

Report on
St Mark's Infants School

Battersea Rise, SW11
London Borough of Wandsworth

by
Emily Cole

Historical Analysis & Research Team
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Nature of Request

The Historical Analysis & Research Team has been asked to provide information on the history and significance of St Mark's Infants School, Battersea Rise, designed by Benjamin Ferrey and built 1866-67. The building is unlisted and unused. The church authorities have plans to redevelop the site of the school, and the church hall, and architect's designs have been submitted. The information contained within this report is intended to support consideration for listing.

Origin of Request: *Anna-Marie Pagano (South London)*
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The School in the Nineteenth Century

Battersea grew rapidly after the coming of the railways in the mid-nineteenth century (Clapham Junction Station opened in 1863). The population rose from 10,560 in 1851 to 19,600 in 1861, and was as high as 107,262 by 1881.¹ With this growth came the need for education, and in 1866 the parish of St Mary's, Battersea, began building an infants school on the apex of a large piece of Wandsworth Common given for the purpose by Earl Spencer, Lord of the Manor.² (Fig 1) The cost of building was met largely by donations from Philip Cazenove, a stockbroker and local resident, whose death in 1880 provided the impetus for the building of St Michael's Church, Cobham Close.³ The school was completed early in 1867, and was named St Mary's. The cost of attendance was 3d per week.⁴

The building was clearly well used. The Battersea Vestry moved there from the Lammas Hall in 1868, and on its first meeting on 7 July a resolution was passed that 'the thanks of this Vestry are eminently due and hereby given to the Vicar (Reverend John Simon Jenkinson) and Mr. Cazenove for their kindness in allowing the occasional use of the school room for meetings of the Vestry'.⁵

A note appeared in *The Builder* on 9 February 1867 headed 'Infant-School, Parish of St Mary, Battersea, Wandsworth Common' and stated that: 'This school has recently been completed, and consists of a room 38 ft. by 19 ft., with a class-room attached, 12 ft. by 10 ft. It is built of stocks, banded with red brick, the heads of the windows being filled in with herring-bone work. The roof is covered with tiles, and surmounted by a hexagonal bell-turret. The greater part of the expense of the building has been borne by Mr. P. Cazenove, of Clapham Common. Mr. Ferrey was the architect; and Mr. Jarrett, of Croydon, the contractor.'⁶ That the 'Mr. Ferrey' refers to Benjamin Ferrey (1810-80), rather than his son Edmund, is certain. The school appears in a list of his works published in *The Builder* on 4 September 1880.⁷

It is probable that a church was planned from the very beginning, although its erection was only sanctioned by the District Board in June 1868. A temporary iron structure was raised on the site adjacent to the infants school later that year, and functioned as a chapel of ease to St Mary's. The name of the church, St Mark's, is said to have been chosen so that the inscription on the school could most easily be altered and indeed, there is every indication that the 'y' on the lintel was previously a 'k'.⁸ (Fig 2) The church was immediately filled with worshippers, who were no doubt relieved not to have to travel a mile to the east side of Clapham Common, where their nearest church was situated.⁹

In 1872, work began on a permanent church, designed by William White. A collaboration had been struck up between the architect and the Vicar of St Mary's, Battersea, Canon J.

¹ Buildings of England, *London 2: South*, (1983), p.666

² Roger Logan, *South Battersea: The Formative Years 1851-1900*, (Wandsworth Historical Society, 1978), p.21

³ See HART file: Wandsworth 112 on St Michael's Church and School, Cobham Close, Wandsworth Common.

⁴ Logan 1978, p.21

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *The Builder*, 9 February 1867, p.100

⁷ *The Builder*, 4 September 1880, p.283

⁸ Logan 1978, p.21

⁹ Russel Hanslip Associates, *Restoration of St Mark's Church, Battersea Rise, London SW11*, (1990), p.1. There is a copy of the report in HART file: Wandsworth 112.

