Introduction

Battersea, covering some 2,164 acres, makes up about a quarter of the area of the London Borough of Wandsworth. As the easternmost portion of the modern borough, closest to central London, it was the part first thoroughly built up. Its northern boundary is defined by the Thames, but it also runs deeply to the south, cutting through both Clapham and Wandsworth Commons and stretching at its southernmost point to a tip not far north of Balham High Road, three miles from the river. Battersea was an independent parish from around 1100 till 1855, when it lost its main powers of self-government to the Wandsworth District Board of Works. A surge in population ensued, allowing Battersea to recoup those powers in 1888 and

Battersea to 1835

Medieval Battersea

The name of Battersea, in medieval times Batricheseie, Batrices ege or variants, probably refers to the gravel 'island' by the Thames on which the church, manor house, and principal arable field lay.[1] Findings from Romano-British or earlier cultures in the parish have been scanty. The most famous object is the so-called Battersea Shield in the British Museum, a major piece of Celtic art variously dated from between the fourth century BC and the Augustan period. But the shield has no certain connection with Battersea or the south side of the river, having been found in the Thames during the 1850s, probably during the construction of Chelsea Bridge.[2]

The earliest records concern the manor. Land in and around Battersea was granted to the nunnery of St Mary, Barking, in 693 by Bishop Eorcenwald of the East Saxons, consisting of 28 hides in Batrices Ege, 20 in Watsingaham, and 20 on the west bank of the stream called Hidaburne.[3] The grant's three parts may reflect the topography of Battersea manor and different areas of settlement. It is unclear how far west and south the land then granted extended, but the mention of Wandsworth (Wendles wrth) and of land west of the Hydeburn (later Falcon) brook shows that Battersea and Wandsworth were already interconnected. Later indications suggest that it stretched as far west as the River Wandle itself.[4]

By 1066 the manor belonged to Earl Harold Godwinson (King Harold II), and passed into the hands of William I. Soon afterwards William gave it, including the 'berewick' in Wandsworth and woodland in the detached

district of Penge five miles to the south-east, with various liberties and franchises, to Westminster Abbey. The Domesday Book states that this was in part return for a grant of Windsor to the king, but a later fabricated charter, not necessarily to be relied on, suggests it was in acknowledgement of the Abbey's surrender to William of the royal regalia. [5] Westminster Abbey held the manor, apart from a brief break in the twelfth century, until it was dissolved in 1540.

Battersea was one of the five principal manors supporting the monks at the Abbey. Its Thames-side position gave it a convenient connection with the Abbey and London. There may always have been a ford running from Battersea Fields to the gravel river bank at Chelsea, along the line of the later Chelsea ferry and Battersea Bridge, and by the end of the twelfth century there were also important landing places. In 1086 a large part of the manor's value consisted of its seven mills, probably all outside Battersea parish on the Wandle in Wandsworth. [6]

No church is mentioned in Domesday Book, though one may have existed then. The earliest certain indication of one, and therefore of a parish, comes in 1157, when Pope Adrian IV confirmed the church of Battersea, the chapel of Wandsworth and their appurtenances (such as tithes) to Westminster Abbey. Soon afterwards the abbot granted the churches of Battersea and Wandsworth to the infirmarer of Westminster Abbey. [7] Both were probably built to serve the abbey's estate. Eastwards, the parish and manorial boundaries seem generally to have been the same, following the line of the Heathwall sewer. On the western side, where part of the manor lay in Wandsworth parish, and along the south and south-eastern borders, which crossed mainly heath used for common grazing, the logic of the parish boundary is not discernible.

one, identifiable with Battersea village today, lay south of the parish church near the Thames, with the manor house and out-buildings just east of the church. Beyond these came its large cultivated field. Long known as Battersea Field or Fields, this was laid out on an area of lower river gravels and brick-earth between the Thames and an alluvial area sweeping round in a southerly band along the line of the watercourse later known as the Heathwall sewer, from the eastern extremity of Nine Elms, to join the Hydeburn or Falcon brook which flows from the Wandsworth Common area into the Thames west of the settlement. Though at risk of flooding by high tides, the field was by no means all marshland. It was in cultivation by 693, since it formed the bulk of the 28 hides granted in the charter of that date. Here lay the main arable areas

extending southwards to Nightingale Lane and the parish boundary. [14] It too gave its name to two or more families of tenants in the manor. There is some confusion about Rydon's history. It may originally have been part of Wassingham, but in 1482 it was describedas formerly belonging to the manor of Bridgecourt.

Hese was probably the medieval equivalent of Nine Elms. It lay at the

probably derives from the Old English ‘brycg’, meaning bridge, and has been linked to the bridge carrying the road from Battersea to Wandsworth across the mouth of the Hydeburn or Falcon Brook at Battersea Creek.[20] But the word bridge was also used to refer to landing-stages or jetties by the Thames, which would allow access to boats at low water. The earliest records for Bruges include property connected with transporting stone along the Thames, so the name may have originated from this use of the Battersea foreshore for river traffic. Its position made it the closest firm ground by the river in the manor of Battersea to the mills on the Wandle, one of the most valuable such group in the Domesday survey.[21] Wharves on the Thames would be necessary to bring in grain and take out flour, especially for the London market.

