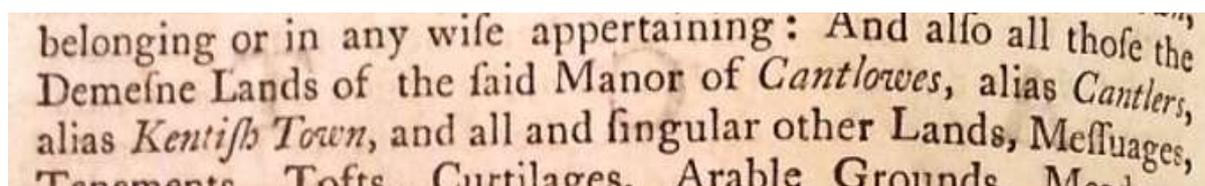


A Georgian suburb

The detailed records of the Camden Town Estate and the Camden family, which have been little explored, reveal the landlord, steward and builders working to an overall plan, but there were also disruptive influences such as transportation and the influence of associated industrial development. In contrast to studies of elite populations of aristocracy and mansions of west London, or the crowded rookeries and tenements of east London, people who came to live in Camden Town were of the 'middling sort', both artisan and middle-class: records reveal their lives and the social organisations they developed, while there are also perceptions of Camden Town in literature. Since the name Camden was given to the new centralising Borough in 1965, the unity of the Camden Town estate has become less recognised. Public history, such as through digital access, provides a means of re-presenting Camden Town's history in a contemporary context.

Origins

The land on which Camden Town is built lies in the valley of the Fleet River, on the north side of London, in the parish of St Pancras. The land had belonged to the family of Elizabeth Jeffreys, Lord Camden's wife. In 1788, Parliament passed "An act for enabling Charles, Earl Camden, to grant building leases of lands and premises at Kentish Town, in the County of Middlesex". The text describes 'the Demesne lands of the manor of Cantlowes, alias Cantlers, alias Kentish Town'.

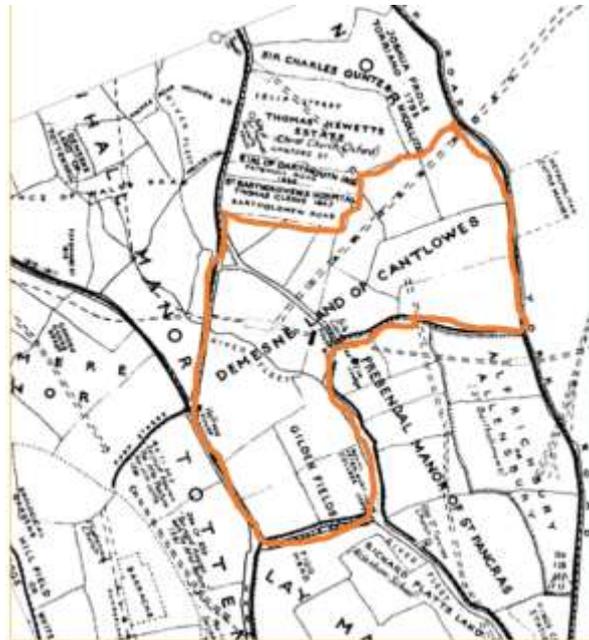


1788 Act: page 2

In 1965 the three borough of St Pancras, Holborn and Hampstead were merged into a larger single authority. The name 'Camden' was chosen for the new Borough because Camden Town lies in the geographical centre. (Some say 'Fleet' would have been better.)

St Pancras church is believed to be one of the oldest churches in England – probably older than St Paul's Cathedral. However, the Cathedral owned the land of St Pancras parish, the demesnes respectively of St Pancras and of Cantlowes, and the ground rents for these lands (termed prebends) were paid to named canons (termed prebendaries) of the Cathedral. Lay authority over St Pancras parish land was held by the Manor of Cantlowes, but in the eighteenth century passed to the Vestry of St Pancras.

The Survey of London (of 1939) made a composite map of landholdings in the parish of St Pancras. The Demesne Land of Cantlowes, which became Lord Camden's land, held in lease from the Prebendary of Cantlowes, is outlined below in orange. (Some future roads and railways were also sketched into the plan.) The land can be seen to lie across the River Fleet and a main road (King's Road), and is adjacent to several other estates.



Manor lands of St Pancras¹

In *Georgian London*, John Summerson described Camden Town as a 'Georgian suburb'. He distinguished this category from other suburbs which developed either by extension on the edge of the existing metropolis, or along roads as 'strip development' or from within villages surrounding London. In contrast, a Georgian suburb developed, new and independently, in open countryside, although still related to the metropolis and potentially 'filling' in a peripheral site between other suburbs. The development often took the extra word of 'town' – as Camden Town and also Somers Town and Pentonville. (Kentish Town, however, was an already existing village.)

