

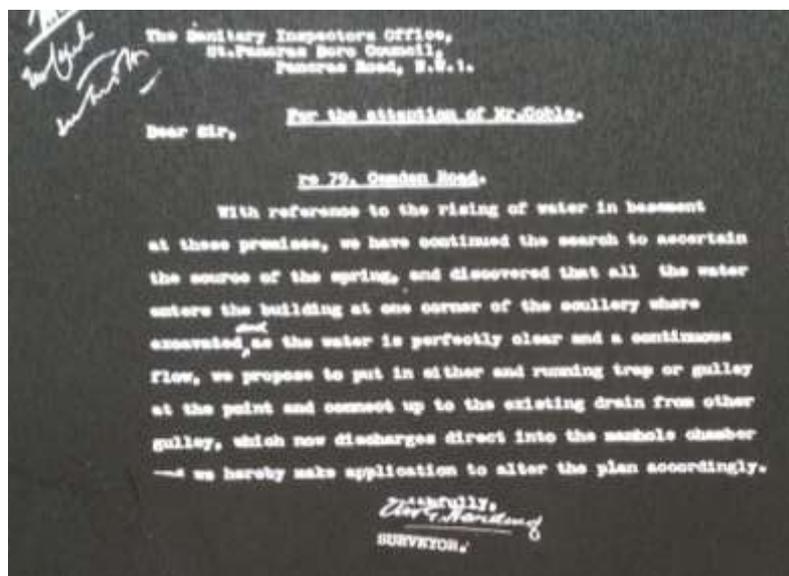
Water

Springs and wells

Tim O'Neill, a medievalist, has written:

Medieval villages and towns were built around sources of fresh water. This could be fresh running water, a spring or, in many cases, wells. And there were fines for contaminating areas of streams used for household consumption.

The mediaeval manor houses of Cantlowes and St Pancras were raised above the Fleet valley along a flat line. There are references to springs in Kentish Town – a road is called Spring Place. But the first record of spring in Camden Town is a letter of 9 July 1924 to the St Pancras Sanitary Inspector, reporting finding a spring in the basement of 79 Camden Road. A spring was also reported from a house in Jeffrey Street.



The culvert into the Fleet from its north bank also indicates the contributing stream:



Piped supply

Water was piped to the City of London from the early modern times. The Hampstead Water Company was among the earliest providers, having created artificial reservoirs at the Hampstead ponds. They could provide water under higher pressure as Hampstead was higher. In the nineteenth century, Parliament required supply to be continuous through the day – and the poorest housing benefited the most since their pipes were the most leaky...¹

The Hampstead Water Company supplied Kentish Town and Camden Town.²

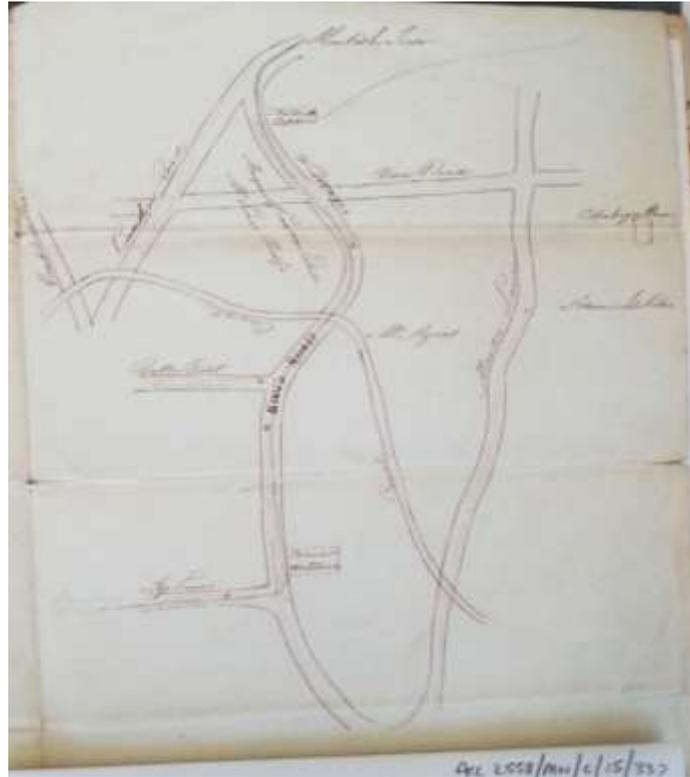


The Hampstead Water Company and the New River Company had a border for their supplies. William Alden provided a report recommending the Hampstead company should take the land south west of the King's Road – as this provided the best natural gradient.³

¹ Joseph Hillier, 'The rise of constant water in nineteenth century London,' *The London Journal* 2011:36:37-53.

² WRH Hakewill, *Hampstead Water Works, Office and Company 1589-1859: a history*, Mimeo, 1988 (LMA: COL/SJ/16/034)

³ New River Company: Hampstead Water Company, report by William Alden on the proposed boundaries between the two companies, 1825 (LMA: ACC/2558/MW/C/15/337).