Because these wharves were a significant resource, the free tenants of Bruges in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries were mostly leading lay officials connected with Westminster Abbey. Two principal estates emerged here. One belonged to William Pentecost, also known as Pentecost of Wandsworth, who in 1200 was confirmed in ownership of a hide in Battersea including a messuage, wharf and eight acres. Pentecost’s holding lay just west of Battersea Creek, on or near the site of the later York House.[22] He was also involved in land and legal transactions further afield, and granted a plot by Battersea Creek to the abbey of Waltham, thought to have been used to transship building stone to Waltham.[23] One side adjoined the creek, and another either adjoined the Thames or lay close to it, and the plot lay next to Pentecost’s court and garden, which suggests he had a house there, almost certainly on the York House site.[24] Other transactions by Pentecost in Cheam, which had important chalk-pits, and in Reigate, where stone quarries supplying Waltham and Westminster abbeys were located, suggest that his ownership of wharves on the Thames was connected with the trade in building materials, notably Reigate stone, the great building stone of medieval London.[25] His son and heir Geoffrey, active by 1208, confirmed

Pentecost's grant to Waltham Abbey, and had inherited by 1224–5, when he held manorial land in Battersea and Wandsworth parishes.[26]

The other large freeholding in Bruges later had the name Bridgecourt attached to it. It belonged in the late twelfth century to Richard de Dol.[27] He was reeve of the Abbey's manor of Westminster in the 1190s, subsequently steward to the abbots, and also held land at Loseley near Guildford.[28] The property remained in the Dol family un til it was purchased in the 1390s by Westminster Abbey, which seems to have been occupying it before that. Here lay probably the garden in Battersea which was being rented by 1387 to store Reigate stone for the nave of the Abbey: and 10,000 tiles were procured in 1393–4 for the 'domo petrarum apud Bryggekourt'.[29] Around then the whole estate was described as including a toft, 144 acres of land, 5 acres of meadow, and 50 6.48 47ave

and Katherine St John, daughters of yet another and more famous Oliver St John, the leading Parliamentarian and Chief Justice during the Interregnum. Both couples appear to have been at first domiciled in Battersea, but Henry and his wife left for Ireland around 1664.[38]

These family alliances and descents confirm that the seventeenth-century St Johns were divided in matters of politics. It may be added that the vicar of Battersea between 1634 and 1657, Thomas Temple, had Independent leanings, yet was appointed by his cousin the first baronet, whose sons died for the royalist cause. His successor, Simon Patrick, a noted writer and preacher and later Bishop of Ely, was Sir Walter St John's private chaplain for three years before he was appointed to the living at the urging of Lord Chief Justice St John. Patrick describes Sir Walter as 'a religious gentleman', and Lady Johanna as 'very pious'. A latitudinarian, he reverted to Anglican forms of worship at the Restoration and noted that 'my patron and his lady … had no scruple about conformity, but entirely complied with me in all things; which was an excellent example to the parish, where they were much respected'.[39] Another author and connection by marriage, Lady Mary Rich, lauds the couple as 'eminent for owning and practising religion'. That is borne out by the establishment of almshouses 'near the pound' by Sir Walter around 1675, and by the enduring memorial of Sir Walter St John's School, endowed in 1700 towards the end of its patron's life but perhaps also inaugurated in the 1670s.[40] More pragmatically, there is testimony that Sir Walter looked after Battersea's difficult drainage, or at least the Falcon brook, at his own expense and 'kept it in brave order'.[41]

The character and habits of Sir Walter and Lady Johanna come to life from her surviving letters, which show the couple shifting between Battersea and their Wiltshire estate at Lydiard Tregoze, with Sir Walter generally staying near London during parliamentary sessions so long as he sat as a

Whig MP. Less can be gleaned about Battersea as a whole during their long lives, but it was in transition from the time of the interregnum. Nine Elms, closest to London, had a brewhouse and a whiting works by the 1640s, while sugar refining and brewing had grown up in the Lombard Road area near Battersea village by the 1670s. Altogether 279 houses are recorded for Battersea in the hearth-tax returns for 1663, of which slightly over half were chargeable, in other words of a good standard.[42] The population may therefore

spent with his Battersea grandparents. He seldom visited there during his ascendancy under Queen Anne, probably because he did not get on with his father (‘Old Frumps’), though he paid a visit when his grandfather died.

sometimes by his son, Lord Bolingbroke, suggesting that relations between them were not quite broken.[51] After Bolingbroke inherited there was some effort at renewal, as hinted in Pope's letter quoted above. The idea of replacing Battersea ferry with a bridge was resurrected, and two roads had been laid out by 1746 with that purpose seemingly in view.[52] From about 1755 longer terms of up to 61 years were offered by the 2nd Lord Bolingbroke, perhaps because the City merchants now trickling into the upland areas insisted on more security for the houses they were just starting to build. Meanwhile industry began to accumulate along the Thames foreshore, with mills, malthouses and, notably, the short-lived Battersea enamel works at York House (1753–6). But the shaky finances of the St Johns seem to have prevented them from taking advantage of these fresh opportunities, so they decided to sell.

