

# PARK TOWN ESTATE, BATTERSEA, IN 1871

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The aim of this paper is to examine in detail the first generation of inhabitants who came to live in part of north-east Battersea in the latter part of the 1860s. The principal sources for this investigation are the census enumerators' books for 1871.<sup>1</sup> Although this gives only a single snapshot of the local population on only one day, it does have the merit of providing comprehensive demographic data, and it is reasonably close in time to the first occupation of the houses, before the original pattern had had time to be overlaid with subsequent migration and employment changes.

It is not the intention here to deal with the building history of the Park Town Estate, since this has been the subject of a recent monograph (Metcalf 1978). The development formed part of a grand strategy to open up a through route from Chelsea Bridge, opened in 1858, to Clapham Common, and to build several thousand substantial houses on what had hitherto been agricultural and market gardening land.<sup>2</sup> The scheme was aimed at attracting middle class residents to an area made desirable both by lower property values than those in similar developments north of the Thames, and by nearby Battersea Park (opened 1858) and Clapham Common.

Unfortunately for Philip Flower and his partners, the future of this corner of Battersea was already being shaped by other, more powerful, hands, namely those of three main-line railway companies developing low cost routes to their London termini at Waterloo and Victoria (Fig. 1) (Jackson 1969). Park Town has

the misfortune of being at the intersection of the London and South Western approach to Waterloo and that of the London, Brighton and South Coast and London, Chatham and Dover Railways route into Victoria. Between them, these three railways spun a veritable cat's cradle of viaducts and embankments around this part of Battersea. In addition, the Chatham company built a substantial works at Longhedge Farm for the building and repair of locomotives, carriages and wagons, situated right along the eastern boundary of Park Town. Much of this railway-building activity was under way during the boom years of the mid 1860s, precisely at the time when the estate was being laid out and developed. The worst effect on the social aspirations of the estate came from the Brighton line's new high-level viaduct, which sliced across the northern part of the estate, separating the bulk of it from Battersea Park, and towering above what had been planned as one of the best parts of the estate. The building of this viaduct in 1865–7 caused the demolition of many nearly-completed houses, as well as leaving a legacy of noise and vibration to those which survived.

Dr Metcalf's detailed treatment of the architectural history of the estate makes further comment superfluous here (Metcalf 1978, 25–37), save to say that almost all the houses which were occupied at the time of the 1871 census were of James Knowles' basic three-storey terrace design. Some embellishments were to be found in the northern part facing principal roads, and around Queen's Square. Although they were no doubt designed

