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Battersea Power Station - Electric Investment to Iconic Landmark

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By [+Kevin Murphy](#) - Wednesday 19 September 2012

As a youngster traveling in and out of Victoria Station I was always amazed at the sight of the Battersea Power Station every time I passed by. Famous for not only its unique architecture it has also become a popular landmark with the help of movies and popular music, most notably on the cover art of Pink Floyd's concept album 'Animals'. I never thought that one day I would be creating film documentaries regarding its present condition and future. When I discovered that the building was on the [2004 World Monuments Fund endangered sites list](#) I decided that this would make an interesting film topic. What I discovered was not only the history of this unique property but the on going local politics and money that has played a huge role in its long life.

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In 1925 Parliament decided to redefine electricity standards and the power grid eventually leading to the formation to the London Power Company. Their plan was to replace small power stations with much larger ones with uniform standards of electricity distribution. The site for Battersea Power Station was chosen for its location on the Thames River for coal delivery and needed water supply. One of Britain's most celebrated architects, [Sir Giles Gilbert Scott](#), who was known most notably for his ability to combine traditional Gothic architecture and modernism in his projects, was selected to be the principal designer for the project.

But initial concerns by local citizens over its potential construction needed to be resolved. First, many were not pleased that this massive brick building, still the largest in Europe today, was going to be constructed in their backyard and the second worry was the amount of possible air pollution from the smoke that would be created from the coal fired generators and expelled through the power stations massive chimneys. Once these issues were resolved the plans moved forward.

The first phase of construction on what had been farmland on the Thames River began first with the A Station in 1929. At a cost of £2,141,550 this phase was not completed until 1935. The next phase, the B Station, was constructed after the end of World War II and became fully operational in 1955.

The design matched the original A Station thus giving the building its iconic four chimney exterior appearance. Inside, the A Station featured art deco designs in the control rooms, Italian marble in the turbine halls and parquet floors. The A Station generated electricity to London for 40 years until ceasing operation in March of 1975. The B Station, which had been switched from coal to oil for power generation, was decommissioned and shut down in October 1983 after 30 years of generating power.

By 1980, almost three years after it stopped production, the A Station was granted Heritage Site Grade II status after a public campaign to prohibit its demolition. Due to the cost of maintaining the site the Central Electricity Generating Board decided in 1983 to host a competition for plans on redeveloping the Battersea site.

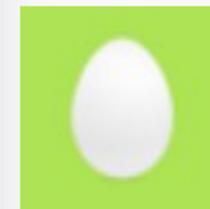
The winner of this was a consortium including Alton Towers Ltd. and John Broome. Their plan was to transform the inside of the power station into a theme park showcasing Britain's engineering and industrial heritage. The scheme was to cost an estimated £35 million to construct. Once the plans were approved in May, 1986 John Broome purchased the site for £1.5 million.

The project began in 1987 but was eventually stopped due to lack of funding as costs rose from £35 million to £230 million. The legacy left behind was that main portions of the power stations roof had been removed in order to extricate the equipment and machinery inside. Since then the internal framework has been left exposed to London's daily weather. It was later decided in 1990 that instead of a theme park the plans shift to a mixed use scheme of commercial, retail shops and a hotel. Even though the revised plans were approved by a local commission no construction was performed between 1990 and 1993.

The site, with a debt of £70 million, was eventually sold in 1993 by the Bank of America to Hong Kong property company Parkview International led by Victor Hwang for £10 million. Once issues regarding creditors were resolved the title to the property was transferred in May 1996. Shortly

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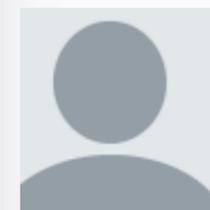
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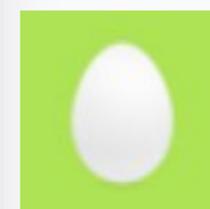
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thereafter Parkview released their redevelopment plans, designed by **Nicholas Grimshaw**, that included numerous bars, cafés, shops, public spaces and a movie theatre. **Their plan also included giving top priority to local businesses and workers to complete the development.**

Skeptical, the **Battersea Power Station Community Group**, formed in 1983, represented by founders Brian Barnes MBE and local architect Keith Garner challenged Parkviews' scheme that rather than have more of the same in London with commercial and retail outlets that the Battersea site should be developed for community uses. The 'Peoples' Plan' would see the Power Station developed with a mixture of arts, commerce, sports and an exhibition area. They also argued that the Parkview scheme lacked affordable housing plans and did not properly address the public transportation problems associated with the redevelopment.