Battersea under the Spencers

The Spencer family are not normally counted among the great London landlords. But in the south-western suburbs their properties were at one time extensive. They owned the park of Wimbledon from 1744 until 1846, and have been continuously the lords of Wimbledon manor ever since. To these they added an estate in Wandsworth in 1758 and then in 1763 the manor of Battersea and Wandsworth, with substantial freeholds in both parishes. Other rights in Wandsworth parish were acquired in 1792 and 1816, when the Spencer properties and influence in suburban south London reached their peak. The Battersea and Wandsworth properties were sold off from 1835, followed by Wimbledon Park in 1846, leaving only manorial and other residual rights. The sole remaining formal connection between the Spencers and Battersea today is Earl Spencer's right to nominate the vicar of St Mary's. Nevertheless for a critical period in Battersea's development, before it took its

modern shape, they were the parish's primary authority.

The family's involvement with sout h-west London goes back to Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, who bought Wimbledon Park and built a Palladian house there in 1732–3. By her will this estate and much else passed under trust to her favourite grandson, John Spencer, who outlived the duchess only briefly, dying in 1746.[53] His heir was John Spencer (1734–83), 'the wealthiest schoolboy in the land',[54] Viscount Spencer from 1761 and first Earl Spencer from 1765. This eligible young man was able to spend and travel liberally. The grandest fruit of his patronage was Spencer House facing Green Park, built to

mortgage of £30,000 back to Lord Bolingbroke formed part of the deal.[60] To reduce the cost, Spencer retained only the core of the St Johns' Battersea lands. Before the purchase had even been formalized, some tracts of ground in the Nine Elms area were alienated.[61] Further sales of 1763–5 disposed of most or all of the St John freeholds between Clapham and Wandsworth Commons.[62] Among the purchasers were early villa-dwellers such as Christopher Baldwin and Isaac Akerman. The break-up of the old landholdings here into smaller estates had a major impact on that district's future development.

The principal in all these arrangements, as in connection with Spencer House, was Thomas Parker, Spencer's lawyer and London manager.[63] Parker's name crops up regularly in the administration of the first Earl Spencer's Battersea and Wandsworth estates. There is no evidence that Spencer took a personal interest in the district. The manor house, already neglected, remained let until it was largely demolished in the 1780s. A hard-nosed attitude manifested itself when the parishioners asked in 1767 for their new lord to pay for repairs to the Falcon brook sewer, as Sir Walter St John always had done, but were peremptorily refused by Parker.[64] The most important development that took place under the first Earl was the making of Battersea Bridge (1771–2), on which more is said below. But he was not present at its inauguration, and the only later contribution he and his son are known to have made to the bridge's affairs was an annual present of venison to the proprietors' dinner.[65] Nor did Spencer take much interest in the rebuilding of the parish church (1775–7), Parker once again representing him in negotiations with the Vestry.

The first Earl Spencer died in 1783. The relationship of his successors, the second and third earls, to their Battersea and Wandsworth holdings was different. Both were front-rank Whig politicians and landowners with many commitments, estates and mansions (notably Althorp in Northamptonshire,

and Wiseton in Nottinghamshire) and a love of rural pursuits. Spencer House was the main family seat in London; Wimbledon was little visited between the destruction of the Duchess of Marlborough's house by fire in 1785 and its replacement (to designs by Henry Holland, the 2nd Earl's regular architect) in 1801.[66] After that the Spencers were more often in south-west London, and there is evidence that the 2nd Earl stopped off occasionally in Battersea, en route between Wimbledon and Green Park.[67] In any case, the growing diversity and value of the Battersea and Wandsworth holdings required closer management. The state of the Thames banks, supposedly repaired and maintained by the Spencers 'at a very heavy Expence' but damaged by those who floated timber along the river, surfaced as an issue in 1792, while in 1796 there was a lawsuit between landlord and tenants about the upkeep of Battersea Bridge Road.[68]

In 1781–2 government commissioners earmarked 80 acres at Battersea Rise as the site for a grand 'National Penitentiary'. The plan did not then materialize, but the threat came back in 1792–4 when Jeremy Bentham lobbied hard to build the penitentiary in the form of a panopticon, causing the growing community of villa-residents to mobilize against the project. In fact the 2nd Earl Spencer never intended to give up this land.[69] He did offer as an alternative a marshy patch in Battersea Fields, but his agent then fobbed Bentham off, informing him that Spencer was 'a willing Buyer but an unwilling Seller, in that and the adjoining Parish'.

