881 despite ongoing family hostility. The head of the Battersea Rise household now became Percy Melville Thornton, grandson of Henry Thornton's elder brother Samuel, who had married his cousin Florence Emily, daughter of Henry Sykes and Emily Thornton. Percy Thornton served as Conservative MP for Clapham from 1892, and was alleged to be the last member who regularly rode to Parliament on his horse.

Henry Sykes Thornton spent much effort during his second marriage in extending the estate belonging to Battersea Rise, which had fallen through sales to 14 or 15 acres by the 1830s. In 1858 he bought Maisonette, the villa immediately east of the house; then in 1870 he repurchased Glenelg to the west. Later acquisitions included part of the Broomwood property, to shield the Battersea Rise grounds from speculative development there in the 1880s. Under H. S. Thornton's will his widow Emily retained a life-interest in Battersea Rise and its environs, which were to be sold after her death. That duly took place in 1907.⁵⁹

Altogether twenty-two acres were auctioned, comprising Battersea Rise, Glenelg, Maisonette and their grounds. National publicity and

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widespread efforts to retain the house as a memorial to the Clapham Sect and the anti-slavery campaigns, along with some portion of the frontage, to be added to Clapham Common, proved unavailing. The purchaser, Edwin Evans of the local firm of estate agents, acting on behalf of a consortium, offered to sell the house and two acres to Battersea Council at cost price. But the Progressives then in power at the town hall resented Evans, an active local Conservative, and opposed the initiative 'on social, ethical and sentimental grounds'. Too late, a committee was formed and subscriptions were solicited. In February 1908 all three houses were demolished and their grounds subsequently covered with housing.⁶⁰ Houses at the north end of Muncaster and Canford Roads now cover the site of Battersea Rise.

It remains to say something of the later occupants of Glenelg and Broomfield. After the Grants left Glenelg, it was occupied by the prominent physician Dr Richard Budd, 'a man of strong will, impetuosity, and of great social influence', who died there in 1821, and then by the publisher Joseph Ogle Robinson of Hurst, Robinson & Co. until that firm collapsed in 1826. It was later the home of the Rev. William Arthur, Wesleyan preacher and author, and lastly part of a private school, Carlyle College (formerly at 83 West Side, above).⁶¹

Broomfield passed from Wilberforce first to William Henry Hoare of the Hoare banking family (d.1819) and then to John Deacon of Williams, Deacon & Co., the bank into which Pole, Thornton & Co. was merged after H. S. Thornton appealed for his neighbour's help during the bank crisis of 1825.⁶² Deacon acquired the freehold and sold it in 1834 to John Thomas Betts, a distiller, for whom J. B. Papworth did minor landscaping commissions. After Betts's widow sold it to Charles Forbes in 1851, the name changed to Broomwood. Forbes, a retired Scots soldier, inherited a baronetcy in 1852. Supposedly, Queen Victoria visited the house after her son Albert Edward's marriage in 1863 with a view to its becoming his home, but nothing came of

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it.⁶³ After Forbes died in 1877 the estate was sold and cut up for development, though the house itself hung on till 1904.

Three Battersea Rise villas

West of the Thornton enclave, three more detached mansions and their grounds occupied the green slopes descending to the Falcon Brook – one at the common's panhandle, the other two fronting the main road (now Battersea Rise). Long demolished, all were built on the estate of Robert Lovelace, a partner in Child's bank.

Lovelace was one of the small early band of City merchants who had benefited from Lord Spencer's disposal of land around Clapham Common in the 1760s. The sales coincided nicely with his inheriting £20,000 on the death of Francis Child.⁶⁴ The estate that Lovelace then built up on both sides of the main road amounted to some 72 acres. By November 1764 he had erected a very large mansion on the south side – the biggest in the Battersea half of the common – to the west of Isaac Akerman's house, facing north across the fields towards the Thames. Like Akerman, Lovelace was keen to preserve this view, buying up ground on the north side to prevent anyone else from building opposite his house, and in so doing caused friction with the litigious Akerman, who thought the land had been promised to him.⁶⁵ In the event, as villa-building around the common took off, Lovelace allowed two large houses to be built on his land on the north side (see Chapter 14), as well as two on the south side flanking his own, discussed below.