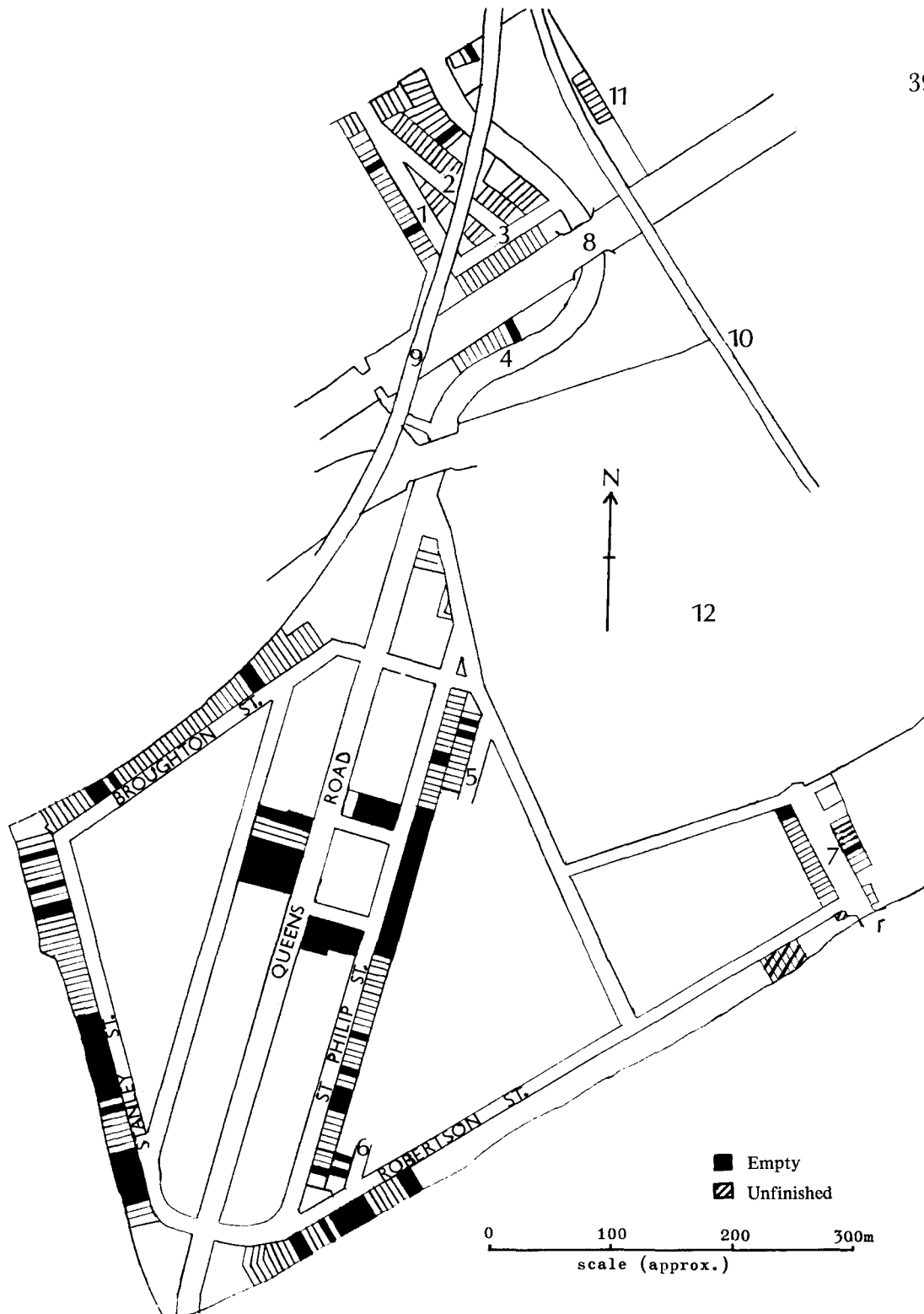


Fig. 1. Park Town 1871: General Location, with empty and unfinished houses.

- |                               |                            |   |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1. West Street                | 2. St. George's Street     | 3. South Street                             |
| 4. Queens Crescent            | 5. Hamilton Street         | 6. Tennyson Street                          |
| 7. St. Andrew Street          | 8. London and S.W. Railway | 9. London, Brighton and South Coast Railway |
| 10. South London Line (LBSCR) | 11. Gladstone Terrace      | 12. London, Chatham & Dover Railway Works   |

for occupation by a single family and its servants, they were large and eminently suited to subdivision into two or three dwelling units.

A comment made by the vicar of St. Phillip's Church, Queens (town) Road that the houses were 'inhabited chiefly by persons in humble circumstances, and of a very migratory character' (see Metcalf 1978, 35), is amply borne out by the census returns of 1871. Between them they show that the developers' and architect's aims and intentions for the estate had largely been thwarted in the decade since its conception. Despite the size and style of the houses, their occupants' social and economic backgrounds varied little from those of a dozen other building developments along the south side of Battersea Park Road in the 1860s in which they were housed in more commonplace, less pretentious houses.

Excluding the eight houses in Gladstone Terrace, which had been compulsorily purchased and retained by the Brighton Railway, whose South London Line viaduct ran only inches in front of the houses, a total of 292 houses was occupied on census night in 1871. In addition, a further 95 were completed but not occupied, and five were still under construction. Approximately 90 houses had been demolished in connection with the various railway projects (Metcalf 1972, 94). The enumerators found 2,590 people in residence, comprising 546 households. Even at this early stage of development there were almost two

households in each house. The average size of household was 4.7 people, and there were just under nine persons in each house. Only one house in three was occupied by a single family, as Table 1 shows.

From these figures it will be seen that 60% of the houses were occupied by two or three families, accounting for 73% of households. Relatively few houses contained more than twenty people, however, and there were generally less than fifteen, making an average of five or so per floor. Many of them were young children of the skilled artisans who had migrated to Park Town in search of a home and work. In fact, the house with five households in it contained only sixteen people. It was 28 Queen's Crescent, hard by a viaduct subjected to constant buffeting by trains. The five small families were headed by a clerk, a banker's assistant, two needlewomen and a tailor.

There were few boarders, lodgers, and living-in servants in Park Town in 1871—only thirty-three, twenty-two and thirteen households respectively came into these categories. It seems that the local population was not so necessitous as to need paying sub-tenants or guests, nor so well-to-do as to be able to afford servants who lived on the premises. In common with the surrounding estates developed in the latter part of the 1860s, Park Town was a colony of skilled artisans, many of them employed in service industries in the locality.

Following the example of Armstrong

Table 1  
Park Town 1871: Multiple Occupancy

Households/ House	No. Houses	%Houses	No. Households	%Households
1	108	37.0	108	19.8
2	125	42.8	250	45.8
3	49	16.8	147	26.9
4	9	3.1	36	6.6
5	1	0.3	5	0.9
Total	292	100.0	546	100.0

(1972) and others, five basic social classes have been employed in this analysis of Park Town's earliest inhabitants. Because of its overwhelming numbers, Class III has been subdivided into skilled manual and non-manual occupations. The groups making up the other classes may briefly be summarised as follows: Class I, higher professions, gentry; Class II, other professions, shopkeepers, employers; Class IV, semi-skilled workers; Class V, unskilled workers. In Table 2 the class structure of Park Town is compared with a 10% sample for the whole parish of Battersea.