from the 1780s. Like Parker, they seem to have served the Spencers well, and knew the South London properties in timately: in 1807 John Harrison noted that he had visited some premises frequently 'and very minutely'. [73] He also tried to redeem what he could from the failure of John Ford, an engineer who had invested thousands on a grand woollen mill and adjacent cottages at York Place, only to fail in 1823–4. His endorsement of Ford's plea for remission of rent in view of his 'great Expenditure and Misfortunes' casts John Harrison and his master in a sympathetic light. [74]

The 2nd Earl's closer oversight of Battersea is suggested by the appointment of his confidant and religious adviser, Joseph Allen, as vicar in 1808. Few of Allen's surviving letters to the Earl focus on the parish, but its affairs, agricultural or spiritual, come up often enough to prove their recipient's interest. [75] Allen's main achievement in Battersea was reforming Sir

In retrospect that action looks puzzling and imprudent. The London & Southampton Railway was in the pipeline, the building-up of the district was already prophesied, and land values were bound to rise. But the 3rd Earl was determined to deal with the debt which had accumulated since his grandfather's day and spiralled under his acquisitive, book-collecting father. [79] Already in 1826, during the 2nd Earl's lifetime but perhaps at Althorp's initiative, a rising Whig lawyer, John Shaw Lefevre, had been brought in as an intimate adviser to examine the Spencers' holdings and finances. He assumed special responsibility for the South London properties, living at first in Balham and from 1828 in Battersea at Terrace House (later Old Battersea House).[80]

The upshot was the promotion in 1827–8 of a Battersea and Wandsworth Inclosure Bill, aimed at an obligatory redistribution of the 942 acres of 'common fields' (about half in each parish) in order to make them fully productive and valuable. The prospectus claimed that these fields were:

> as much the exclusive property of the owners of the soil as any Inclosed lands can be … It cannot surely be for a moment contended that by any length of time or constant usage the public have acquired the right to ride and walk over fields of this Nature—over Meadow Grass, Standing Corn, and Asparagus Beds; in short, over land regularly cultivated for private purposes. Yet clear as this point is, there has been, notwithstanding, as much said in favour of the Public on this occasion as if the lands to be enclosed had been a Cricket Ground or a Bowling Green, and exclusively devoted to public amusement.[81]

The bill was opposed on several grounds: objections to giving 'wealth to the wealthy'; a fear that the fields and the commons alike would be covered

with housing; and a petition against it from Clapham parish.[82] Its failure may have determined the 3rd Earl to sell, once he inherited. Shaw Lefevre remained his adviser, and in March 1835 confirmed that policy, though with 'much anxiety' for Spencer's interests.[83] A first auction took place later that year, with sales trickling on until 1838. Shaw Lefevre hoped to raise £160,000, but the Earl's agent Anthony Spedding was less optimistic.[84] Substantial sums also accrued to the Spencers from land sold to the London & Southampton Railway around the same date. But the paucity of records for the 3rd Earl precludes an exact reckoning. Even the Spencer shares in Battersea Bridge were disposed of and the annual present of venison for the proprietors' dinner stopped, Shaw Lefevre informing them that the Earl had sold all his deer to the King.[85] The sale of Wimbledon Park followed on in 1846, after the 3rd Earl's death.[86]

The failure of the 1827 bill and the subsequent 1835–6 sales are seminal

3rd Earl, took an equally serious view of his public responsibilities, but still viewed the commons in some measure as his personal property. That was most clearly expressed in relation to Wimbledon Common, which he sought to enclose in 1864, turning a portion into a public park and reserving the rest as building land, to include a large house for himself.[87] But by then such projects were becoming politically impossible: and by the 1870s all three commons had passed out of the Spencers' hands and become lodged in public bodies. That decade saw the effective end of the family's major interests in Battersea, though the earls continued to appoint its vicars; Canon Erskine Clarke, for instance, installed in 1872, was as careful to keep the 5th Earl abreast of his plans as Joseph Allen had been with the 2nd.

Battersea since 1835: selected themes

River, roads and bridges

The Thames holds the key to Battersea's origins as well as to its industrial development. In time, roads and railways took over, marginalizing the river's importance to the parish's prosperity and communications. This process was gradual. Around 1700 over thirty Battersea residents were watermen, ferrying goods and passengers along the river.[88] Intensive passenger traffic survived into the era of steamboats and mass commuting, while one of Battersea Park's attractions when it opened was its accessibility to boat trippers. As for commerce and industry, water was long safer and quicker than land for all heavy loads. Copious Thames water was also crucial for most manufacturing processes, for extraction, power or cleaning. As late as the 1920s the siting of