As for Lovelace's house, later known as **West Side**, he lived there in splendour until his death in 1796, when his estate was sold at auction. The house was described as a 'uniform, modern, brick-built mansion', elegantly fitted out, and set within lawns, pleasure grounds, a canal and kitchen

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garden, and ten paddocks of grassland populated with horses, cattle, poultry and peacocks.⁶⁶ Charles Haldimand, a Swiss merchant, bought the house and lived there until his death around 1807 when he was succeeded by his son, Anthony Francis Haldimand (d.1817), founder of the banking house of Morris, Prevost & Company, who had inherited vast wealth from his uncle, the soldier Sir Frederick Haldimand, Governor of Quebec during the American Revolution. The principal later occupant, from 1842, was Charles Webb (d.1869), a wealthy wine merchant. In his day West Side was known for its garden, with walks, lake, summerhouse, vineries, melon ground, and a fine conservatory of exotic plants, linked to the house by an arcade of roses, all looked after by a head gardener and four men.⁶⁷ Webb's widow sold the house for redevelopment in 1881; Leathwaite Road, Webb's Road and the adjoining streets now mark the spot.

To its east, next to the future site of Glenelg, was the first of Lovelace's two speculative houses on this side of the road. It had no name, but formed with its grounds an estate later known as the **Chatto estate**, from a subsequent owner, William John Potts Chatto of Torquay.⁶⁸ Its first lessee c.1767 was William Fuller, a dealer bankrupted in 1770. He was succeeded by Samuel Marsh, merchant, who lived there until 1774, when he was elected MP for Chippenham. The Office of Works surveyor Kenton Couse and the builder John Loat of Clapham Common were involved in a subsequent sale, and so may have had a connection with the house's construction.⁶⁹ Later occupants included Thomas Astle, antiquary, archivist and collector (c.1776–1803), and Philip Cazenove, stockbroker and philanthropist (1846–80).⁷⁰ Following Cazenove's death, Chatto's estate was sold for redevelopment. Lovelace's other house, to the west of West Side, had been built by 1780. It was generally later known as **Ashness**, after its long-term owner Thomas Ashness, resident there from c.1786 till his death in 1827, followed by various members of his family. The house was sold at auction in June 1875 following a family dispute

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and Chancery case over its inheritance.⁷¹ Lindore and Almeric Roads now stand on its site.

Five Houses Road and Balham Lane

The Georgian mansions that once graced the west and south fringes of this area, fronting what were then known as Five Houses Road or Lane and Balham Lane (now Bolingbroke Grove and Nightingale Lane respectively), were built on land owned by Robert Dent (d.1805), senior partner in Child & Co.'s bank. Like his near neighbour and banking partner Richard Lovelace, Dent benefited hugely from his association with the Child family, being one of the trustees and main beneficiaries under the will of Robert Child of Osterley Park in 1782.⁷²

Dent had taken ground here in the 1760s, presumably on lease from Lord Spencer. Then in December 1772 he bought from Spencer the freehold to all the fields skirting the two roads, with the exception of a plot at the south-east corner (part of Christopher Baldwin's Clapham Common take) and Bolingbroke Farm to the north-west, in the previous ownership of Samuel Hoare, merchant (Ill. 17.1). In all, Dent acquired twenty fields, totalling about 88 acres, at a cost of £5,650. In 1775 he added part of a field called Broomfield, adjoining, procured from Christopher Baldwin.⁷³

Then in 1775–6 Dent built himself a house with spacious grounds, east of the brook (see Old Park House, below). West of the brook, on the land overlooking Wandsworth Common, he erected five more large gentlemen's residences as a speculation. Four were finished by November 1777 when they were advertised in the London press as 'new, substantial-built, brick houses,

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neatly finished', for sale or to let; the fifth was completed a year or two later.⁷⁴ And so the road skirting the common acquired the informal name Five Houses Road or Lane, though contemporary accounts of its residents often referred to them as being 'of Battersea Rise' or Wandsworth Common.

