

A miscellany of social aspects



View northwards from St Pancras Church towards fields of future Camden Town



St Pancras Paving Commissioners

St Pancras was a large parish, extending from Holborn to Highgate, with many political interests. The Vestry, the local political body for most of the nineteenth century, was subject to changing national regulations.¹ In 1830, when there were 120 Select Vestrymen, Camden Town was represented by only three people.²

In the same year, Samuel Denton, "from the Commissioners for paving, &c. the Camden Town District", who was then also building houses at St Paul's Terrace, presented to Parliament the accounts for the Commissioners for South West St Pancras.³

But in 1831, 'A Rate Payer' writing in the Times criticises the Camden Town Paving Commission, which 'raises local taxes yet the streets are muddy, ill-light and ill-kempt' while opposite Camden Terrace, the pavement 'is half grown over with grass, upon which donkeys cows and horses may occasionally be seen grazing': and, the writer jibes, the Commission have built, for £3,000, their own 'handsome house' in Pratt Street 'in which they hold their secret court'.⁴

The building, at 57 Pratt Street, continued life as administrative offices. Camden Town Literary Society rented rooms for three years 1847-1849. Later, it became offices for the St Pancras Electricity company.



57 Pratt Street (LMA: LMA/4278/01/791 - WJ Barnes, photograph album)

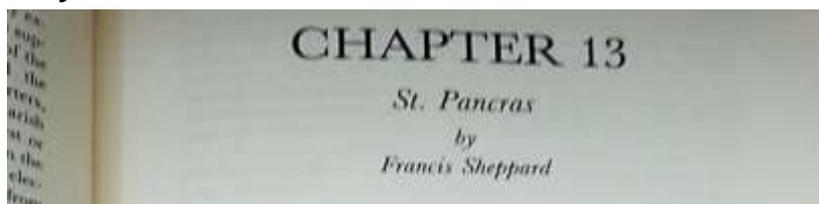
¹ Francis Sheppard, 'St Pancras' in David Owen, *The government of Victorian London 1855-1889*. Cambridge (USA) 1982:284-303.

² Edward Coleman, Veterinary College; Richard Jeffreys, 2 Gloucester Place; John Rigge, 46 Camden Street.

³ House of Commons, *Journal*, 1830;85:657-658.

⁴ A Rate Payer. 'Camden-Town District', *The Times* 19 November 1831:3.

Politics of the vestry⁵



Sheppard considered the land ownership of St Pancras 'fragmented', preventing any large coherent layout comparable with that proceeding in Regent's Park or on the Eyre Estate at St John's Wood in Marylebone'. But in support of this, he quotes Nash describing 'houses of such a mean sort as have been built at Somers Town and are now building on Lord Southampton's ground...' – not Camden Town.

In St Pancras by 1825 had nine 'inefficient' district paving boards and (now All Saints church) had 'self-perpetuating trustees' had Acts of Parliament to raise rates for building and running Camden Chapel (becoming St Stephen's Church).

In the 1830s, the politics of St Pancras was in the hands of 'small shop-keepers, minor rate-payers and the Dissenters', meeting in 'public-house clubs [without] order, sobriety and common decency, as well as of common sense ...' whom Sheppard saw as 'petty-minded and obstreperous busy-bodies'.

In the 1840s – 1850s there were two rival groups know as the Blues and the Pinks 'based on various public-house associations', the latter being anti-church and better organised. But they were all 'extreme liberals or radicals'.

In a new Metropolitan Local Management Act, St Marylebone parish was reorganised into wards, enabling 'more moderate views'. Rev Thomas Dale had become the new vicar in 1846 and in 1855 he expressed the view that 'in the old vestry licensed victuallers and builders held a disproportionately large number of seats'. He wanted 'a fair balance of classes and not a preponderance of any one'. A new group emerged, 'officially called the St Pancras Association but commonly called Camden Hall – the literary institution' where they met.

The Camden Hall vestrymen, under the chairmanship of the vicar, 'were all respectable and honest, some were wealthy, well-educated and enjoyed a high position in society.' But frequent meetings, 'often rowdy and interrupted by scuffling' were a drain on their time and determination and within thirty months 'Camden Hall was defunct.