Thames as it turns from Battersea Reach to Chelsea Reach, Battersea village was isolated from natural through-communication by land. Direct routes from London to Wandsworth and hence to Putney or Kingston beyond bypassed it in a pocket to their north. As a result, already by 1751 only half of Battersea's population lived in the village itself, a much lower proportion than in Putney or Wandsworth.[89] Major road traffic avoided the village. In 1825, for instance, Wandsworth was the terminus of ten short-stage coaches from the City, Clapham of 21, but Battersea could boast only one, though some passing stages stopped there.[90]

Roads are hard to date, but three east–west thoroughfares of considerable antiquity pass through Battersea. The earliest definitely attested follows the line of Clapham Common North Side and Battersea Rise. This existed by the end of the fifteenth century, and in the early eighteenth was known as the Canterbury Way or Road, suggesting that it was a regular link via Clapham between Kingston and the main route from London to Canterbury.[91] It was eventually supplanted in importance by the present line of Wandsworth Road, Lavender Hill and St John's Hill, which became part of the Southwark to Kingston turnpike in 1717.[92] Entering Battersea from the east where Lavender Hill begins, that artery held high, dry ground all through the parish except where it dipped down to cross the Hydeburn or Falcon brook at the 'wash way', now the intersection next to Clapham Junction Station. There were no turnpike gates in Battersea parish. The third major east–west route, on lower ground to the north, is represented by the long line of Battersea Park Road and its continuation as York Road. The eastern end of this road, beginning from Nine Elms, was the old land route to Battersea Village. At a

1871 became Battersea Park Road.

As for major north–south routes, probably the oldest line began with the present Bolingbroke Grove (Five Houses Lane in the eighteenth century), turning east along Battersea Rise, then north along the course of the Falcon brook up the present St John's Road and Falcon Road. Pubs marked the crossroads along this route: the Falcon at the intersection with the turnpike, and the Prince's Head where Falcon Road connected with the south end of Battersea High Street and the lower road described above. From the latter, Battersea village could be reached to the north or York Place to the west along what is now York Road.

Many smaller lanes in the low-lying northern portion of Battersea are depicted on Rocque's 1746 map of the environs of London and the earliest parish map of c.1760. The most prescient are a pair of straight, modern-looking lanes running east and north from the village through St John property and marked 'Road to the Ferry'. Represented today by the eastern half of Westbridge Road and the northernmost stretch of Battersea Bridge Road, these must relate to the 'new road leading to the new bridge' confidently mentioned in an advertisement of 1752. There had been talk of a bridge here, promoted apparently from the Chelsea side, as far back as 1661.[93] But this was evidently a new initiative, perhaps dating from the 1st Lord Bolingbroke's return to Battersea in 1743. For the moment nothing more occurred. Then came reports in 1760 that his successor was to apply for an Act to build the bridge, and that Robert Mylne, victor in the recent competition for Blackfriars Bridge, would be his surveyor.[94]

Battersea Bridge was destined to be realized not under the indebted Bolingbrokes but at the behest of the new lord of the manor, Earl Spencer, who privately obtained the Act of 1766. For the Spencer family, frequent

travellers between the West End and Wimbledon, the bridge was a personal convenience. But the arrangements for its creation and management were commercial. Fifteen proprietors shared the costs of this cheap timber toll

A river crossing at what is now Chelsea Bridge today seems an inevitable accompaniment to Battersea Park. Yet it was pursued almost lackadaisically. First mooted in 1843, the idea followed from the government's proposal to embank the north side of the Thames from Vauxhall Bridge to Battersea Bridge and build a road along its length, starting from the east with the present Grosvenor Road. Chelsea Bridge Road was conceived as a prolongation of Sloane Street down to this embankment so as to create a

bridge, and could not have their dinne rs sent them from home like other working men without the toll being paid'. [104] The tolls on Chelsea Bridge were not abolished till 1879.[105]

Queenstown Road, leading southwards from the bridge, was laid out by the Crown only as far south as Battersea Park Road. Further south it was delayed until the 1860s. Its contorted course shows what damage the railways could do. First planned as a straight line aiming for Cedars Road and Clapham, Queenstown Road ran foul of a bevy of railway bills, and was forced to negotiate three sets of railway bridges and as many twists before resuming its axial directness through the Park Town estate. The effect of the railways on local communication in Battersea is discussed at greater length in Chapter 7.

In the case of the Albert Bridge, the road came first. The Battersea Park Act of 1846 had allowed for a second bridge on the west side of the park. That was enough to ensure the layout of Albert Bridge Road from Battersea Park Road to the river's edge, but the secondbridge formed no priority for the park commissioners, and so was postponed for private enterprise to take up. The Act finally granted in 1864 allowed for a connecting road from Culvert Road near the bottom of Albert Bridge Road through to Queenstown Road – never undertaken. It also provided that th e new Albert Bridge Company should have the option of buying out the Battersea Bridge proprietors, since the two bridges were close and the wooden crossing was increasingly decrepit and irrelevant—except to the painter's eye.[106] Even so, the company delayed work until 1871, when the Metropolitan Board of Works had embanked this section of the river. [107] It may also have wished to wait until building development had got to the point when it could be sure of a fair return from tolls. In the event Albert Bridge was a toll bridge for le ss than six years, until the MBW bought out the company and freed all the local bridges. If never heavily used, it is the

prettiest and most popular of London's upriver bridges. It is certainly the most eccentric in structure, the Albert Bridge Company having after long prevarication decided to build R. M. Ordish's semi-suspension, semi-cable-stay design, first published in 1865. Happily it escaped the rebuildings that ushered first Battersea Bridge (1886–90) and then Chelsea Bridge (1934–7) into the era of modern road transport.

