

A brief history of Munster Road

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The area around Munster Road on the western edge of Fulham, with its quiet streets of Victorian terraced rows, schools and the central 'Munster Village', was not long ago covered in market gardens and farming land with only a few small cottages and large country houses dotted across the fields...

Mustew – Early Munster Road

When Munster Road first appeared it was originally a mere dirt track for local farmers. The name has seen many changes over the years, first appearing in 1397 as 'Mustew' to describe the whole area north of Fulham Road. The origins of the name 'Mustew' are uncertain, but it is thought to have originated from two old English words meaning 'Meeting Place'. The area of Mustew, from today's North End Road to the river was almost entirely farming land.

The first reference to a road running through the area of Mustew was in 1486, recorded as 'mustewlane'. Over time the name corrupted several times, becoming 'Mustow', 'Muster' and by the 18th century it finally became known as 'Munster Lane'. It was known as a lane for most of its history and only became Munster Road in around 1890.

The path of Munster Road has been almost exactly the same since it first formed across fields in the 15th century, running from the junction of Lille Road and Dawes Road, down to around today's railway bridge, where it joined 'Muddy Lane' (today's St Dionis Road) through to Parsons Green. The lower section of Munster Road was only extended down to New Kings Road in 1832.

Munster House

For much of the early history of the area there was only one significant house - Munster House - situated on the corner of Munster and Fulham Roads. It is believed that the first Munster House dated back to the 16th century, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. A popular local myth ascribes Munster House as the former home of Melesina Schulenberg, who was created Duchess of Munster by George II in 1716. However, the story has proven to be local legend, as there was no connection with her in Fulham and the name of 'Mustow House' appeared in documents and maps before 1716.

In 1587, Munster House along with 11 ½ acres of freehold land was sold to the Powell family, who continued to hold the land for many generations. When Sir William Powell, Baronet was elected to Parliament during the 1660s the house was used as a hunting lodge by King Charles II.

The house saw many changes over the years, including conversion into an asylum in 1751 for those 'afflicted with nervous, or melancholy disorders', changing to a girls school by the late 18th century. In 1813 the house reverted back into a family home and was taken by John Wilson Croker, author, politician and secretary to the Admiralty. In 1841 it was the home of Rev. Stephen Reed Catley, curate of Fulham Church and editor of Foxe's Book of Martyrs, but by 1849 was once again converted into an asylum for 'insane gentlemen'. After surviving for 400 years, the house was demolished in 1894 to make way for new homes.

Munster Farm

Munster Farm formerly stood on the eastern side of Munster Lane, on the corner of today's Filmer Road. The original boundaries ran along Filmer Road and Bishops Road, across to today's Radipole Road. Munster Farm was the home of the Bagley family for a large part of the 19th century, until it was taken over in 1879 for the workshops of building firm, Messrs Gibbs and Flew.

Colehill Villa

Colehill Villa was an old farmhouse that formerly stood on the western side of Munster Lane, on the corner of Colehill Lane, opposite Munster Farm. For a large part of the 19th century it was a nursery, with land running west towards Kimbell Gardens and north towards Gowan Avenue. The house was demolished in 1895 to make way for new homes.

Building begins to spread

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Fulham was known as one of the most prolific providers of vegetables and flowers to the markets of London. The area around Munster Road was dominated by cultivated land and nurseries. However, along with many parts of London, the introduction of the railways and the new Underground, along with improvement in roads and the expanding population, created a need for new homes. The Metropolitan District Railway (today's District Line) was extended down to Parsons Green and Putney Bridge in 1880 and the surrounding area, including large parts of Fulham Fields became ideal for new housing. Land began to be sold off during the late 1870s, with large portions of the available land being developed by prominent local builders, Messrs Gibbs & Flew.

Master Builders – Gibbs & Flew

Mr. William Henry Gibbs and Mr. J.P. Flew started their building operations in West Kensington around 1876 and were one of the biggest building firms in the area. They had their own brick fields, steam sawmills and even their own stone and marble works. At one time they employed over 1000 men. They expanded their building works towards Fulham in 1879.

The workshops of Gibbs & Flew were on the grounds of the former Munster Farm, covering over 2 ½ acres. They were a highly successful firm and built over 200 houses a year, amounting to over 1000 houses between 1880 and 1884. They were responsible for building homes across much of Fulham including Chesilton, Radipole, Lilyville and Bishop's Road. They were also responsible for Munster Park Chapel (for which they gave the land); St Peter's Church, Varna Road and St Andrew's Mission Hall.

Gibbs & Flew also had a unique trademark on each of their homes; all the relief plaster work over doorways and windows featured botanic leaves and flowers, all slightly different for every house and rarely repeated in one street. The designs were all botanically recognisable specimens and many examples can still be seen across Fulham today.

Each home not only featured these unique design features, but were also known for being well built. Even within the smaller homes, they featured the latest housing improvements, including hot and cold water, bathrooms and electric bells. They also featured distinctive architectural details, with encaustic tiles, stained glass, and marble fenders.

Today, the area around Munster Road has become a popular residential community with the central section popularly known as 'Munster Village', with a collection of shops, café's and restaurants. However, it is worth casting your mind back to imagine this part of Fulham covered in market gardens and the occasional horse and cart traversing the fields.