By the 1870s and 1880s, rivalry for seats was 'chiefly between the publicans and the advocates of temperance' – the vestry contained eleven publicans, fourteen builders, nine retired tradesmen, six bakers and five furniture dealers, and a total of 47 different trades represented. 'Rowdiness, personal abuse and bad language still prevailed sometimes'.

Administration itself was not perfect. Between 1857 and 1863 'the vestry clerk was dismissed' (with a reward for his arrest) 'and the relieving officer for the poor and several rate collectors absconded'. Yet there was action in construction. Widening and improvement of roads was frequently undertaken by the vestry, whereas the Metropolitan Board of Works' 'only achievement' was the junction of Royal College Street and Kentish Town Road in 1883: 'the vestry itself probably did more than any other metropolitan authority'. Moreover, the 1867 board of guardians and Poor Law Board gained a 37-acre site at Leavesden near Watford for an industrial school and an infirmary at Highgate. And the first public baths were built in 1868 at Camden Town.

⁵ Francis Sheppard, 'St Pancras' in David Owen, *The government of Victorian London 1855-1889*. Cambridge (USA) 1982:284-303

Fire Stations

Camden Town – at the workhouse

Escape ladders positioned at

- Camden High Street opposite Southampton Arms;
- Kentish town opposite The Falcon

Friendly societies

LMA: MR/SBL/317/1-2; MR/SBL/318; MR/SBS/62; SBS 67

TNO: FS 6/159/261MIDD; 1/476/83

Friends of Labour Loan Society, 'Jelly Ferrer', High Street, 29 Jan 1855

Friends of Labour Loan Society, 'Hope', Camden Town 3 Jan 1856

Camden Town Working Mens Club and Institute Labour Loan Society [1864-1865]

United Camden Town and North Pentonville Benefit Building Society and Accumulating Fund [1847]

Camden Town Savings Bank, Infant and Sunday Schools, Camden St. 23 Apr 1839

Environmental Health

TNO: MH 13/270/73 Folio 152.

To: J W Phillips, Commissioner of Works, From: The General Board of Health.

Draft letter enclosing a copy of a letter from Mr Willy of Hamilton Street, Camden Town, containing suggestions for the improvements of the dwellings of the poor and others.

Date: 1855 Feb 2

TNO: H 13/270/72folios 149-151.

To: The General Board of Health. From: J Willy, 4 Hamilton Street, Camden Town,

Detailed letter enclosing Willy's remarks and observations on the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Consolidation and Amendment Bill.

Date: 1855 Feb 17

Barbara Penner. 'A world of unmentionable suffering: women's public conveniences in Victorian Britain.' *Journal of Design History*, 2001;14(1):35-51.

Reviews a dispute in 1900 over the proposal to construct a women's public lavatory in Camden Town, (including Vestryman, George Bernard Shaw)... 'how the decision to build an everyday object such as a public lavatory for women was implicated in producing, maintaining and contesting the patriarchal power structure of late Victorian London providing an opportunity for small resistances to the status quo to occur'.

Camden Town



Lady Camden
Belgrave Square

TWELFTH ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
CAMDEN TOWN CLOTHING SOCIETY,
FOR ENABLING THE POOR OF THE DISTRICT
TO PROVIDE THEMSELVES WITH
BLANKETS, FLANNELS, AND OTHER NEEDFUL ARTICLES
IN THE WINTER SEASON;
FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 1845.



ESTABLISHED 1837.

Committee,

Mrs. BAINES
Mrs. W. EVANS
Mrs. HANNAM

Miss HANNAM
Mrs. INGPEN
Miss T. KING

Miss C. SEWELL
Mrs. TUNALEY
Mrs. TURNER

Treasurer,
Mrs. HANNAM.

Hon. Secretary,
Miss HANNAM.

Collector,
H. TAYLOR.

THIS Society was established in the year 1837, for the purpose of encouraging habits of saving and fore-thought amongst the poor. Its founders being of opinion, that they could not more directly contribute to promote their welfare, than by endeavouring to awaken in their minds a desire to assist themselves.

The outline of the mode by which this object is attempted, is appended to this Report; and the Subscribers to the Clothing

Vestry minutes

At Halfway Houses – 7 houses @ 6/-,
Wm White house & land of **Lady Jeffries** charged to Mr Morgan. £17...

