

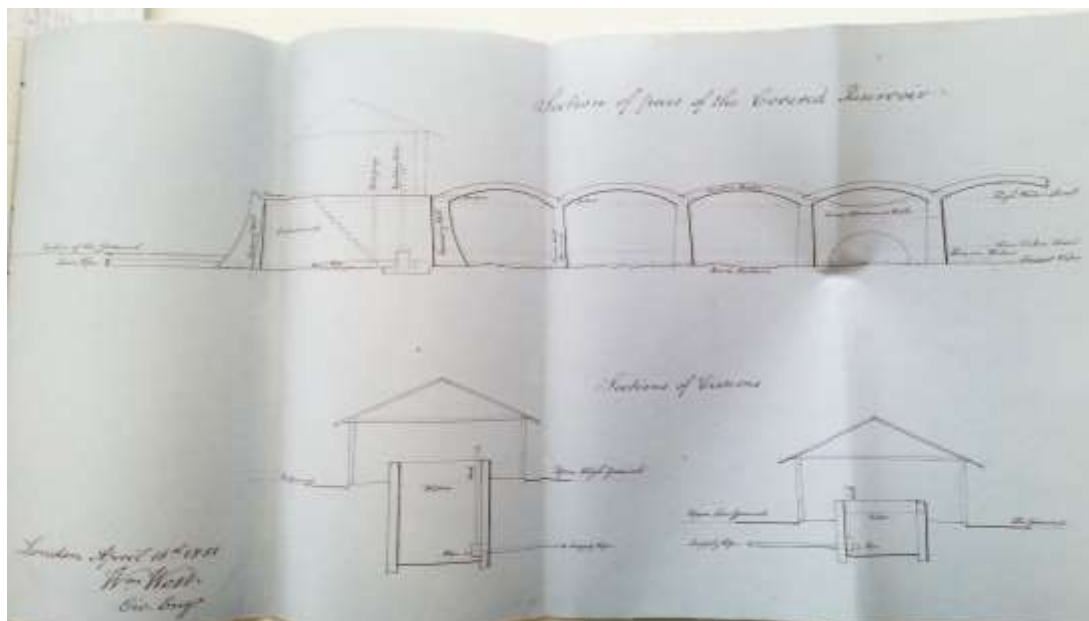
Engineers of Camden Town

The brothers **Adam and Otto Hilger** came from Germany to London in the 1870s making precision optical instruments in Tottenham Court Road. In 1900 they moved to 77-79 Camden Road, and Rochester Mews behind. They were joined in 1898 by Frank Twyman who from 1902 became manager and made innovations in spectrosopes and prismatic equipment. Twyman led the company until 1946, when its workforce – from making wartime equipment – had risen to four hundred.^[1]

Schemes to generate electricity privately in London developed from the 1880s: St Pancras Vestry was the first public authority to develop its own production. **Sydney Barnes** came to St Pancras in 1895 as chief electrical engineer and saw the opportunity for public use in lighting and cheaper power for manufacturing. Following an initial site at Stanhope Street, near Regents Park, a larger plant was built in Kings Road in 1896, adjacent to the Regent's Canal for coal fuel and water cooling.^[2] The St Pancras service was notable also for linking electricity production with burning refuse – in a 'Dust Destructor' (refuse burner) – that had for many years been collected nearby at the 'dust' fields of Battle Bridge and Somers Town.

John Seaward, who died at 20 Brecknock Crescent age 71, and his brother Samuel Seaward FRS, from 1825 developed the Canal Iron Works, Millwall, were the first to develop steam engines for naval use, as well as designing swing bridges, dredging machines, cranes and machinery for saw and sugar mills.^[3]

Walter West, who lived at 9 St Paul's Road, was part of a family making equipment for cotton presses in north-east India ('West's Patent Press Company 1874-1911'). His correspondence includes accounts of journeys in Europe and a proposal for improving the water supply of Bombay.



Eugenius Birch.



Hastings pier 2018 (Photo: M McCarthy)

Eugenius, born in Shoreditch, London in June, 1818, and was educated at Brighton and at Euston Square. He watched with much interest the cutting of the Regent's Canal, and the Primrose Hill tunnel of the London and Birmingham Railway. At sixteen, he planned a marine steam-engine, which pleased Dr. George Birkbeck and at nineteen he received a Silver Medal from the Society of Arts similarly for drawing a marine steam-engine. The following year he decided to become a civil engineer. From 1845, with the Railway Mania, he and his brother John ¹contributed to the East Indian Railway from Calcutta to Delhi, designing the bridges and viaducts, thereafter on railways in Nottinghamshire and later in Devon and Somerset, West Surrey waterworks and the Scarborough and Whitby railway in Yorkshire. But his primary innovation, with his brother, was a screw-plie system for promenade-piers, first for Margate jetty (1853) and thereafter at Aberystwith, Blackpool, Bournemouth, Brighton (West), Deal, Eastbourne, Hastings, Hornsea, Lytham, New Brighton, Plymouth and Scarborough. He 'understood the potential and limitations of the materials he selected (timber, cast and wrought iron) and exploited them for 'elegant structures'.² During a tour in Italy, Egypt, and Nubia in the winter of 1874- 75, he made a series of more than a hundred water-colour drawings and sketches which gained high prices. Mr. Birch was 'a pleasant and genial companion, and a thoroughly honourable man'. He died in 1882.

Birch lived at 6 Rochester Terrace Gardens in 1856, shortly after the house was built. It is of a different style from the rest of the row, being fully stucco with parapets. It is possible that

¹ Who died 'unsound of mind', 1862 (The *Law Times* 2 May 1863:230)

² Stephen Emmitt, *Architectural Technology*, Blackwell, 2002:21

the style was 'seaside' and of note that Birch designed the aquarium at Brighton (1869-72) 'in the Italianate style'.³



Margate Jetty © Institute of Civil Engineers Publishing,



Photograph 1890 - 1910 © Historic England Archive ref: OP00650

³ <https://pulham.rocks/2014/03/29/35-apr-14-1872-75-brighton-aquarium/>;
<https://www.visitsealife.com/brighton/discover/history/>