

Piano and organ builders in Camden Town

"Piano firms were in all sizes - whales and minnows. Besides manufacturers there were small-part makers, clustering round the big firms. Piano key makers; wrench pin makers; sellers of key leads; hammer coverers; incisors, who cut the fretted wooden fronts; truss carvers; gilders; marquetry workers; french polishers, veneer, timber and ivory suppliers; makers of piano castors; candle-sconce makers; piano stool, music cabinet, piano-back makers; piano movers, piano storers, tuners and salesmen. All these found a living in and around Camden Town and along the Canal."

Jack Whitehead, *Piano manufacture in Camden Town*' (page)
<http://www.locallocalhistory.co.uk/ctown/p050/pages55-59.htm>

'The near total collapse of British piano making means there seems to be little likelihood of these fascinating centres of musical workmanship – the small piano factories – ever being seen again on these shores. ... The erosion of skill on a national level, as a result of the decline of manufacturing of all kinds, is a matter which currently appears of little concern to politicians and captains of industry alike, blinded as they are by the 'headless' and unprincipled energy of global market forces.'

Alastair Lawrence. *Five London piano makers*. Keywood Press London, 2010.

Camden History Review, 1:30-32

David Wainwright *The piano makers* Hutchinson, 1975.

Piano manufacture in Camden Town <locallocalhistory.co.uk/industrial-history/piano/page1-m.htm>

Alastair Lawrence, *Five London piano makers*, London 2010.

Thomas Jones, Robert Tomb, 'The French left in exile', in Debra Kelly, Martyn Cornick eds, *A history of the French in London*, London 2013:180.

<https://antiquepianoshop.com/online-museum/collard-collard/>

C.D. Howkins, 'Made in St Pancras, British pianos and their story', *St Pancras Journal*, 19(10).

Collard and Collard (c.1833-51) had premises at 6 High Street Camden Town, having previously been (as a company led by Muzio Clementi) at 26 Cheapside and the 195 Tottenham Court Road (which had a fire). Clementi had made important improvements in piano construction as well as being a celebrated composer, conductor and music publisher. The firm was Clementi, Collard and Collard from 1823 until 1831, when Clementi retired. They moved to Oval Road, Chalk Farm in 1850, where they suffered another fire. "The lost workmen's tools was the greatest disaster."

Collard was taken over by Chappell in 1929 in Ferdinand Street, Camden Town, and in 1970s by Kemble in Milton Keynes.

Monington and Weston

The above described Buildings are all brick built and roofed with slates and zinc, except where otherwise mentioned, and are known as Messrs. Monington and Weston's Steam Pianoforte Works, situate in King's Place, King Street, and Bayham Place, Camden Town. Said buildings are heated by steam and lighted by gas. The aforesaid letters refer to a Plan of the said Works deposited with this Company.



From the Camden Town Estate register.

William Roberts, £85, Georgiana Street 14 houses, @£4 each, Albert Street 2 houses @£5 each and leased piano manufactory 1853 in Albert Street

Herrburger, Brooks 1922 of 31 Lyme Street, Camden Town, London, NW1.

Until 1998, Herrburger Brooks was the world's oldest established maker of piano actions, hammer heads, and keyboards.

1810 The company was founded in London, by Henry Brooks. 1844 in Paris, Jean Schwander set up production of the famous Schwander action. Bechsteins, for example, were fitted with Schwander actions up until about the time of the First World War.

1900 Jean Schwander's successor was his son-in-law Joseph Herrburger', who formed a New York

branch in 1900. The two companies soon become world leaders in quality piano actions

1920 Twenty years later, Brooks of London and Herrburger amalgamated, so the firm of Herrburger Brooks came into being.

Late 1920s Herrburger Brooks moved from London to Long Eaton, Nottingham. The company made piano actions for many piano manufacturers.

1953 the English company absorbed the Paris operation, and moved it to Long Eaton, where it became the largest manufacturer of piano actions in Europe.

1965 A new development took place when Kimball International Inc. (formerly Jasper Corporation) took over Herrburger Brooks.