Nearly all of Battersea's other roads were constructed for local building development, covered in volume 50. It remains to add a word on the growth of public road transport. Horse-trams were resisted by the Wandsworth Board of Works throughout its domains, but by Acts of 1879 and 1880 the South London Tramways Company obtain ed authorization for routes first along York Road and the full length of Battersea Park Road to Nine Elms; from Chelsea Bridge to Lavender Hill along Queenstown Road; and along St John's Hill, Lavender Hill and Wandsw orth Road, with a connecting line along Falcon Road to the Battersea Park Road line. The earliest of these routes opened in 1881. According to Henry Ha nsom, one of the local district surveyors, the tramways raised the value of property along Battersea Park Road by as much as forty per cent. They also confirmed the main roads in general and Clapham Junction in particular as shopping venues. Gradually extended and improved, they generated a series of road-widenings and two tram depots, a larger one between the railway lines off Queenstown Road, a smaller one at Clapham Junction. The Queenstown Road route was the scene

Until the 1850s Battersea was predominantly an agricultural community, with a tenacious tradition of strip-farming. On the parish maps of the 1760s, strip after narrow strip is shown in its northe rn sector, for most of the way between Nine Elms and Battersea village. Here lay Battersea Field or Fields, part of an

The tradition of Battersea strip cultivators growing cash crops for sale in London markets was probably very old. Market gardening on the Dutch model seems to have taken hold in the early seventeenth century, which tallies with the record elsewhere around London. A parish terrier of 1636 refers to 'the new made gardens', producing peas, beans and root crops;[110] while in 1639 Battersea's 'gardeners, husbandmen' and other parishioners asked for legal redress when Sir Thomas Southwell and a Mrs Peel set up posts which obstructed a route used 'for conveyance of dung, &c. from the waterside', suggesting that the boats taking produce to market were returning with urban manure.[111] Much further back, in the 1290s, about thirty boatloads of manure or night-soil had been brought to Battersea manor every year, probably for similar purposes.[112] A bequest of 1682 is recorded for 'six poor women that work in the gardens'. A parish registration book of 1695–1705 suggests that gardeners and labourers were then the commonest trades. But Taylor's deduction that labour-intensive market gardening had by then 'almost entirely ousted general farming'

'Battersea-Red' and the 'Ld. Bullingbrook'.[117] The holdings of the Juer family (the normal spelling) were among the parish's biggest and longest-lasting; their name is recorded as early as 1641, and theirs was the only local market garden listed in a trade directory of 1840.[118]

Anemones were among the Battersea specialities noted in the 1720s by the botanist Richard Bradley in his *New Improvements of Planting and Gardening*. Bradley also mentions the Battersea Bean (a dwarf variety of kidney bean) and Battersea Cabbage, and is the first to single out the local asparagus ('the largest I have yet seen').[119] Asparagus became the parish's proverbial crop, renowned for its size. The heads of the 'Battersea bundles' elicited angler-style rivalry and boasting, some allegedly weighing in at 'more than 32 pounds'.[120] Other parishes vied for primacy in cultivating this summer delicacy, which one newspaper of 1794 claimed could earn the right ground £2,000-4,000 per year.[121] But it was the vaunt of a character in Samuel Foote's *The Mayor of Garratt* (1763), that in the 'manufacturing of sparagrass: Battersea, I own, gentlemen, bears, at present, the belle'.[122] Another locally-set comedy, Charles Dibdin's *The Waterman* (1774), features characters called Mr and Mrs Bundle.

It would be wrong to focus exclusively on market gardens. Along the river edge, osiers for the London basket trade were a lucrative crop, sufficiently so for one basket-maker with seven and a half acres of ground near Battersea Bridge to lose 300 bundles to theft in 1787.[131] The lavender of Lavender Hill (the name is not recorded before 1774) was grown to flavour honey, perhaps too to protect against disease. There was plenty of animal husbandry and pasture land on higher ground, while along the river from about 1790 quantities of both cattle and hogs were fattened up each autumn in sheds attached to the distilleries, on a mash of grain and distillery waste.[132] Lucerne was also grown for fodder. Crop returns for 1801 show nearly 300 acres in Battersea given over to cereals—145 acres of wheat, 104 of barley, 39 of oats and 8 of rye. These figures tally with those for Lambeth, but the proportion of barley in Battersea was higher than that in both neighbouring Wandsworth, which devoted 360 acres to cereals, and smaller Clapham, with only 110.[133] They also agree with data of 1773 for John Harman's 30-odd acre estate at Battersea Rise, where fairly equal proportions of wheat and barley are indicated, plus some ground for potatoes.[134]