Suburbs are, by definition, close to the main city. Whereas up until the eighteenth century the large majority of people lived above/below, or at least close to their work – for both men and women. The London suburbs developed in a new way: people would walk to their work and return to their 'home' at night. Middle class women would have assistance in domestic tasks; working class women would keep homes and could also have part-time paid employment.

In contrast to sizeable literature on suburbs in London (and elsewhere) from the later nineteenth century and the twentieth century, the 'Georgian suburb' has been hardly described as such. There is one paper describing a Georgian suburb of Dublin – at a time

¹ Sketch map of the parish of St. Pancras. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol19/pt2/sketch-map-st-pancras> [4 March 2018] - Cantlowes demesne outlined in orange.

when Ireland was part of the United Kingdom: but Dublin's periphery was not growing at the same rate as London's. Camden Town, in open countryside between Somers Town and (the village of) Kentish Town fits Summerson's category.

Two nearby London estates, both begun in the Georgian period, have received scholarly attention. Olsen's detailed account of building what is now Bloomsbury, the Bedford and Foundling Hospital estates, shows the benefits of the landlord's interest and engagement in town planning.² Linda Clarke's equally comprehensive study of 'urbanisation as a production process' – the organisation and financing of building – looked at Somers Town, land just north of the New Road, where weak engagement led to deteriorating properties and overcrowding. Studies of Agar Town and Islington to the east have similar lessons; there appears to be no study of Lord Southampton's land to the west. Useful comparative material can come from Edinburgh and Bath.

Two academic theses of Camden's history, particularly addressing social issues, were undertaken some decades ago. Marian Collums, at Bedford College, traced the patterns of growth and economic development within the (then new) London boroughs of Camden and Lambeth, looking in depth at building on two estates in each borough (the estates for Camden were in Hampstead rather than Camden Town). She identified 'ecological' growth patterns in concentric rings as populations moved steadily outwards. By the end of the century, she considered, 'the residential status of most affluent developments had deteriorated, even when the landowners pursued an active management policy'.³ Alaric Mostyn, in a dissertation at University College London, estimated population structure by social class from the 1851 census for 'Camden Town'. His boundaries extended westwards, into Lord Southampton's terraces, rather than northwards as Camden New Town, but the focus on the area between Kentish Town and Somers Town had a similar intention to the present study. Discussing how Camden Town is frequently misattributed in Dickens' work, Mostyn suggested, 'Perhaps the widely conflicting descriptions of historians mentioning Camden Town is partly due to lack of precise definition'.⁴

However, there is an important distinction, set out in the Survey of London, of Lord Camden's land from that adjacent manors to the west. The land of the manor of Rugmere, to the northwest, was sold "in 1786 to Charles (Fitzroy) Lord Southampton, it being described as commonly known as Chalk Farm, then in the possession of Thomas Rhodes and Samuel Rhodes".⁵ Earlier, in 1761, a survey of the narrower land of Tottenhall, north to Ken Wood and South to Tottenham Court Road was made for (then Mr Fitzroy), whose family had gained the freehold. Thus, Camden Town was built on the land to the east of the

² Linda Clarke. *Building capitalism*. London, Routledge, 1992. Donald Olsen. *Town Planning in London*, London, Yale, 1982.

³ Marian Collums. Residential development in London in the nineteenth century. PhD thesis, Bedford College, 1978:257-266.

⁴ Alaric Mostyn. The social structure of Camden in the mid-nineteenth century. London, University College, 1977 (mimeo: no page numbers).

⁵ 'Introduction', in *Survey of London: Volume 19, the Parish of St Pancras Part 2: Old St Pancras and Kentish Town*, ed. Percy Lovell and William McB. Marcham (London, 1938), pp. 1-31.

Hampstead Road (becoming the High Street), while to the west it is Lord Southampton's land of Tottenhall and Chalk Farm.

Camden Town boundaries

Other authors have used different boundaries.

- The architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner included adjacent parts of Lord Southampton's land and all of Lord Camden's land within 'Camden Town'.⁶
- Gillian Tindall, in *The Fields Beneath* (published 1976), draws on material from the broader area of St Pancras – in earlier centuries Kentish Town and Pancras were both terms used. She acknowledges 'Camden Road environs' as within Camden Town, while the southern boundary ambiguously 'crosses Kentish Town Road and Camden Street'.
- The Camden History Society has published a series of walks which describe building histories street by street: *Streets of Camden Town* includes the Southampton lands but some areas of Camden Town that lie west of Camden Road are put into *Streets of Kentish Town*.
- John Richardson, a former President of the Society and editor of the Newsletter, has written two books about the area, *The Camden Town Book* and *Camden Town and Primrose Hill Past*, which provide chronologies, narratives and images of local features and people: the areas include Lord Southampton's land but less of New Camden Town.
- Jack Whitehead's *The growth of Camden Town: AD 1800-2000* provides detailed accounts of the railway lands of Chalk Farm and industrial premises around the canal, but it does not cover the Camden Town estate.