*Table 2*  
*Park Town 1871: Social Class of Household Heads*

Class	Number	Park Town		Battersea (10% sample)	
		Number	%	Number	%
I	7		1.3		1.7
II	77		14.6		16.5
IIIM	266		50.7		37.8
IIINM	98		18.7	} 69.4	} 56.1
IV	33		6.3		
V	44		8.4		14.2
Total	525*		100.0		100.0

\* 21 heads did not provide details of occupation

The principal feature revealed by these data is that over half the families in Park Town belonged to the skilled manual class, compared with just over one-third in the whole of Battersea. This is balanced by a deficiency in Classes IV and V in Park Town. With 70% of households in Class III, Park Town was almost a one-class estate, albeit not the one for which it had been designed. If the sample for Battersea is factored up, then it is seen that 6% of skilled manual workers lived in Park Town, although it contained only 4% of households and a slightly smaller proportion of occupied houses.

Following the classification employed by Armstrong (1972) once more, Table 3 sets out the numbers of household heads in each of the main occupational categories,

again compared with a 10% sample for the whole of Battersea. It should be emphasised that within any given occupational grouping there will be people who belong to more than one social class, since each covers a wide range of income and hence ability to pay for housing and other goods and services.

Comparing the two populations, it will be seen that Park Town has more than the expected proportion of building and transport workers, but far fewer in the distributive and retail trades. This reflects its location close to railway works and stations, and the fact that construction was still in progress in 1871, albeit at a very low ebb. Retail provision tended to lag behind housebuilding, and in any case the plan for Park Town as originally conceived did not allocate much room for shops—mainly in Queen's Road and over the parish boundary in Clapham. Surprisingly in view of its physical surroundings, almost one household in ten in 1871 belonged to the professional and private means categories, although they had a distinct tendency to cluster in one part of the development.

Although many of the people who moved into Park Town when the houses were first built came from other London suburbs as part of the general tendency for outward migration in short hops, it is nevertheless interesting to examine the ultimate origins of the first inhabitants from the data in the census on birthplace. The figures are given in aggregates of parishes or counties in Table 4, expressed as percentages and compared, as previously, with a sample for the whole of Battersea parish.

The most striking difference between the two distributions is that the proportion born in the two immediate counties of Surrey and Middlesex is about 40% higher in Battersea as a whole than in Park Town. Two-thirds of the latter were

Table 3  
Park Town 1871: Occupation of Household Heads  
Park Town

Group	Park Town		Battersea (10% sample)
	Number	%	%
Agriculture	—	—	0.9
Building	135	25.7	18.8
Distribution	35	6.7	13.1
Domestic Service	29	5.5	7.2
Industrial Service*	58	11.0	10.9
Minerals, etc.	1	0.2	0.5
Manufacturing	148	28.3	28.3
Private Means	8	1.5	2.0
Professions	38	7.2	7.6
Transport	73	13.9	10.7
Total	525	100.0	100.0

\* Includes clerks and unspecified labourers

Table 4  
Park Town 1871: Birthplace of Household Heads

Parish/County/Region	Park Town	Battersea (10% sample)
Battersea	0.2	3.4
Adjacent parishes	14.9	19.9
London (City)	5.8	4.7
Rest of Surrey	4.2	8.3
Rest of Middlesex	7.1	9.3
Total Surrey/Middlesex	32.2	45.6
Home Counties	16.0	13.4
South West	11.9	8.2
East Anglia	9.5	9.5
West Midlands	9.5	5.7
North East	4.9	1.8
East Midlands	4.2	3.2
Ireland	2.9	4.8
Scotland	2.6	4.8
North West	1.8	2.2
Wales	1.5	0.9
Overseas	2.0	1.6
Not known	1.0	1.3
Total	100.0%	100.0%

born further afield, and only one third in Battersea itself. The majority of household heads in Park Town were born in the south and east of England, in a swathe of counties from Norfolk to Devon and Cornwall, which accounted for about 70% of the total, with another seventh from the Midland counties. Many of the building workers came from rural counties in the south and west, doubtless

attracted to south London by easy rail access and the feverish building activity there in the 1860s.

Having examined the total pattern of social class and occupation in Park Town in 1871, it is appropriate to look a little deeper at the way in which the various groups were actually located within the estate. There is some evidence of geographical concentration in certain groups,

and this is also true of empty properties, for example two-thirds of the houses at the south end of Stanley Street were unoccupied at the time of the census, and only four out of thirty-five in Queen's Square were inhabited. In Robertson Street, one-third of the houses were empty, and five were still under construction.