1996 October: Kimball sold the action division, Herrburger Brooks, to Harmony Pianos of Hong Kong.

1998 September: Herrburger Brooks went into administrative receivership.

https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Herrburger,_Brooks

Muir Smith and Company, Pianoforte Manufacturers, 116 and 118 Bayham Street, Camden Town, London. 1883 May 10 (TNA: T 43/59/398047)

Will of **James Graves**, Piano Forte Maker of Queen Street Camden Town , Middlesex

Date: 11 July 1849, (TNA: PROB 11/2096/95)

Insured: **George Edward Debenham**, 6 Gloster Place, Camden Town, Middlesex, carpenter

Other property or occupiers: pianoforte maker, 6 August 1834 (LMA: MS 11936/544/1181320)

John Sandon at 54 Queen Street, Camden Town, 1882-1885”¹

Frank Challen in Archer/Curnock Street, Camden Town. ‘Frank Challen took his instruments to fairs in Brussels and Turin 1911 and 1912 and won the Grand Prix medal on both occasions.’ As secretary to the Piano Manufacturers’ Association, he tried to sponsor a ‘trade school’ where piano design could be learned (without success) and evening classes at Northern Polytechnic in Holloway Road. These transferred to the London College of Furniture in the 1960s and latterly under the London Metropolitan University. As production increased between the wars, the factory moved to Hendon, and later to Haringay.

Will of **Johan Heinrich Anthon Gunther**, Pianoforte manufacturer of 7 High Street, Camden Town 10 November 1847 (TNA: PROB 11/2064/354)

¹ <http://www.locallocalhistory.co.uk/ctown/p050/pages55-59.htm>

Will of **William Jones**, Piano Forte Tuner, 186 Great College Street Camden Town, Middlesex d1855

<http://www.debenham.org.uk/personal/MD%20List%20of%20Wills.pdf>

Wills – St Pancras (unqualified)

Gabriel Ball, Piano Forte Maker of Saint Pancras , Middlesex 19 February 1834

Robert Fairn, Piano Forte Maker of Saint Pancras , Middlesex 05 July 1843

Johann Christian Alexander Klein, Piano Forte Maker of Saint Pancras, Middlesex d1818

George Kendall, Pianoforte Maker of Saint Pancras , Middlesex d1840

David Black, Piano Forte and Organ Key Maker of Saint Pancras , Middlesex 30 October 1832

Will of **Robert Wornum**, Pianoforte maker of Camden Street, Camden Town, 02 December 1852, (TNA: PROB 11/2164/11)



Some reference material shows Wornum establishing his own firm as early as 1811, while others put the date at 1815. In 1832, Wornum advertised his "Music Hall" located at 18 Store Street, London, capable of accommodating up to 1,000 persons.²

Robert Wornum is best known for his advances and design in upright piano construction. During the early to middle 19th Century, the square grand piano was most prominent in

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Wornum

both America and Europe, with the grand piano taking second place in popularity. The upright piano was virtually unknown early on, slowly becoming more and more popular by the middle and end of the 19th Century.

Although the firm built conventional grand and square pianos like most makers, Robert Wornum designed and patented a number of unique upright piano designs constantly improved the ever-evolving upright piano action. His most famous designs were known as the "Cottage Piano", the "Piccolo Piano" and the "Cabinet Piano", all upright pianos in different shapes and sizes.

In 1861, Robert's son Alfred Nicholson Wornum succeeded his father as head of the firm, changing the name of the company to "Robert Wornum & Sons". Robert Wornum & Sons continued to build pianos until about 1878 when the family closed the firm.

Robert Wornum is considered to be one of the most important historical makers to advance the upright piano's design and popularity. Instruments by Wornum are quite rare today, and they are definitely of museum caliber and deserve the finest restoration and preservation available. Many of the surviving Wornum instruments today can be found as focal points in museums and private collections around the world.

<https://antiquepianoshop.com/online-museum/wornum-robert/>

Letters to their father from Ralph Wornum (who became an artist) and his brother Alfred Wornum (who took over the firm), 1840s ... National Gallery Research Centre (NG 32/9)

Organ builders

W Hill & Son, Camden Road, London, N., Opened on Thursday 19 September 1878

William Hill and Son of London were pipe organ builders of great repute. The pioneering organ of the Birmingham Town Hall was built between 1833 and 1837 and was the first to have a high pressure solo reed stop, the Grand Ophicleide - not a free reed of course. Hills were known internationally.

