

THE HISTORY OF YOUR AREA

In 1850, around fifty years before this photograph of Montholme Road was taken, only 300 people were living in the area known as South Battersea. Now referred to as 'Between The Commons' it is home to over 20,000.

Until the land was purchased by Earl Spencer in the 18th Century it had belonged to the St John family as Lords of the Manor of Battersea. Henry St John became the first Viscount Bolingbroke after purchasing the title in 1712 and the family are commemorated by a number of streets bearing their name.

When wealthy banker Robert Dent purchased a significant portion of Earl Spencer's land at the end of the 18th century, he began an ambitious building programme including several large estates and five grand houses facing the Common on 'Five Houses Lane'. Renamed Bolingbroke Grove, only one of its houses – the former Bolingbroke Hospital – remains today.

Huguenot Matthew Charlie was a successful wine merchant who lived in another of the five houses. His granddaughter, Marianne, through marriage to a Spanish Count, became Countess of Morella and Morella Road is named after her.

Dent himself lived in the largest and most impressive of all his houses, Old Park. In 1881 the horseshoe-shaped Dents Road took his name, though half was later renamed Gorst Road after Sir John Gorst – lawyer and Conservative MP who lived here.

The opening of Clapham Junction Railway Station in 1863 made the city accessible and the area became a target for developers. Broomwood House and its substantial grounds were the site of the area's largest development and approval for the construction of Broomwood, Montholme, Gayville, Devereux and Hillier Roads was given in 1880. The house, which William Wilberforce had lived in for several years, was eventually demolished in 1904.

For more than sixty years 24 Morella Road was home to Ida and Louise Cook, two opera-mad spinsters who helped rescue dozens of Jews from Hitler's Germany. Their mission was financed by Ida's career as Mills & Boon's most prolific author – writing 130 novels over fifty years. The sisters were posthumously honoured for their bravery in a ceremony at Downing Street last year.

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