By the 1850s, the degree of development in Camden Town led to criticism of the Hampstead company. A *Memorial* from residents in Great College Street asked for an Act of Parliament to 'force' regulation of water companies.⁴ The Hampstead company responded by trying to increase output from their well in Whitcher Place, on the edge of Camden Town. It had output at 540 feet, and a French company (which had been successful in Paris) drilled to 1302 feet – but stopped with solid chalk. (Idris were still taking water from this well in 1905 for their mineral water factory.)⁵

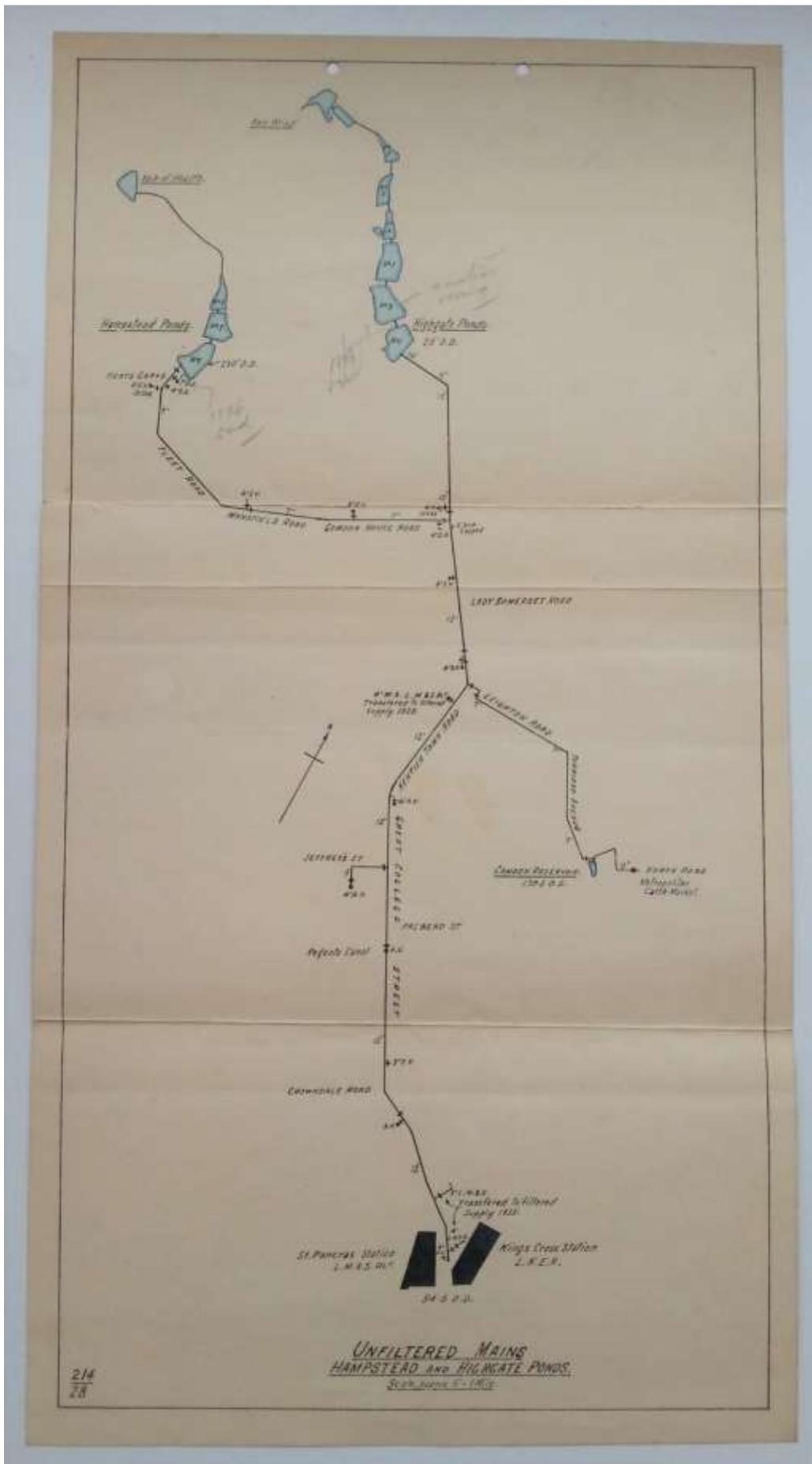
Partly as a result of the failed drill, the Hampstead company accepted merging with the New River Company in 1856. A second factor was the requirement by law that drinking water should be 'filtered'. The Hampstead company chose to make industrial supplies that did not have this requirement, so that the pipes were used only to the new stations at Kings Cross and St Pancras and to the Metropolitan Cattle Market at Copenhagen Fields.⁶ These arrangements finally ended in 1936.⁷

⁴ Inhabitants of Great College Street, Camden Town [Middlesex]. Memorial from the householders and occupiers of the North West district of Camden...1855 (LMA: MH 13/270/163, ff 320-321).