29 July 1803 'We appoint John Joyce to collect and pay the same'
Approx 1% tax on value:

- In Kentish Town Martha Ashton for children workhouse – rent £24, pd 5s.
- Morgan's land £360, rent 3.15.0;
- Joyce's inmates x2 – 5/- for each.
- Pancras Wash. Wm Francis & Lord Camden, valued at £1700 and pays £17.14.2
- Robert Keir value £30, tax 6s
- Veterinary Coll v £300, tax £3.2.6
- Kirkman & Hendy value £88, tax 18s4d
- Many then on value £16, tax 3s.4d
- Kings Place 9 houses value 8, tax 1s8d

Booth's report on social conditions in London (1890s)

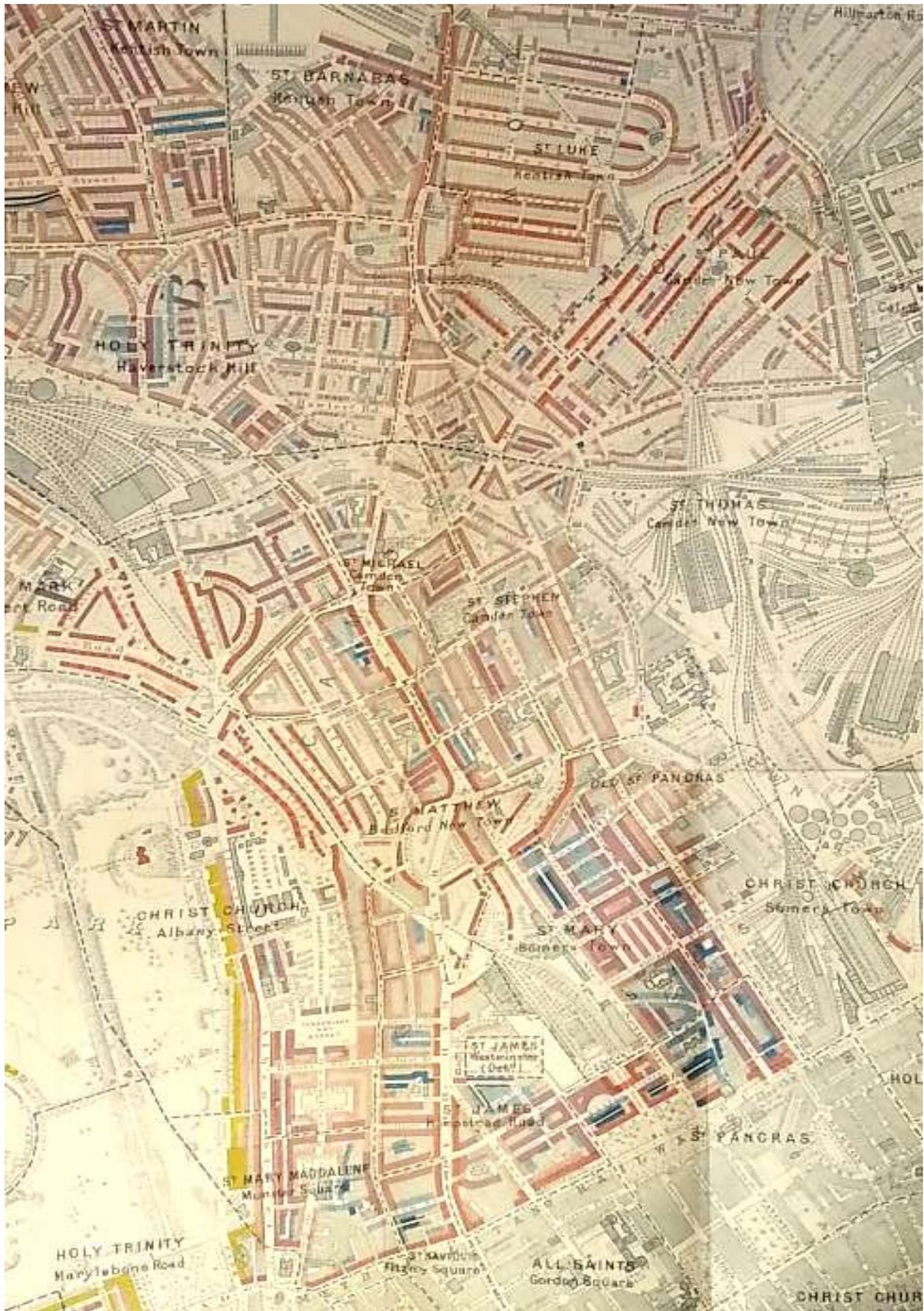
Booth recorded dissatisfaction with St Pancras Vestry after the 1894 reforms of local administration, with its greater numbers of members and wider voting franchise. He quoted local views: 'not quite the right people'...'either small property owners or agents'...'publican's influence rules' ... 'trade union men fight solely for their own hand'. Yet, he says, 'In the supply of electric lighting there has been bold, and successful, enterprise; there were baths and wash-houses, 'liberal and economical'; environmental health matters were 'well attended to'; and of housing the difficulty was 'lack of any definite principle to act.' He reflected, 'the condemnation of the authorities is perhaps unfair ... whatever its faults, its predecessors were no more successful' (p193).