The business expanded rapidly, becoming '**Norman & Beard** Ltd' in 1896. A second factory in Ferdinand Street, Camden Town, London, was opened in 1902. The last organ to be built in Norwich was the 97-stop, four-manual for Johannesburg Town Hall in 1916. In that year the firm merged with the long-established firm of Hill & Son of London. Norman & Beard had the sales but not the staff, whereas the reverse was true of Hill's, the Hill workforce being older and less affected by the war. The Norwich works closed and the combined firm operated from the Hill factory in London.


Agreement for reconstruction of organ, By William Hill and Son and Norman and Beard Ltd of Camden Road, London, with specification 1 Apr 1931, (Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch, FL545/5/121)

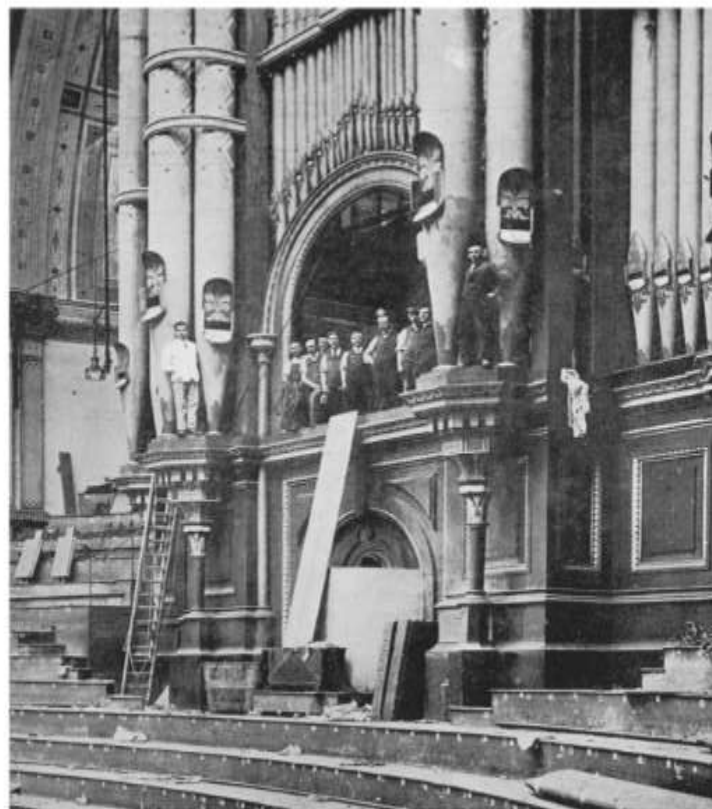
Wm Hill & Son and Norman & Beard Ltd, generally known as Hill, Norman & Beard, had an early client in a wealthy amateur who, in 1920, commissioned a 45-stop four-manual instrument for his specially-built music room. The client, John Christie of Glyndebourne, liked the organ so much he bought the company. He put the company into the new market for organs to accompany silent films. The instruments were known as Christie Unit Organs. They were based on American Wurlitzer technology which, in turn, had been based on patents granted to Robert Hope-Jones.

<http://moothallorgan.co.uk/history-of-norman-beard-ltd/>

Henry Willis

Letters from H Shelgrove, esq, of Rotunda Organ Works, Camden Road, London, requesting payment for work done to organ, 1877 and 1880; papers concerning provision of new parish organ, 1881-1882. Gloucestershire Archives (P78/1 CW 3/10)

'Father' Henry Willis (1821–1901)	"Organ Builder lived here"	9 Rochester Terrace Camden NW1 9JN	1986	
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Pt. 3. The Palace's organ under construction. A short account of the grand organ Alexandra Palace as restored by Messrs. Henry Willis & Sons Ltd. and the opening ceremony by the Rt. Hon. the Lord Mayor of London'. Alexandra Palace Organ Restoration Fund, London: Roberts & Newton Ltd. 1929, n.p. Image courtesy State Library of Victoria, Melbourne

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OPAL, Reg No 56133, Southampton 1867, Built Poole, Sail, 34 tons.

Owner: 1878, 1892 Henry Willis, Rotunda Organ Works, Camden Town (Rochester Terrace, London)

Master: 1878, 1887 Charles Moon, 84 St. Vincents Street, Southsea; 1888-92 as owner

Voyages: cruising Southampton Archives Office,