

Camden Town science

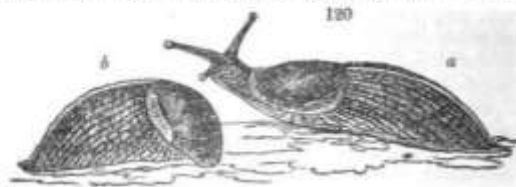
George Swiney (c1786-1844), a physician who established two Lectureships, each endowed with £5000, one at the Society of Arts (still awarded annually as a prize) and Royal College of Physicians, and one at the British Museum. He lived in some seclusion, at one time in Molesworth Place [corner of Jeffreys Street and Kentish Town Road], and was buried in St Martin's cemetery, Pratt Street, directing that 'the coffin be covered with bright yellow cloth, and that the pall and the mourners' cloaks be the same material'.¹

James De Carle Sowerby (1787-1871) was a botanical artist who lived at and worked from 5 Camden Terrace West in 1834-1839, and was at Pratt Street in 1840.² He was a Treasurer of the Camden Literary and Scientific Institution, reading a paper on the 'Habits of the long-eared bat' to the first meeting in January 1836.³ A snail (*Limax Sowerbyi*, common in Camden Town and 'troublesomely abundant') was named after him [see Box]. With his cousin Phillip Barnes, in 1838 he founded the Royal Botanic Gardens at Regent's Park, and was its Secretary until his retirement in 1869. He illustrated many fossils in *Mineral Conchology* (1812-46) and for many publications – Darwin wrote 'I picked him out as most capable of doing the work'⁴

ART. II. *Some Account of the Limax Sowerbyi of Férussac.* By JOHN DENSON, Jun. A.L.S.

SOME of the Bayswater gardens are rich enough in slugs; and among these are numerous individuals of a species very distinct from any species that inhabits the limited portions of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk with which I happen to be acquainted. By submitting living individuals of this slug to Mr. James de Carle Sowerby (5. Camden Terrace West, Camden Town), I have learned the following facts respecting it. Mr. G. B. Sowerby, being unable to identify it with any species described, sent specimens of it to Paris, where it had not been before seen, and was determined to be an undescribed species. Subsequently, the Baron de Férussac has published

"Plate VIII. D," cited by Férussac, appears not to have been yet published; but the accompanying figures (fig. 120.



a, b), drawn by Mr. Sowerby from living individuals, well exhibit the animal under two of its forms: b, when it has been touched, and has contracted itself; and a, when again dilating itself to resume its progress: b does not show, I think, so

Magazine of Natural History (1839:3610) describes *Limax Sowerbyi* in Camden Town in 1835

¹ Thomas Seccombe, Roger Stearn. *Swiney, George (c. 1786-1844)*. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Gentleman's magazine. 1845 p 133-5. A report from the Victoria & Albert Museum adds: "He lived in the greatest seclusion, not going out of doors more than five or six times during an entire year. He had not shaved for the last two years, and his beard extended nearly to his waist ... for the last month he peremptorily refused to allow the slighted nourishment to pass his lips, excepting small quantities of cider and water".

² Royal Society MS/682.

³ The *London and Edinburgh Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science* 1836;8/47:265. John Salter, his sixteen-year old apprentice, also gave a paper.

⁴ RJ Cleevley, *Sowerby, James De Carle, (1787-1871)* Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.



Illustration from James de Carle Sowerby, Edward Lead, *Tortoises, Terrapins and Turtles*, London, Sotheran & Bear, 1872.



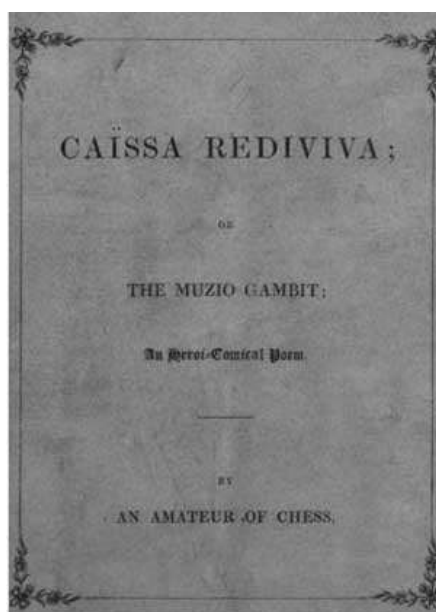
Design for the RBS gardens, Regent's Park, by Decimus Burton, 1840.