The social character of Camden Town at population level was recorded, through Charles Booth, at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Booth made street-by-street analyses, gaining his information from local public servants – policemen and clergy. Notes were taken from the policemen as they walked each street; interviews with clergy followed a set schedule, relating to the Church of England parishes and also non-conformist churches.

Booth considered that, moving anti-clockwise from Stepney to Paddington, society moved from 2 groups (poor and destitute) to five groups (destitute to rich). St Pancras lay in the '4 groups' part of the arc, with the poorest in the south between St Pancras Station and Hampstead Road. With the arrival of railways, some of the poor from this housing were displaced: but, Booth observed, it was 'not in Camden Town near by, but in Kentish Town that the evils reappear, [in] the unfinished and unoccupied streets of new districts.

The result, if not the movement, in St Pancras can be seen in the map from the book on North West London. Booth's hierarchy runs from golden and red, through pink and magenta to blue, green and

black. Somers Town is magenta and blue, south Camden Town is pink, and there is red around Camden Road. Blue emerges again further west of Kentish Town.



Charles Booth's surveyor took a walk with Inspector Bowles of the Somers Town police division on 18 November 1898.

North side of Pratt Street is St Pancras Liberal Club 'and behind it the recreation ground'.

Camden Street now a 'mixture of working and middle class', with adjacent St Martins Place 'quite respectable – police etc living here'. In Georgiana Street, 2-3 rooms let for 6/6 to 9/- - 'decent'. Lyme Terrace is a 'quiet spot', children in Little Randolph street 'poor and not poor, playing about'. On the King's Road, No 80 'recently vacated by Marie Lloyd'. Further south on the Kings Road, on the east side, houses semi-detached, with tiny sloping gardens in the front - "a perfect picture in the summer".

In Little Camden Street, Maples Depository and Humphreys American Gun Factory are noted. College Place, 'having been rebuilt, with bay windows ... superior' – Bowles himself lived there and other officers from Marylebone. At the south east end of Great College Street, 'S. Pancras Labour Bureau: about 30 men reading the papers on hoardings or standing on the kerb'.

A walk again with Inspector Bowles a week later started at York Road where shops 'rapidly deteriorate'. In Clifton Road, the houses as 'apartments ... getting decidedly shabby'. This part of the 'Camden Estate ... has been affected by the removal of gates a few years ago by the L.C.C., by the building of a Board School and by the proximity of the cattle market'. Bowles remembered from his youth a saying that 'it stinks like Belle Isle' – the name of the land where the cattle market and slaughterhouses were built. St Paul's Road 'had gone down considerably ... only three families in the road kept servants now'. With rents at £45 'this necessitates sub-letting'. Camden Square's 'respectability still protected by a Square keeper'. Wrotham Road is 'working class throughout'.

A third walk, in Kentish Town with Inspector Tompkin, entered Rochester Road and Rochester Terrace and Wilmot Place, 'a wonderful quiet neighbourhood giving no trouble'. Of the 'Artisan's dwellings' at the junction of College Street and Kentish Town Road, asked if any casual labourers occupied the dwelling, Tompkin said he thought not: mainly mechanics: they were 'pretty strict'. And Jeffreys Street 'a quiet working class street'.