Erskine Clarke, and White was to design a further four churches for the Parish: St Peter's, Plough Road (1875-76, demolished except for the tower): St Michael's, Cobham Close (1880-81, grade II): St Mary le Park, Albert Bridge Road (1882-83, demolished): and St Stephen's, Battersea Bridge Road (1886-87, now Assemblies of the First Born). St Mark's was finally completed in 1874, and was illustrated in *The Building News* on 15 January, 1875. Although the drawing does not show the school building, White must have designed his church with it in mind, for the school stands within close proximity to the south side of the apse. In 1887, White added a mission/parish hall on the north side of the church, completing the group of buildings which survive today. (Figs 3 and 4)

The School Today

St Mark's Infants School ceased to function in the 1960s, and was subsequently used by the Vicar of St Mark's as a printing press. It has, for at least the last fifteen years, been used only as a store for odds-and-ends and now presents a sad sight, unloved and neglected. (Fig 5) Claims have been made that the school is falling down but no complete structural survey has been undertaken. There was talk in the late 1980s and early 1990s of restoring the school as part of the overall restoration of St Mark's (which received English Heritage grant aid), but nothing was done. This seems to have been largeley because the school remains in separate ownership (the diocese rather than the church authorities). The current congregation has no history of using the building, and finds it difficult to conceive any possible use.

This has, fortunately, had one general effect. The school is largely unaltered, unlike the well-used church hall, which was enlarged in the 1960s by the addition of unsightly flat-roofed extensions (see Fig 3). The interior of the school has been partly subdivided, and a modern suspended ceiling has been inserted near the west porch, but these changes appear to be easily reversible.

The Building Described

St Mark's is a small-scale, single storeyed school building on a prominent corner site. (Fig 6) In style, it is High Victorian, and comparable with the work of Butterfield, Bodley, and White, especially their minor buildings such as vicarages and cottages. Indeed, Butterfield's Baldersby cottages, North Yorkshire (c.1855-60) and William White's Little Baddow rectory, Essex (1857-58) show remarkable similarities to St Mark's Infants School, especially in their use of the hip-gable, which has been termed 'one of the most persistent motifs in Butterfield's work'.¹⁰ The motifs of St Mark's Infants School are eclectic; there are both Gothic-inspired pointed-headed windows and polychromy, and Tudor style chimneys.

The south façade of the structure, facing directly onto Battersea Rise, works as a piece. (Fig 7) It is near symmetrical, with a hip-gabled central bay projecting forward to the road. The window in the centre of this façade is that which bears the inscription and date (see Fig 2). An early twentieth-century photograph of the school shows that there were boards – perhaps with class times and so forth – attached to each side of the window. (Fig 8) To the right (east) of the façade is a small, gabled porch, which faces onto Battersea Rise (see Figs 5 and 7). This appears to have been the original main entrance, but has not been used for some time.

¹⁰ P. Thompson, *William Butterfield*, (1971), p. 219

There is another porch on the west front of the school, placed to the right of the irregular façade. (Figs 9, 10 and 11) It bears a door, but the concrete lintel belies its insertion in modern times. This door faces a path which leads up to the south side of the church, and appears to have been used as the principal entrance to the school for some years. The porch itself is original, and may have contained a pointed-headed door, like that on the south front. Aside from this porch, the west façade is – like the south – dominated by a large hipped gable with a tall window. The east façade is very similar in composition. (Fig 12)

The north front was clearly intended to be little seen and remains so today, hidden from Battersea Rise and facing the apse of the church. (Fig 13) It is set off only by two pilaster buttresses, their vertical emphasis echoed by the chimney which rises at the centre of the façade. The window between the buttresses is clearly an addition. That to the right has also been inserted, into what appears to have been a doorway.

As the description in *The Builder* states, the school is built of stock bricks, with red banding running right around the building, except on the porches. The windows – simple in design – are set within relieving arches and the heads are filled in with herring-bone work. The roof – an essential part of the composition – is tiled, and there are tiled hips over the gables. *The Builder* mentions a hexagonal bell-turret, which is visible in Victorian and early twentieth-century photographs as an unusually tall, wooden structure, placed in the centre of the main east-west roof (see Fig 8). Its former position can still be traced. According to author and Clapham Society member Roger Armstrong, this bell-turret had been removed by the time of the First World War.

It has not been possible to inspect the interior of the school for this report. However, it is apparently largely original and is dominated by a single space, open from floor to roof. The floors are tiled and the walls plastered. The style is plain and unadorned.¹¹

Benjamin Ferrey

Benjamin Ferrey was born in Christchurch, Hampshire, in 1810. In 1826, at the young age of 16, was articled to Augustus Charles Pugin. Ferrey – a fellow pupil of Augustus's son A.W.N. Pugin – accompanied his master on his tours around England and Normandy, and became known early on for his skills in architectural draughtsmanship. After some time in the office of William Wilkins, Ferrey set up on his own in 1834. He initially practiced with Thomas Larkins Walker (d.1860) and was later to work closely with his son, Edmund Benjamin Ferrey (d.1900).