⁵ Joseph Prestwich. On the boring through the chalk at Kentish Town, London. *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London*, February, 1856.

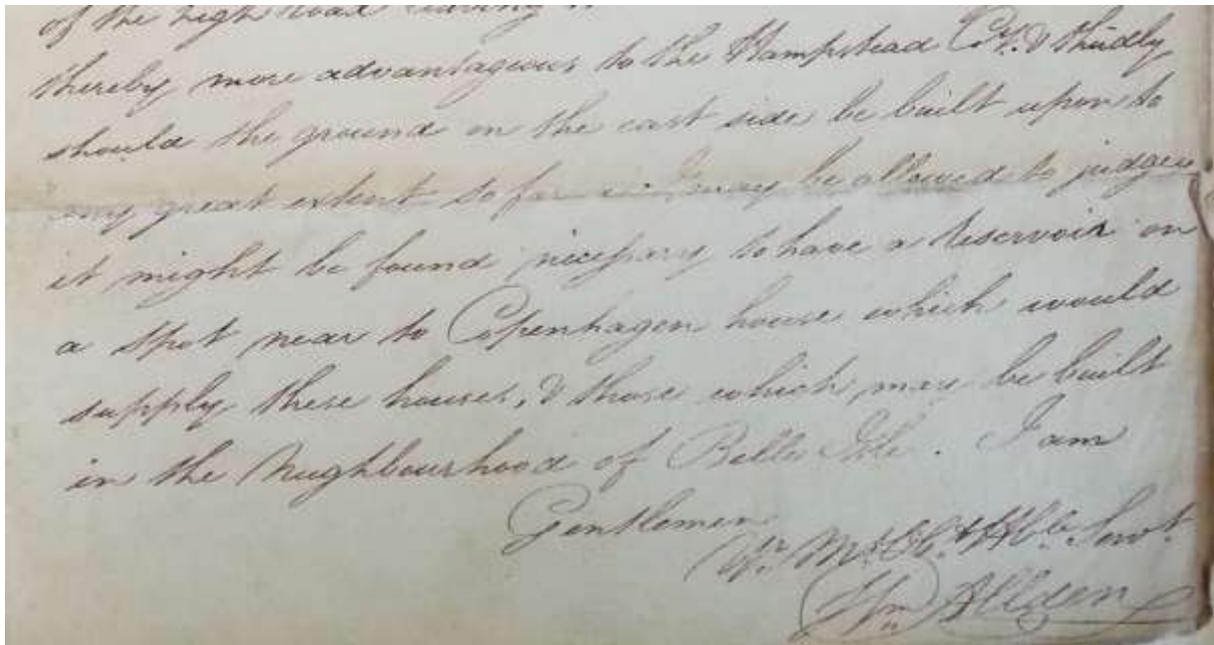
⁶ Department of Industrial and Scientific Research, *Water supply of the County of London*, HMSO 1938:68

⁷ RE Morris, letter from Metropolitan Water Board, 16 March 1936.



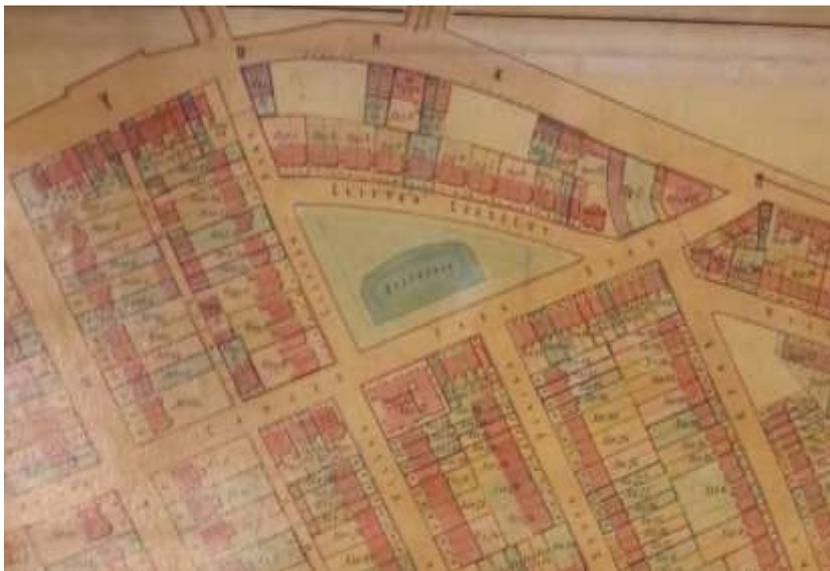
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By contrast, the New River Company prospered in Camden New Town, taking up the suggestion of the Hampstead company's engineer in 1825 of building a reservoir 'close' to Copenhagen House.



Letter dated 14 July 1825 (LMA: MW/C/15/337)

The site chosen was within the Camden Town Estate, and was commended by Joseph Kay, the estate's agent, in providing open space for the terraces.



Camden History Newsletter 6 has a photograph of the reservoir looking southwards from Marquis Road.