John Salter (1820-1869), son of a bank clerk of Kentish Town, was apprentice to James de Carle Sowerby. He contributed drawings and engravings to many of Sowerby's publications, but his interest developed in fossils. He was appointed to the Geological Survey in 1846, when he married Sowerby's daughter Sally,⁵ and became the leading authority on trilobites. In 1863 he resigned the Survey, on matters of principle, and was without income for his family of seven children. He suffered from severe depression and committed suicide by drowning himself, when with his son, from the ferry from Margate to London in 1869.⁶

⁵ J A Secord, *Salter, John William (1820–1869)* Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

⁶ 'John W. Salter: the rise and fall of a Victorian palaeontological career'. *Archives of Natural History* | 1985, Issue 1. *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society*, 1870;2; *Proceedings of the Geological Society* pxxxvi

Rev. **Charles d'Arblay** (1794-1837), a mathematician and a Fellow of Christ College Cambridge was the vicar of Camden Chapel for its first ten years. Through his mother, the socialite and diarist Fanny Burney, he was intimate with aristocracy and also with Clara Bolton – “a very close friend” of Benjamin Disraeli. He is remembered by chess experts for publishing a poem about an exceptional match, to which he added his own challenging chess problem as cover illustration.⁷



Augustus de Morgan (1806-1871) was the foundation professor of mathematics at the University College from 1828 through to 1866. From 1844 -1858 he lived at 7 Camden Street with a family of seven children.⁸ 'An inveterate Londoner, he loved the town, and had a humorous detestation of trees, fields, and birds.'⁹ Through his wife's social connections with the Byron family, de Morgan became tutor to Ada Lovelace 1840-1842.¹⁰ With his wife Sophia he became interested in spiritualism and carried out paranormal investigations in his own home with the medium Maria Hayden.¹¹ His specialty was algebra and he wrote for both academic and public audiences. He founded the London Mathematical Society whose headquarter at Russell Square is called De Morgan House.

⁷ <http://www.vukutu.com/blog/2011/03/the-matherati-alexander-darblay/>

⁸ Correspondence of 200+ letters with Dublin Professor Hamilton: Life of Sir William Rowan Hamilton, London, Longmans, 1885; Letter to Royal Society (EL/M3/60a) (figure)

⁹ Leslie Stephen, I. Grattan-Guinness. Morgan, Augustus De (1806–1871), mathematician and historian. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

¹⁰ Christopher Hollings et al. 'The Lovelace–De Morgan mathematical correspondence: a critical re-appraisal'. *Historia Mathematica*, 2017 (pre-publication online).

¹¹ Janet Oppenheim, *The other world: spiritualism and psychical research in England, 1850–1914*. Cambridge University Press, 1988:335.



Olaus Henrici FRS (1840-1918), mathematician, lived at 21 South Villas at the census in 1881 (other Germans lived nearby). He came to London from Germany in 1865, was professor of mathematics at University College and then Imperial College from 1869 through to 1911.¹² He innovated in courses, particularly applied mathematics, and wrote texts for students. He was made FRS in 1874 and was President of the London Mathematical Society – that Augustus de Morgan had founded – 1882-1884.