I requested and received permission from Parkview International in 2004 to film the Battersea Power Station inside and out. Spokesman Ian Rumgay was my guide and appeared in my first film, "**Battersea Its Past, Its Future**" discussing Parkviews future development of Battersea. After filming the exterior I was taken to the inside where the main halls had once been operational. The only term to properly describe the interior was most certainly 'derelict'.



On this day it was raining and the water poured onto the rust covered steel frames. The floors were no longer existent and were now just broken pieces of concrete and mud. Occasionally I would look up and watch an airliner making its way to Heathrow or see birds aimlessly flying around inside the roofless structure. Just like when I was younger I found the building amazing.



In 2005 it was decided by Parkview and the Wandsworth Council that the chimneys were no longer structurally strong enough to remain and should be pulled down and replaced. Organizations including the **Twentieth Century Society** and World Monuments Fund provided evidence from their own commissioned engineering studies that concluded that the chimneys needed some repairs but not to be totally replaced. The chimneys remained despite the reports.

On November 30, 2006 Parkviews stake in Battersea Power Station ended

with the property being sold to Real Estate Opportunities of Ireland for £400 million. The new owners, Richard Barrett and Johnny Ronan of Treasury Holdings decided against using Parkviews plans. They chose architect [Rafael Viñoly](#), Uruguayan born and based in of New York City, to create a new design for the 38 acre Battersea Power Station property.

The new proposed design included 3,400 homes and 10 million-square feet of offices and shops. Also included was a proposed extension of the London Underground with a 2 mile tunnel from the Northern Line in Kensington going west to Battersea and Nine Elms with the cost of £600 million being partly funded by REO. The plans were submitted to the Wandsworth Council and eventually were approved on 11 November 2010. Total price tag for the development was £5.5 billion. In an interview with the Daily Telegraph the next day REO Director Rob Tincknell called the approval a 'huge step' and indicated that 16 interested parties along with sovereign wealth funds had formally expressed an interest in buying into the redevelopment of Battersea Power Station.

I contacted REO and Treasury Holdings in July 2011 to conduct on-camera interviews regarding the details of the redevelopment for a [new updated film, 'The Station 2012', about the power stations situation](#). After a number of correspondences back and forth my request was eventually denied. I decided to proceed with the new filming and returned to London where once again I interviewed Brian Barnes MBE and Keith Garner. They spoke of their frustration with REO and their development plans. Once again they felt that the local people were going to be let down and not become a real part of the Battersea Power Station renewal. I also secured an interview with Lord Alf Dubs of Battersea at Westminster. He also voiced strong concerns about the process of securing funds and the cost of revitalizing the Battersea site.

With the local and global economic situation deteriorating and a lack of funding, the lenders debt (mainly Lloyds Bank and Irelands National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)) related to the £400 million were called in. With that, [REO and its plans collapsed and the site was forced into administration](#).

For the first time ever [Battersea Power Station was listed on the open market for sale by commercial agent Knight Frank in February 2012](#). The new owners would have to pay £500 million for the power station building, £325 million in outstanding debt to Lloyds Bank and NAMA and another £100 million for the Northern Line rail extension.

Interested parties included the Chelsea FC owned by Russian tycoon Roman Abramovich who wanted to construct a new stadium with a retractable roof that could hold up to 75000 spectators. But on 7 June 2012 [Knight Frank and Ernst & Young had made an agreement to sell the Battersea property to SP Setia and Sime Darby of Malaysia](#).

[On 5 September 2012 the new owners unveiled their new vision for Battersea Power Station](#). The £8 billion 12 year development plan includes once again 3,400 homes with 500 deemed 'affordable' and 50 apartments under the towers with views of Wembley Stadium and Richmond Park. Also in the plans is a new 'high street' district that will have 160,000 square feet of offices, dozens of shops, restaurants and public park space all accessible with the new Northern Line Underground Station. As for the four chimneys, they will be pulled down and replaced with concrete replicas at a cost of £12 million. English Heritage requires that the new chimneys be similar to the four original ones.

Battersea Power Station Community Group leader Brian Barnes MBE remains skeptical if any of this new development will ever be performed. [In an interview on 10 September 2012 with the Croydon Guardian](#) he emphasized the need for affordable housing in the Wandsworth area and that after almost 29 years will this just be another plan that is one more time doomed to fail.

Written by [Kevin Murphy](#) - founder and president of the independent film production firm Eclipse Films, Inc. based in Casa Grande, Arizona.

Battersea Power Station Documentaries

["Battersea, Its Past Its Future"](#)

["The Station 2012"](#)

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