Cereals were grown in the alluvial Battersea fields as well as on high

ploughed in one uniform way and sown with one uniform round of grain, one source recorded, without fallowi ng. The light soil was then heavily manured, which promoted good yields, but the earth was ‘invariably foul’ and prone to couch grass and other weeds.[136] After the Spencers’ enclosure bill

wall. Neither the Surrey and Kent Commission nor its short-lived successor,

The Battersea portion of the MBW's Southern Low Level Sewer, along the line of Nine Elms Lane, Battersea Park Road and York Road, as designed chiefly by its engineer, Joseph Bazalgette, was built in 1864–5 (William Webster, contractor). Hard on its heels in 1865–6 came the covering-in and partial rebuilding of the Heathwall and Falcon brook sewers (started by W. Moxon, contractor, succeeded by Thomas Pearson for the former, and by J. W. Hiscox with James & Samuel Williams for the latter). The suppression of a third watercourse, the Lord Spencer open sewer near Battersea Park, followed. [151]

These works made it possible to cover the remaining ground of lower Battersea with housing. They were not completely effective. Many new houses had already been built with basements which were too deep and therefore seldom free of water; on the Park Town estate, for instance, complaints about flooding persisted. Continuing difficulties with storm water were tackled by adding the Falconbrook Pumping Station at Battersea Creek (1878–9), and the Heathwall Pumping Station (1897–8); both have since been rebuilt, the Falconbrook station twice. On the whole later Victorian houses in north Battersea are without basements. Yet dampness remained endemic. It was the fault invariably diagnosed when swathes of small Battersea houses were sentenced to destruction in the mid twentieth century.

Government and politics

The modern political history of Battersea commenced in March 1888, when its Vestry regained the independence it had enjoyed since regular meetings began in 1742 but lost in 1856. Between those dates the parish had been governed by what in theory was an 'open' Vestry, which all ratepayers were eligible to attend. In practice the attendance was seldom over thirty and

sometimes less than ten. As many vestry meetings took place on weekday mornings, they tended to be 'select gatherings of those whose financial or occupational standing was such as to allow them to attend meetings frequently'. [152]

With Battersea nearing 12,000 in population such an administration was no longer tenable. Under the Metropolis Management Act of 1855 the parish was relegated to 'Schedule B' status and corralled into the Wandsworth Board of Works for the purposes of improving its infrastructure,

its MP from 1892 to 1918, and one of the outstanding politicians and activists of his day.

In many eyes, not least his own, Burns was synonymous with Battersea—a view summed up by a Punch cartoon of him bestriding a map of the place. Yet his relation to his adopted parish (he was born just over the border in Lambeth) was often oblique. His father, Scottish-born as was his mother, worked as an engine driver; from about 1867 the family lived at various addresses in the lowly new streets north of Clapham Junction, his father's base.[156] Burns attended Christ Church National School, and was a choirboy at Christ Church itself.[157] From his early years he was a self-educator and wide reader, acquiring in the process a passion for his native London. But the large family must have needed extra income: hence the lad's episodic work as a potboy at a local pub and, in 1870, at Price's Candleworks.

These were the only jobs Burns ever held in Battersea. By 1874 his family was back on the Lambeth side of Wandsworth Road, and Burns had begun an apprenticeship with a Millbank engineer.[158] He may not have been a Battersea resident again until after his marriage (at St Philip's, Queenstown Road) in 1882; he then lived in the borough for the rest of his life.[b] Until his election to the LCC he held various jobs in construction and engineering, latterly as an assembler of machines.

Burns was probably introduced to radical politics by Victor Delahaye, a refugee from the Paris Commune. He had his first brush with the police when addressing a meeting on Clapham Common in 1878. With his forceful voice and instinct for rhetoric he came to the fore through outdoor speaking,

important to the agitations of the 1880s. His diary for 1888 shows him moving on Sundays from morning meetings at the gates of Battersea Park to afternoon ones on Clapham Common. It also reveals that Burns had a wider culture than he is usually credited with: that year he read Shelley, Adam Bede and Robert Elsmere, revisited the Royal Academy exhibition where he was critical of the latest Burne-Joneses, saw Tosca, relished the beauty of William Morris's Kelmscott House, and admired the 'sturdy common sense' of a speech by Oscar Wilde.[159]

Burns was involved with Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation from 1884. A Battersea branch was formed soon afterwards; Tom Mann, another prominent activist and briefly a Battersea resident, was also an early member. It met in Sydney Hall, York Road, described by Stephen Sanders, Burns's youthful right-hand man, as a shabby upper chamber 'situated above a waxwork show of an inferior kind not uncommon in those days, and flanked by a yard in which gipsy caravans found temporary sojourn'.[160] Sydney Hall was also the venue of the first socialist Sunday school. Another meeting place convenient for the industrial workers of north Battersea was the Prince's Head at the corner of York and Falcon Roads.