[For comparison – 30 years earlier, about Agar Town. Rev Clemenger became vicar at St John's Wrotham Road.] John Hollingshead, *Ragged London in 1861* Smith, Elder & Co, Cornhill, 1861. Derived from 'ten letters' of "London horrors" in the *Morning Post*.

p129 'Near King's Cross'. Says that Agar had wanted extension of his lease, so that he could play against railways, but CofE denied him, so 'the proper people were called together, and Agar Town – the lowest effort of building skill and arrangement in or near London – arose upon Church property." In 1851 it had gasworks but no gas, while 1861 – "in defiance of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who could never be brought to any sense of their public duty" – now possesses lights and paving.

The inhabitants of the lower part are men costermongers 'who follow the market' and women laundresses. In the upper portion, the inhabitants are "of a higher class – hardworking mechanics and railway men". When sent from the union – even other unions – they make Agar Town their first residence as they wait for something to turn up – "as the law will not allow them to huddle in the gutters"

Much soup is given away under the superintendence of the local clergyman, the Rev RP Cleminger. With Cleminger, from a temporary church, there is a maternity society, national school with 100 scholars, Sunday school (370), penny bank with 600 depositors, girls/infant school. The schools are liberally supported by Miss Agar.

Clinics

The North West London Hospital was started in houses on the east side of Kentish Town Road, just north of Camden Road. With a link to Hampstead General Hospital in 1912 a new outpatients building was erected at Bayham Street and Greenland Street in 1912. This remains in use for social services, but Camden Town lacks any primary medical care facility.



The British Hospital for Mental Disorders started at 208 Euston Road in 1894 and moved to 72 Camden Road (the entrance at the building's side) renamed the British Hospital for Functional Nervous Disorder under the direction of Dr L. S. Forbes Winslow.⁶ In 1961 it was renamed the Camden Clinic⁷ and the services were transferred to the Paddington Clinic and Day Hospital in 1962

⁶ LMA: A/FWA/C/D/198/001

⁷ <http://ezitis.myzen.co.uk/britishfunctional.html>; Camden Clinic, *British Medical Journal* 1961;2:1793.



In the 1930s Dr William Beaumont ran the Municipal Sunlight Clinic ('Institute of Ray Therapy') of St Pancras borough at Camden Road. His book included example questions from papers set by the Chartered Society of Massage and Medical Gymnastics...⁸ After the war, the building became the Medical Rehabilitation Centre. Demolished in the 1980s, it is now the site of a care home and mental day-hospital.

Public houses

My great great grandmother, Elizabeth Bumpstead, found herself in Camden Town in 1830 with one son and four daughters, the eldest of whom was my great grandmother Mary, then 14 years old. One year earlier, her elder son William [presumably the family breadwinner] had been sentenced to Transportation to van Dieman's Land. Whether Elizabeth was simply running short of funds or had it in her mind to join her son on the other side of the world, on 24th February, 1830 she "entered the Black Cap public house in Camden Town, kept by one Edmund Butt. Whilst on the premises", it was alleged, "she took four pewter pots and hid them in the petticoat beneath her apron. She left the premises, unobserved by Mr Butt and went on to the Wheat Sheaf public house, kept by James Scull. There she took another pewter pot, which she added to the collection in her petticoat". On 15th April, 1830, Elizabeth Bumpstead was tried at the Old Bailey for Larceny - 4 pewter pots, value 2s. 6d., the goods of Edward Butt, and 1 pewter pot, value 1s. 6d., the goods of James Scull - and found guilty. Her sentence was – Transportation for Seven Years. And so, she and her children joined William in Hobart Town. **+

<https://pubshistory.com/LondonPubs/StPancras/WheatsheafHighStreet.shtml>

⁸ *British Journal of Tuberculosis*, 1931, Vol.25(4), pp.192-197.

Photographs by John Carnaby



View from the Parrs Head, Camden Town - in 1936. My young Father, Jack Carnaby (aged 26 years) is sitting cross legged in the centre of the photo. [It is his wedding day] The photographer has his back to the Parrs Head that was then in [73] King Street, now called Plender Street.

<https://pubshistory.com/LondonPubs/StPancras/ParrsHead.shtml>



Laurel Tree pub outing, Camden Town - circa 1940s (John Carnaby)
<https://pubshistory.com/LondonPubs/StPancras/LaurelTree.shtml>