

30: CLAPHAM JUNCTION

History & Topography

The earliest reference to the area is a mention of the 'Ryse' in 1656 (now Battersea Rise). Prior to the construction of the first railway line in 1838 the area was mainly fields. The early development was concentrated along main roads such as the coaching route from London to Guildford, now the A3, and along St.John's Hill. Rocque's map of 1745 clearly shows Battersea Rise and the roads that are now Lavender Hill, St.John's Hill and Falcon Road. The latter followed the line of the Falcon Brook which, between Battersea Rise and what is now St.John's Road, was formed into three large ponds. The 1838 Tithe Map shows the area immediately prior to the construction of the London to Southampton railway, the route of which was demarcated. At this time the only developments in the area were a few isolated villas, farm buildings and possibly commercial buildings. Many of the fields were used for the commercial production of Lavender, a crop that was used for the perfume industry; hence Lavender Hill. There is a reference in 1767 to a public house 'the Foulcon'. The 1871 O.S. Map shows a horse trough outside the original public house, which no doubt had become a popular staging point for horse drawn traffic.

The first railway to be constructed was the London to Southampton line (1838), which terminated at Nine Elms, but at this time there was no station at Clapham Junction. The Richmond railway line opened in 1846; in 1848 a third track was completed from Vauxhall to Falcon Bridge, together with the opening of Waterloo station as the main terminus; and in 1860 a fourth track was added. As a result, the London and South Western railway decided that an interchange station with the West End and Crystal Palace, the West London Extension and the London Brighton and South Coast railways, could be justified. In 1863 the new station at Falcon Bridge (i.e. Clapham Junction) was

opened where the Richmond railway branched away from the main line. Each company had their own platforms and entry to the station was from St.John's Hill. The north and south sides were linked by a long subway only six feet wide. New buildings for the LBSCR were opened in 1874 and those of the LSWR in 1876, the latter being architecturally more significant.

The construction of the railways and the opening of the stations was the catalyst to the development of the open fields of Battersea and Clapham, which were progressively transformed into new housing estates. The strips and furlongs of Battersea's fields often represented the boundaries of the new residential estates. Between 1840 and 1910 some 141 building estates were developed in the parish of Battersea. The population increased during this period from 6,000 to 168,000.

The early housing was mainly for low income families associated with the local workforce. During the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, though, this changed to more speculative housing. The developer Alfred Heaver made an enormous impact on the Battersea townscape with the construction of some 4,419 houses in the area between 1878 and 1898.

The construction of houses brought with it a demand for goods and services and St.John's Road, Lavender Hill and St.John's Hill became thriving commercial areas. By 1885 the commercial importance of the area was such that Arding and Hobbs, the largest department store south of the River Thames, was built.

Buildings & Townscape

The character and appearance of the area rely upon the strength of its architectural origins, which are essentially Victorian, and its association with the development of the railways. The grain of the area is composed mainly of a grid of streets, north-south and east-west in orientation, with buildings fronting directly onto them. The construction of the railway imposed a barrier to the north-south movement, with Falcon Road being the only northern entry to the town centre.

St.John's Road developed as a thriving shopping area at the end of the nineteenth century, but a few of the earlier mid-nineteenth century buildings survive (nos.16-20). Elsewhere the street comprises mainly three storey Victorian Gothic terraces of red brick with decorative stone motifs to heads of first floor elliptical windows. There are no surviving original shopfronts, and most of the later replacements are uninspiring. Nos.45-49 (Marks and Spencer), an early twentieth century composition with ornate projecting clock, and nos.36-44 in an International style with decorative 'fins', contrast well with the mainly Victorian buildings. The corner of St.John's Road and Battersea Rise is marred by the poor appearance of nos.93-95, the cladding being particularly unattractive. St.John's Road is now restricted to buses and service vehicles. The brick planters inserted in the 1980s detract from the qualities of the street. The Victorian post box on the corner of Beauchamp Road and St.John's Road is of architectural and historical interest.

Arding and Hobbs was originally built in 1885, but a fire in 1909 destroyed the building. The new store of 1910 by James Gibson is a magnificent Edwardian baroque composition of red brick and stone.

The cupola with its clock is a local landmark and helps to reinforce the sense of place around the junction of St.John's Road and St.John's Hill.

Ilminster Gardens retains a number of three storey Victorian buildings. The Welsh Chapel nearby, a red brick classical composition, is of architectural and historical interest.

The buildings in Lavender Hill are mainly of three storeys in a Victorian Gothic composition that neatly steps up the hill. The curved terrace at the lower end is by Alfred Heaver and the large corner building is dated 1889. Its main quality lies in its townscape interest, in framing the public space at the junction of Falcon Road and Lavender Hill. To the north and east, adjacent to the conservation area, the townscape deteriorates with gap sites, buildings and public spaces of poor visual quality. In Mossbury Road an early nineteenth century farmhouse, known as 'The Chestnuts' survives but has been much altered.

The triangular public space at the junction of Lavender Hill and Falcon Road is clearly shown on Rocque's map of 1745. With the subsequent development of the area the space became an important traffic junction. In the late nineteenth century the centre of this space was re-organised involving the construction of public conveniences, lamp standard and cast iron railings. The modern alterations to this space have now reduced it to a mere pedestrian island. The buildings enclosing this space, together with the space itself, gave a visual focus to the town centre, reinforcing its sense of place.

A public house existed on the corner of Falcon Road and St.John's Hill before the 1800s, but it was rebuilt in 1880 as the Falcon Hotel (grade II). Its curved brick frontage to the corner of these streets, in an Italianate style, makes it of immense townscape importance as a local landmark.

The new buildings flanking the Falcon Hotel are rather austere with weak fenestration and detailing. The building to the west incorporates a new arcaded public space providing access to the station. Architecturally the station is still three separate entities reflecting its origins. Of the surviving buildings the single storey yellow stock brick former booking office to platforms 9/10, the weatherboarded timber buildings with their pedimented windows and doorcases and modillion eaves cornices, the cast-iron canopy supports with their strapwork decoration, the fretwork edging to the canopies, railings to platforms 2-8, and the timber overbridge are of local architectural and historic interest.

The imposing parcels office of 1910, an Edwardian baroque building, makes a significant townscape presence on St.John's Hill through its size and position. It has recently been restored along with the adjoining shops (Brighton Buildings). The architectural character is therefore one of a collection of buildings associated with the area's historical origins as a railway development.

Around 1900 the Grand Palace of Varieties (now Grand Theatre, grade II) was built to designs by E.A.Woodrow. The building, a massive red brick structure with arcaded loggias, helps to reinforce the sense of place of the area through its size, function and historical meaning. The interior is decorated in a Chinese style. The group of buildings to the west of the Theatre have a strong pattern of fenestration.

The former station master's house, 54-56 St.John's Hill (grade II), with recently restored architectural features and an enhanced forecourt, was built prior to 1838. They are a pair of yellow brick construction with channelled stucco ground floor and Ionic pilasters to first and second floors.

This character statement is intended to give an overview of the development and current character of the conservation area; it is not intended to be prescriptive, nor to be a summary of planning constraints or an inventory of individual buildings or other features whether listed or otherwise.