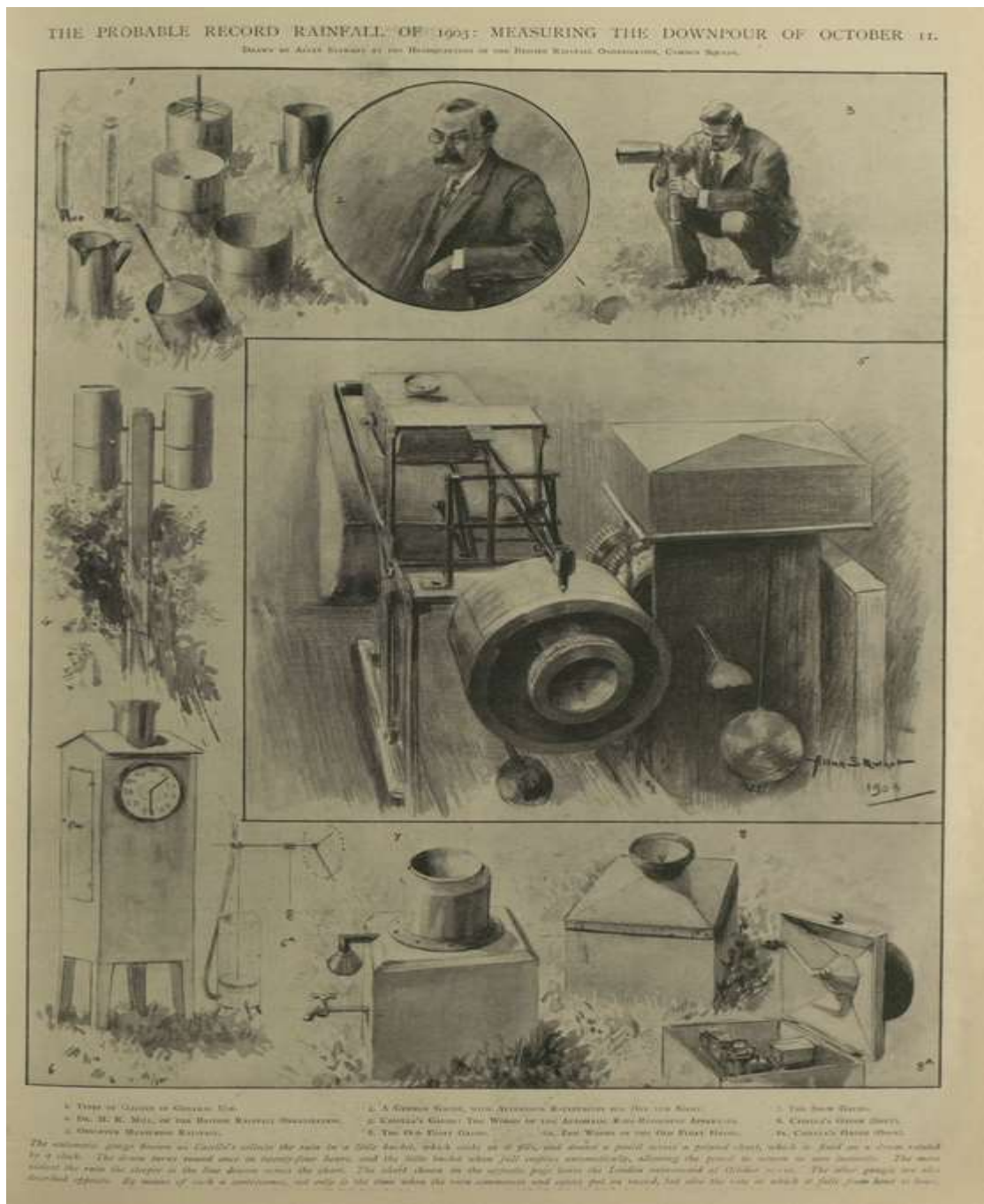


George James Symons FRS (1838-1900) was a meteorologist who created the British Rainfall Organisation, volunteer observers to collect meteorological data across Britain. In 1899 he used data from 3,528 stations, 'a mass of data of standard value, unmatched in any other country'. 'He turned his gardens in his house at [62] Camden Square into a

¹² <http://www-history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/Henrici.html>

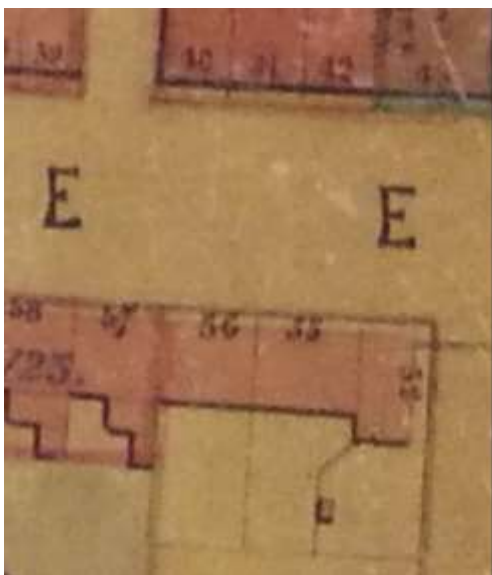
menagerie of instruments, where he maintained an unbroken series of observations for forty-two years', assisted by his wife Elizabeth until her death in 1884.

The weather station in Camden Square was in use until 1969: his weather vane, on top a flag pole, still stands in the back garden and has recently been restored. He printed as well a monthly rainfall bulletin which became *The Meteorological Magazine*. There is a commemorative plaque.



'The probable record rainfall of 1903: measuring the downpour of October 11', *Illustrated London News* 17 Oct. 1903:567.