The core of Ferrey's work was ecclesiastical buildings, mainly in the Gothic style. He was described by Charles Eastlake in the early 1870s as 'one of the earliest, ablest, and most zealous pioneers of the modern Gothic school'.¹² In 1841, he was appointed honorary architect to the diocese of Bath and Wells, and a year later superintended the restoration of Wells Cathedral. Around the same time, Ferrey designed the Church of the St Leonard, Streatham (1841, grade II). By the mid-1840s he was considered one of the rising church architects of the day, and in 1845 was asked by the Baroness (then Miss) Burdett Coutts to design the church of St Stephen, Rochester Row, Westminster (1847-50, grade II*). This, together with its associated schools and vicarage, was one of Ferrey's most important works. Other churches in London designed by the architect include the Church of St John, Angell Town, Brixton (1852-53, grade II), the Church of St Andrew, Southbridge Road, Croydon (1857, grade II), the Church of All Saints,

¹¹ Information from Anna-Marie Pagano, who has been inside the school.

¹² Eastlake, Charles, *A History of the Gothic Revival*, (1870-2, 1970), p. 220

Blackheath (1857-58) and Christ Church, Union Grove, Clapham (1861-62, grade II). Ferrey was, until the late 1860s, one of the best employed and best liked architects of his day. At the time of his death in 1880, *The Builder* could list nearly sixty new churches designed by the architect, an amazing achievement.¹³

Nonetheless, Ferrey was known not only for his churches. He was frequently asked to design schools, parsonages, public buildings, and country houses, generally in the Tudor style. The list of his 'mansions' in *The Builder* includes Bulstrode, Buckinghamshire (1861) and Bagshot Park, Surrey (1877). The subject of particular interest here is, of course, his schools. The twenty nine listed in *The Builder* include those at Cuckfield, Sussex (mid-nineteenth-century, grade II), Darshill, Somerset, Upper Tooting, Surrey, Henley-on-Thames, Lower Slaughter, Gloucestershire, Romsey, Hampshire (1851-52, grade II), and Morpeth, Northumberland.¹⁴ Further research would be required to ascertain how many of these survive.

Ferrey was successful right until the close of his life. In 1861, he published his *Recollections of A.W.N. Pugin and His Father Augustus Pugin*, a work which was extremely well received. Nine years later, in 1870, he was awarded a gold medal by the RIBA for his design of a cathedral for Victoria, British Columbia. His last work was Bagshot Park (mentioned above) and after a slight attack of paralysis later on the same year (1877), he retired from his long and distinguished career.

Conclusion

St Mark's Infants School is a building of some importance in the history of Battersea. It presents a living memory of a time when the populace itself was in its infancy, and was no doubt used and appreciated by a great number of local residents. Although the school is plain and small-scale, this in itself tells us something about education in the mid-Victorian period and the needs of the parish.

Furthermore, the school is an interesting work by Ferrey who, as we have seen, was a Victorian architect of some note. It was built towards the end of his life, when his style had matured and developed, and – as has been stated – is eminently comparable with the minor works of architects such as Butterfield and White.

Most importantly, the school makes a significant contribution to the architectural effect of the grade II* listed Church of St Mark. As has been shown, the church was designed after the school had already been built, and White must – consciously or unconsciously – have taken its general form into account. Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, in their *London South* volume of the Buildings of England, note that 'the canted apse is picturesquely flanked by the low, half-hipped schools dated 1866, and the church hall'.¹⁵ The school seems always to have been seen as an integral part of the collection of three buildings and was, until the 1960s, enclosed by the same boundary railings which surrounded church and church hall (**compare Figs 6 and 8**). Photographs from the Victorian and Edwardian periods, taken down Battersea Rise, show that the group has remained essentially unchanged for well over one hundred years. The site is a prominent one, seen daily by pedestrians, drivers and passengers of the many buses which pass along Battersea Rise, and this major part of its distinctive silhouette would be an enormous shame.