Dent had employed the City surveyor Richard Norris to design and build his villa. This was most likely Richard Norris the younger (d.1792), rather than his father (d.1779), James 'Athenian' Stuart's right-hand man, who at the time was busy building Mrs Montagu's house in Portman Square.⁷⁵ Both men held a string of important surveyorships, Norris junior's including, inter alia, Christ's Hospital, the Sun Fire Office, the London Assurance Incorporation and the Charterhouse. It is likely that Norris also designed several of the Five Houses; he was the first lessee of at least two of them. At least one other house was the work of John Scott, a Holborn surveyor and associate of the Norrises, who also held a lease from Dent. Norris's brother Philip, a Holborn builder and bricklayer trained by their father, witnessed all these deeds and probably handled the construction side; another brother and witness, Christopher, of Lincoln's Inn, was presumably their lawyer. All four men were listed in newspaper advertisements during the winter of 1777-8 as contacts for prospective purchasers or lessees.⁷⁶

Early descriptions of the Five Houses as 'genteel', 'modern', and 'brick built' suggest equivalence with those going up around Clapham Common and Lavender Hill at the same time. All had the Falcon Brook running behind or through their gardens and grounds. A farm (Dent's Farm) was erected at the south end, in the grounds of a house acquired from Dent by his brother William (d.1823); another stood beside Old Park House. By the 1850s Five Houses Road had become more generally known by its modern name of Bolingbroke Grove.⁷⁷

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The Five Houses (all demolished)

The new road name derived from the grandest of the five, with the largest grounds – **Bolingbroke Grove House**, sometimes inconveniently referred to as Bolingbroke House – which stood towards the north end of the lane. It alone outlived the area's late-Victorian transformation, through conversion to a local hospital, the Bolingbroke Hospital; that later history is recounted in volume 49. It is also the only one for which any views survive.

The house was first leased to Richard Norris in 1778, but shortly afterwards was taken by William Willis the elder (d.1831), partner in the long-established Lombard Street banking house of Willis Percival & Company. Willis later acquired the freehold, and around 1797 purchased Bolingbroke Farm and its associated fields north of the house and on the east side of the brook from Richard Lovelace, thus creating a valuable freehold estate of some 64 acres. In 1803 he passed all this to his son, William Willis the younger (d.1828), and his wife Sarah, as part of their marriage settlement. They were succeeded in turn by another Willis, Henry (d.1879), who also took the controlling interest in the bank.⁷⁸ The house was a three-storey, five-bay classical affair: plain and flat-fronted facing the common, with an entrance portico; but far livelier on the east front, where a projecting pedimented central bay with tripartite upper windows and canted end bays added movement and interest to a well-composed façade by Norris (Ills 17.23, 24). This aspect was made all the more picturesque by being framed by clumps of trees in the well-wooded grounds, and by lawns sloping away from the house down to the brook, which broadened and curved at this point. Nineteenth-century illustrations show wings at either side of the house, possibly added by the Willises – single-storey at first, later raised to two storeys.

Henry Willis had gone by 1834 but retained ownership. The estate's principal resident thereafter was Henry Wheeler (d.1873), a retired merchant

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and fundholder, who lived at Bolingbroke Grove House from 1846. He bought the house from Willis in 1859, when it was described as an 11-bedroom mansion with a suite of reception rooms, walled garden and 15 acres of meadow. Wheeler also bought the adjoining farm. He eventually sold up to the Conservative Land Society in 1868, though he and his family stayed on while new streets converged upon them.⁷⁹

In Battersea terms this was a large estate and was tackled by its Victorian developers in several phases, the last houses, at the west ends of Wakehurst and Belleville Roads, beside the old mansion, not going up until 1878–80 (page ##). By then Canon Clarke, the parish vicar, had set in train its purchase for conversion to a much-needed local hospital, which opened in 1880.⁸⁰ Increasingly hemmed in by additions, it survived until 1937, when it was demolished for a new administration block.