Oliver Heaviside FRS (1850-1925), who was born at 55 King Street, is remembered for his work on the mathematics of electricity. He recounted his early life as 'in a very mean street in London, with the beer shop and baker and coffee shop right opposite ... [father] always whacking us, so it seemed'.¹³ His father was an engraver and his mother converted their home into a small school. His mother's sister, was first governess for, and then wife to, Charles Wheatstone, who lived near Regent's Park. An inventor (including the concertina), Wheatstone had sent the first electrical message, using codes, along the new railway from Euston to Chalk Farm station. The Heaviside family had moved from King Street to College Street in 1863, and he attended Camden House school, principal teacher FR Cheshire. Two of Heaviside's older brothers took up work in telegraphy – one a clerk, one a manager. After two years at home in self-study, Heaviside went to work with an electrical cable company, first in Denmark and then Newcastle. He returned to Camden Town in 1873, and in 1875 the family moved again, to 3 St Augustine's Road: 'it was here, over the next fourteen years, that Oliver produced a brilliant succession of startlingly original papers'. The reclusive Heaviside was visited 'for tea' by Oliver Lodge, once also a student living in Camden Town. But although elected FRS in 1891, Heaviside declined to have any formal attachment and moved, with his aging parents, to Devon, where he remained for the rest of his life.



55 King Street (now demolished)¹⁴

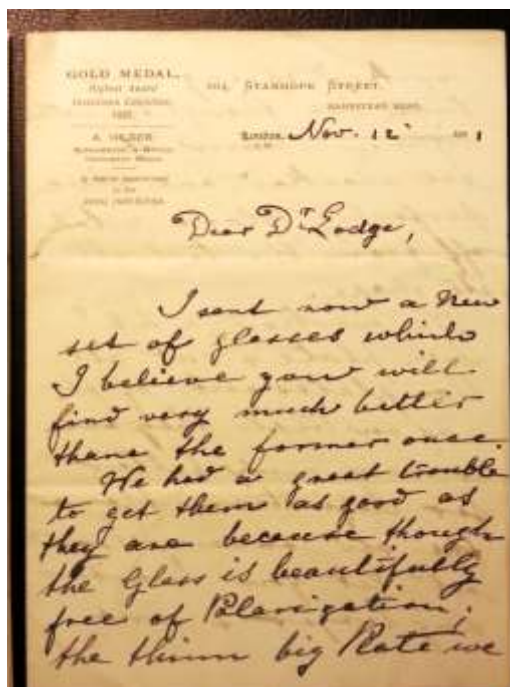
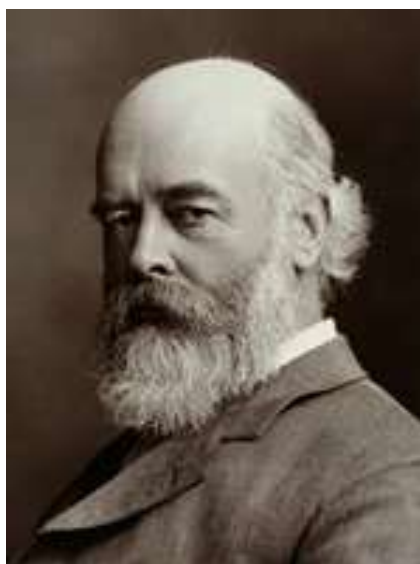
Oliver Lodge (1850-1940) lived for three years in Delancey Street, while a student at University College, where he joined the staff, later moving in 1881 to be professor of physics at Liverpool University. On his marriage, 'the first lodgings we took were in Harrington Square, but the landlady said we had too much luggage. Ultimately we settled down in Camden Road. Thence we migrated to Kentish Town, and at length to Parkhurst Road. There we lived until 1881 and there were two sons born.'¹⁵ He recounts having visited

¹³ Basil Mahon *The forgotten genius of Oliver Heaviside* New York (USA), Prometheus Books, 2017.

¹⁴ Camden History Review 1996; 20: 14-16

¹⁵ Oliver Lodge, *Past years: an autobiography* London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1931:131.

Heaviside in 1888, in his home at St Augustine's Road. Lodge, as also de Morgan, took an interest in the supernatural, especially chiefly telepathy, and wrote books about it. He was a member of the Ghost Club and of the Society for Psychical Research. Laboratory equipment was made for Lodge by Adam Hilger, although before the firm moved to Rochester Place – and Lodge later supported Frank Twyman's Royal Society fellowship.