¹³ *The Builder*, September 4 1880, p. 283

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *London South*, p.668

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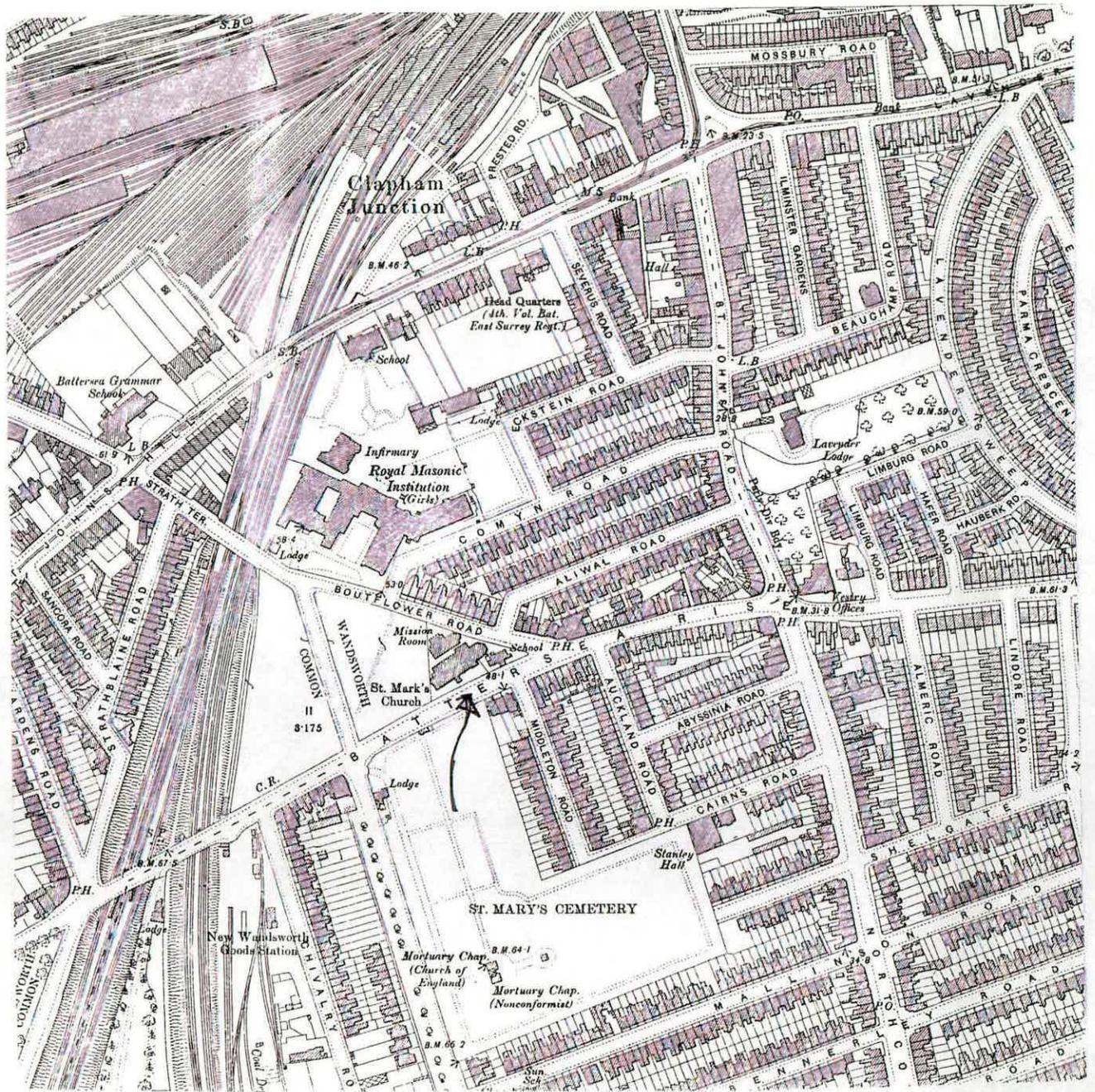


Fig 1: Detail of Ordnance Survey map of 1894-96.



Fig 2: Detail of window on south façade showing inscribed lintel. The inscription was apparently changed from St Mary's to St Mark's after the consecration of the church in 1874.



Fig 3: Mission/parish hall built in 1887 to designs by William White. The hall was extended in the later part of the 20th century.



Fig 4: The group of buildings on the corner of Battersea Rise and Boufflower Road comprising infant school (1866-67), church (1872-74) and mission/parish hall (1887).



Fig 5: St Mark's Infants School from the south-east (corner of Battersea Rise and Boufflower Road).



Fig 6: General view across Battersea Rise showing Benjamin Ferrey's infants school and William White's church.



Fig 7: South façade of school, from across Battersea Rise. The window bearing the inscription is that in the centre of the gabled bay.



Fig 8: Photograph of Battersea Rise taken in c.1910 showing church and school. The school's original bell-turret can just be made out rising at the centre of its main roof span. [Photograph from: A Wilson, *The Buildings of Clapham*, (2000)]



Figs 9 and 10: The school from the south-west.



Fig 11: West front of school showing porch and inserted doorway.



Fig 12: East façade of school fronting onto Boutflower Road.



Fig 13: North façade of school with inserted windows.