South of Bolingbroke Grove House stood the second of the five houses, latterly known as **Grove House**, with a similar long, rectangular footprint – presumably also comprising wings either side of a central core. This house was the work of the surveyor John Scott, though it was still unfinished at the time of his lease in 1778.⁸¹ Early occupants here included Edward Fawkes (c.1789–1804), son of a prominent Guildford mercer, and Henry Barchard (c.1804–6), wine merchant. The Willis family also acquired the freehold to this house. In 1807 it became the residence of Alexander Champion, whaler, merchant, and director of the Bank of England, who died there in 1809. Through his family it descended eventually to Charlotte Ellen Blackmore, later wife of the Rev. John Pincher Faunthorpe, principal of Whitelands College, Chelsea, and Grove House was their family home from c.1870 until c.1889, when they sold up to the developer H. N. Corsellis.⁸² The western ends of Kelmscott and Bramfield Roads were built on its site.

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The third house – confusingly also later referred to as **Bolingbroke** or **Bolingbroke Grove House** – was a more compact villa, with a large rear bay commanding views over the gardens and brook; it was leased to Richard Norris in 1778. An early occupant in 1785–9 was Chamberlain Goodwin, a wealthy Moorfields dyer. Matthew Chalie, founding partner of the wine merchants Chalie, Richards & Company, was a long-term resident, from 1793 till his death in 1838.⁸³ In 1852 the house was acquired by the National Freehold Land Society for the building of Chatham Road, the first Victorian suburban development in the area between the commons. However, the house hung on for a time while its grounds were built over. In 1855 it became the first offices of the Wandsworth District Board of Works, then from September 1858 it was the family home of James Lord, the barrister turned developer, who dabbled in the Chatham Road venture. It was finally pulled down by Lord in 1864 to make way for new speculative housing.⁸⁴

Next came another, similarly sized villa, later called **The Elms**; today the western end of Honeywell Road runs through its site. It was built specifically for Benjamin Cole (d.1816), a very wealthy draper and government broker, and Sheriff to the City of London and County of Middlesex in 1782–3.⁸⁵ In 1792 Cole invited Sir John Soane to make improvements to this house. Soane’s pupil and assistant, Thomas Chawner, prepared plans, which Soane travelled to Wandsworth Common to discuss. But nothing seems to have come of it.⁸⁶ However, Chawner’s work has left us the only plans to survive of one of the Five Houses – indeed of any ‘Between the Commons’ villa in its original form (Ill. 17.25). These suggest a relatively grand entrance front, with a tetrastyle portico to the piano nobile approached by sweeping flights of steps to either side. Internally space was tight and the planning compact but not entirely satisfactory; an eating room doubled as the entrance hall, with the main stairs in a separate compartment to the side. The principal reception space was a large rear drawing room with a canted bay offering views over the grounds and Falcon Brook valley, but the two

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flanking reception rooms seem not to have had east-facing windows; one was built as a main-floor nursery for the Coles' young family. A single-storey dairy wing connected the service area in the raised basement with stables to the north.

Alterations were made to the house before 1838, in the form of extra rooms or extensions on the east side, either side of the bay, and a bow window in the south wall, but it is impossible to say if these related to Soane's proposals.⁸⁷ Later residents of The Elms included: Sir James Mansfield, lawyer, politician and judge (1803–21); Alexander Gordon, solicitor (1823–44); and Frederick Mangles, MP, merchant and shipowner (c.1846–55). Its last occupant was Charles Lambert, of Lambert & Butler, the cigar and cigarette merchants (c.1858–70s).