In 1887 Burns led a crowd of socialists and unemployed to St Mary's, Battersea, engaging in a respectful stand-off with the vicar, Erskine Clarke, who preached from the Sermon on the Mount.[161] This episode took place between the two famous Trafalgar Square demonstrations of February 1886 and November 1887. Burns's prominence on these occasions gave him metropolitan and national standing. The six weeks he served in prison following the November clashes ('Bloody Sunday') made him the best-known of the working men to secure a seat on the LCC in 1889. Already active in the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, he enhanced his reputation in the successful Dock Strike later that year.

Battersea Trades and Labour Council, an alliance of radical interest groups. In the Vestry election of that year 80 Progressive candidates were returned, giving them a majority on the Vestry and Council maintained until 1909, when the secession of a separate Battersea Labour Party let the Tories in for three years. In 1912 the Lib-Lab coalition was renewed, retaining power till 1919, when Labour took long-term control of the Council. [167]

Even before the Progressive victory of 1894, the Vestry was pursuing advanced policies on labour and unemployment, running a labour exchange and obliging its surveyor to reserve certain winter jobs for men likely to be unemployed at that season. [168] But the heyday of municipal socialism in Battersea was 1895–1902. In these years the Vestry (later Council) transformed its maintenance staff into a fully fledged Works Department, to which major building contracts were awarded; won powers allowing it to generate and distribute electricity from a station in Lombard Road; and planned two cottage estates of its own council housing, the sizeable Latchmere Estate and a smaller group behind the town hall. These activities followed lines laid down by the Progressive LCC, where Burns had been the spiritual father of its Works Department. But politically Battersea Council was bolder than the LCC, taking a public stand against the Boer War and even naming one of its streets on the Latchmere Estate after General Piet Joubert. Its direct-labour tradition also lasted far longer.

From about 1902 the political temperature dropped. Some disillusion set in, symptomatized by *The Times*' invective against the extravagance and featherbedding of the Works Department. Sanders condemned the 'serious moral temptations' into which he felt a materialistic interpretation of socialism had led some of the local working classes, and went over to an 'ethical' politics. [169] But apart from the interlude of 1909–12 the Progressive alliance held, if sometimes shakily. It was in these years that John Archer,

reducing council services to what it viewed as an efficient minimum, hiving off housing, closing schools and selling sites, often controversially. As these policies persisted, a more affluent class trickled into Battersea, while its working classes, industry and sense of independent identity all fell away. The sequence speeded up from the 1980s. Labour now lost ground in most elections, as mordantly observed from the perspective of the Queenstown Ward Labour Party in John O'Farrell's Things Can Only Get Better

regularly in the Wandsworth Historian, inaugurated in 1971. Among the main contributors has been the late Patrick Loobey, who also co-ordinated Battersea Past (2002), an exemplary short history, and other publications making use of his personal photograph collection. An other has been Keith Bailey, who was the founder-editor of the Wandsworth Historian and has produced a stream of articles ever since. Many explore Battersea's fragmented Victorian estate development and the careers of the speculators and builders involved. Much of this information is drawn together in his doctoral thesis, 'The Metamorphosis of Battersea 1800–1914' (Open University, 1995). Bailey's most recent work at the time of writing is Aspects of Battersea History 1770–1910 (2010). There have also been excellent publications about the political life of Battersea in the era of John Burns and William Archer, with Sean Creighton as their most prolific author. These flourishing networks of local-history writing have been an invaluable support to the present volumes.

Also worth singling out are some exceptional memoirs of Battersea lives, obscure or almost so. Specially informative are those, in near-chronological order, by John Buckmaster (writing pseudonymously as John Buckley), William Evill, Arthur Newton, the poet and essayist Richard Church, Edward Ezard, James Guttridge, Harry Wicks, Michael de Larrabeiti and John Walsh. On the other hand Battersea has not been richly blessed by its showing in art or literature. A famous series of paintings convey the silhouette of its industrial foreshore from Chelsea through the impressionistic palette of Whistler and his disciples, the Greaves brothers, but these are views from an indefinite distance. Among novels, Joseph Hocking's All Men Are Liars (1895) features two chapters luridly contrasting the dissipation of Battersea's streets and pubs on a Saturday night with the ensuing Sunday's religious gloom; while Philip Gibbs's

by Nell Dunn, first issued in 1963, about a posh girl who crosses the river to find a more honest life among the working classes of Battersea, is better known for the television version directed by Ken Loach (1965) and the feature film of 1968. Many other films have scenes set in Battersea, but *The Lavender Hill Mob* is not among them.