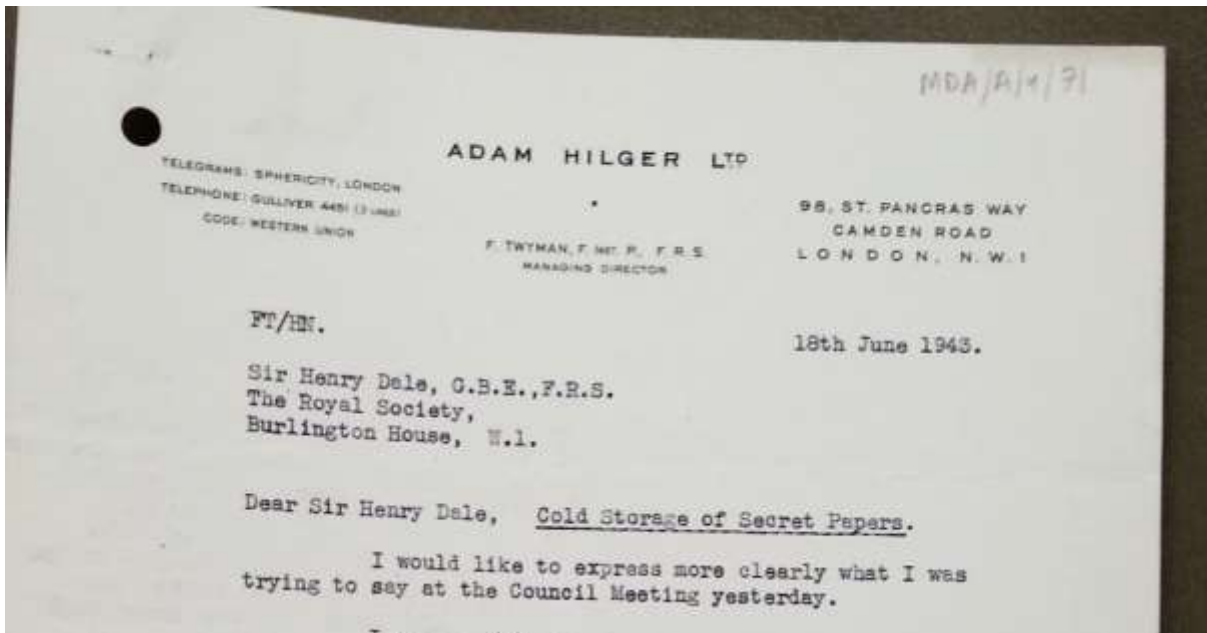


Catherine Alice Raisin (1855–1945), geologist and educationist, was born at 13 Camden Terrace, the daughter of (Daniel) Francis Raisin, pannierman at the Inner Temple, and his wife, Sarah Catherine, née Woodgate. She was educated at North London Collegiate School and at University College. Moving to Bedford College, she became the first woman head of a geology department in a British university and, from 1898 to 1901, was vice-principal of the college. Remembered by colleagues as a strong, vigorous, and charming woman, she was affectionately known as 'the Raisin', and (secretly) 'the Sultana'. In committee she could be a formidable opponent. After retiring, Raisin gave much time to various women's groups and to societies for the promotion of women's interests. She died on 12 July 1945 in Cheltenham.

Frank Twyman FRS (1876 - 1959)

Twyman was born in Canterbury, in a large family, son of a ropemaker. He was at the Central Technical Institute (to become part of Imperial College) for two years. At the age of 22 he joined the company of Otto Hilger as an assistant, becoming managing director when Otto died four years later. Twyman was particularly interested in developing spectrochemical analysis for industry, making the first quartz spectrometer (1910) and infra-red spectrometer (1913). Later work with his foreman created the Twyman-Green Interferometer, said to have done 'more to improve the quality of optical instruments than any other device' – Zeiss bought the German patent rights in 1929, and the Hilger factory

was identified (although incorrectly) on 1939 German maps prepared for invasion because of its technical importance.¹⁶ His *Prism and lens making* (1943) was a 'classic book'. Hilgers had moved to 14 Rochester Place in 1900. In an amalgamation they became Hilger & Watts and developed the adjacent site of 79 Camden Road and 98-106 Camden Road, with a workforce of several hundred by the 1950s, but thereafter suffering the attack on Britain's industry (taken over by Rank Xerox) in the 1960s. 'He was fond of music, and for many years at lunch-time he shut himself in his office, with a glass of milk for his lunch, and most of the time played his violin.'



¹⁶ <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/pdf/10.1098/rsbm.1960.0020>