As for the fifth house, occupied by William Dent, it is referred to here by a later name, **Dent's House**, though predictably it was also known loosely as Bolingbroke House or Grove. It, too, had eleven bed and dressing rooms on its upper floor, approached via a 'wide' staircase, above a ground-floor suite of dining, drawing and breakfast rooms.⁸⁸ A further land purchase from his brother gave William Dent a sizeable estate of about 36 acres, including a large field on the east side of the brook; the house and its gardens stood at the far north end of the estate, a farm to the south (Ill. 17.1). A bachelor, Dent at first intended leaving the estate to his nephew, John Dent of Temple Bar, whilst allowing an adopted daughter, Mary Dent, to stay at the house for her lifetime; but shortly before his death he added a codicil leaving all to Mary, who is generally assumed to have been an illegitimate child.⁸⁹

Mary Dent died in 1867, and the following year Dent's House and its grounds (then known as the Wandsworth Common Estate) were put up for sale at auction in several lots.⁹⁰ Most failed to sell, though Sir Charles Forbes of Broomfield House, adjoining, acquired the field east of the brook to add to

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his estate. Four years later the estate was offered again, and this time was bought by an auctioneer, who in 1874 sold it on at profit in two portions. Dent's House and some five acres of gardens went to John Eldon Gorst, QC, MP and Tory party agent as his residence. The remainder (about 21 acres) was acquired by C. E. Appleby for development; Blenkarne, Morella, Granard and Estcourt Roads and the west end of Thurleigh Road were later built on this land. Gorst lived on at Dent's House until about 1881, when he sold up to a builder and the house was demolished for Gorst and Dent's Roads.⁹¹ Minor fragments of pre-Victorian days remain: a stable-block to Dent's House (now 1B Gorst Road), and a length of old boundary wall between the garden of 35 Bolingbroke Grove and houses at Nos 36–38 built on the neighbouring Broomwood Park estate.

Old Park House (demolished)

Robert Dent's villa was picturesquely situated on an eminence, set within well-wooded grounds at a remove from the main road (Nightingale Lane). Work began in 1774, before Dent had acquired the freehold, in preparation for the construction work, which took place in 1775–6 under Richard Norris. Generous outbuildings included a kitchen yard, coach-houses and three stables (one referred to as a 'spare'), as well as a lodge and 'cottage' (possibly the farmhouse). Dent, who had a town mansion in St James's Place, Westminster, was establishing a country house estate: in addition to garden walls and gates there was an obelisk and a ha-ha. John Scott was also involved, being required to put up 'a new Gate & put to rights the Hen Coop & what else is amiss'.⁹² Later views of the garden front show a simple but elegant two-storey edifice, with a dormer attic storey, a bow to one side and a veranda (Ills 17.26–8). Inside were a stuccoed entrance hall with a groined ceiling and portico, ground-floor reception rooms with marble chimneypieces, and some thirteen or fourteen bedrooms.⁹³

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Dent died in 1805, leaving the estate to his son John (d.1826), another partner in Child's Bank. Later an MP for Lancaster, he spent little time there.⁹⁴ Old Park's first tenant in 1805 was (Sir) Francis Freeling, Secretary to the Post Office, at the time a highly lucrative office. Around 1812 Freeling seems to have been succeeded by the expectant Hon. Mrs Louisa Cavendish, whose husband, the Hon. William Cavendish of Piccadilly, had died in a riding accident at Holker Hall, Lancashire, one of the family seats. Their third son, Richard (later Lord Richard Cavendish, d.1873), was born and baptized at her house 'in Clapham' later that year.⁹⁵ Subsequent residents include: William Henry Cooper of Stockwell (1819–23); James Coles, silk merchant (c.1830–51); James Horatio Booty, oil merchant (1876–88). The estate was sold at auction in 1866, heralding much new development, but the house and some 4 or 5 acres of its immediate gardens and grounds survived until the early 1890s, when it was demolished for the building of Old Park Avenue.⁹⁶