Taking the middle-class households first, more than 40%, lived to the north of the L.S.W.R. viaduct, and there were other, smaller, groups in Stanley Street (18%) and St. Andrew Street (11%). The attraction of the northern end of the estate to these families lay in its proximity to Battersea Park, and also to the more fashionable parts of town by way of Chelsea Bridge. In addition many of the houses around the Queen's Road/Battersea Park Road intersection were of a grander design than usual (Metcalf 1978, 35, Pls. 6a, 7c, 7e).

Skilled manual workers formed such a high proportion of the total in Park Town that they are found throughout the estate, often sharing accommodation with families of other classes. Non-manual workers in service industries show some concentration, however, with one-third to the north of the L.S.W.R., and a block in Queen's Crescent, one of the few areas of shops. In the semi-skilled and unskilled classes, there is only one appreciable cluster—in Broughton Street—with 23% of the total.

As is the case with Class III manual workers, those employed in the various building trades are found throughout Park Town. Their distribution generally accords with that of occupied houses, except in the case of West Street, where there are fewer than expected (4% compared with 8% of houses), and in Broughton Street (25% compared with 17% houses).

Employees in 'industrial service', who

comprise mainly clerks and some labourers whose trade is not specified in the census returns, tend to be scattered widely throughout the development. In contrast, employees in metalworking and in road and railway carriage building show more evidence of concentration in the streets around the periphery of Park Town. Six of these households are clustered in St. Andrew Street, just outside the gates of the Chatham Railway's workshops.

Employees in the clothing trades account, somewhat surprisingly, for more than one third of manufacturing employment in the area, with local concentrations in Queen's Crescent, St. Philip Street and Stanley Street, which between them house 57% of the clothing workers in only one third of the houses. Many of those employed in these trades were homeworkers, either tailors or needlewomen, and there was little or no factory employment for them nearby. The census is unfortunately silent about how many, if any, used the various local train services to reach the West End and the City for work.

Excluding those engaged in carriage building, some fifty-five heads of household in Park Town in 1871 were employed on the railways and of these 60% lived to the north of the South Western viaduct, and a further 12% in St. Andrew Street. The former reflects the ease of access to Victoria and the Brighton Company's locomotive and goods facilities at Battersea Park and the latter the proximity of similar facilities at Stewart's Lane on the Chatham line. (The South Western station in Queen's Road was not opened until 1877, making access to Waterloo and the Nine Elms works more difficult for those in Park Town in its early days, although some of the railwaymen doubtless walked the mile or so needed to reach the works.) The most obvious concentration of railway workers was in Brighton

Terrace, a group of eight houses compulsorily purchased by the Brighton Railway in the mid-sixties and housing ten of its employees in 1871.

Those who belonged to the professional classes and those of 'private means' in the 1871 census conceal a wide variety of incomes and status in society. For example, not only those at the peak of careers in medicine, trade or the civil service count as professional, but those in lower echelons such as Board School teachers, nurses and policemen. Similarly, those living on private income could include not only gentry, but those who had retired to live on the rents of a few houses, or the interest from stocks. In Park Town, these groups are often found at the northern end of the development reflecting the predominance of social Classes I and II there. Examples include a mission woman, two Greenwich pensioners, a musician and a police constable. About one-fifth of these households lived at the western end of Broughton Street and the northern end of Stanley Street. In the former No. 46 housed a tutor, No. 47 a schoolmaster, No. 48 a chemist and No. 49 a science teacher. Persons of private means tended to be scattered at random throughout the estate, with no discernible pattern.

From the foregoing analysis of the social and economic characteristics of the early settlers on the Park Town estate in north Battersea, it is clear that whatever the aspirations of its developers, notably Philip Flower, and its architects, the two James Knowles, the location of the development, both in relation to the sorts of estates going up around it at the same

time, and more particularly in relation to the pattern of railway lines and works as it emerged between 1863 and 1867, ensured that it became occupied by an essentially working class population. Already in 1871 a majority of these large houses was subdivided into two or three dwelling units, and the middle class element in the population was small, and tending to gather in the detached northern portion of the estate.

The estate, in short, came to resemble its more humbly conceived neighbours despite the intentions of its developers. No doubt they had been in part compelled to accept this kind of tenant in order to reduce the number of houses standing empty and unprofitable. In the end, the physical presence of railways and their works in such profusion cast the die. Although the original houses were, and are, impressive in their style and massing, and the concept of the focal main thoroughfare with its square and church echo grander parts of the metropolis, the fact that by 1885 the rest of Park Town was being finished with ordinary two-storey houses, and even maisonettes, is eloquent testimony to the forces which moulded Battersea during the mid-Victorian period.

#### NOTES

1. Held on microfilm at Battersea District Library, Lavender Hill.
2. *Clapham Gazette*, December 1864, 22.

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