The Survey of London, within its sixty volumes, separates St Pancras into four volumes. While St Pancras church and Kentish Town are in the third volume, Camden Town is the final section of the fourth volume, published in 1952.⁷ It summarises Lord Camden's inheritance, interprets building development from two maps, Thompson of 1801 and Britton of 1834, mentions that both Charles Dickens and painter Francis Holl lived in Bayham Street (one of the earliest roads) as children, and gives accounts of three churches (one in Camden Square), the St Martin's burial ground and alms-houses and the Royal Veterinary College.⁸

⁶ Bridget Cherry, Nikolaus Pevsner. *London 4: north (The buildings of England series)*. London, Penguin, 1998:384-393. '...still essentially c 19, lively and scruffy, a mixture of shabby terraces and robust industrial ... overflowing with c 20 youth', p393.

⁷ <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol24/pt4/pp134-139>.

⁸ E. Walford, *Old and New London*,

Surveys of housing and industrial conditions across London have included Camden Town specifically –[Religious survey] Mayhew’s survey of working men of the 1860s, Booth reporting on housing areas (1890s). The Valuation Survey (1910-15) was initiated by Lloyd George to determine property wealth: working with Ordnance survey maps, there are inspectors’ field books with records by individual household.⁹ There was academic documentation about the survey in the 1980, but there have been relatively few publications using the material. There are also opportunities to compare these surveys with postal directories¹⁰ (Kelly) and census (The National Archives); and with Smith’s broader study of occupation and wages across the whole of London (1930).

A series of bibliographies of thematic London history (in 1998) included ‘London 1700-1850’ by Leonard Schwartz and ‘Modern London 1850-1939’ by John Davis. Although they fall across the period of the ‘long’ nineteenth century, these are of interest for comparison as well as their listings. Schwartz suggests a relative paucity of work on eighteenth century London, compared with earlier centuries when the city was more compact and therefore easier to summarise, and the later period for which there are more records. (He lists one hundred publications compared with six hundred by Davis.) For Schwartz, ‘While there are many detailed studies of parts of London, there are few systematic attempts to relate local processes to urban-wide processes:’ topics lacking detailed studies included the London bourgeoisie, the arts and women’s history. Davis, welcoming a change from the ‘crudely Dickensian’, ‘gloomy’ view of London (‘Books on housing no longer carry titles like *The Eternal Slum*’), particularly noted strong publications on industry and education.

Invited papers similarly reviewed articles on themes of crime and housing published to 2016 in the *London Journal*. Through reports of Old Bailey proceedings there has been a shift to studying crime, rather than justice, and also yielding descriptions of London life; but few of these studies were for periods after the eighteenth century. In contrast, housing history had several stronger articles in the earlier period, the 1970s and 80s: and in contrast to crime, the major focus has been on Victorian and twentieth century periods. Indeed, no housing paper was described relating to the first half of the nineteenth century except for Paul Laxton’s numerical study of new housing built in the period 1799-1819.¹¹ In neither of these thematic fields was particular attention given to women.

Tosh Warwick reports on recent theses on city heritage, quoting Peter Borsay’s view that urban historians should play a crucial role within communities ‘engaged in a complex discourse with the past ... that for many was fundamental to their livelihood and identity’.¹²

⁹ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/valuation-office-survey-land-value-ownership-1910-1915/>

¹⁰ P. J. Atkins. The compilation and reliability of London directories. *The London Journal*, 1989;14(1):17-28.

¹¹ Robert Shoemaker. Forty Years of Crime in London (Journal). *The London Journal*, 2015;40(2):89-105. Tanis Hinchcliffe. Pandora's box: forty years of housing history. *The London Journal*, 2016;41(1):1-16. Paul Laxton. The evidence of Richard Horwood’s maps for residential building in London 1700–1819. *London Journal*, 1999;24(1):1– 22.

¹² Tosh Warwick, Research in urban history: recent PhD theses on heritage and the city in Britain, *Urban History* 2018;45(3):549-560.

Local history of inner London continues to hold academic attention, with recent dissertations taking a chronological approach and drawing on thematic literature related to place and person. David Kroll's was concerned with development by, and the architecture of, speculative builders in the Minet estate, Camberwell; Sean Gubbins has similarly looked at the building process, the appearance of the houses and the people who came to live in a Hackney estate; Tracey Logan investigated Victorian Chiswick politics through records of the Chiswick Improvement Commission, 'an experimental, amateur-led organ of government'; Juliet Davis looked at planning and development in Hackney Wick, proposing a 'new local centrality in urban edgeland'; David Brown analysed how building quality was associated with proximity to the local river, the Tyburn, in Mayfair; and Pamela Taylor, for the Victoria County History, has linked the changing built environment with political and religious histories from the Restoration of 1660 until 1900 in Knightsbridge.¹³

In summary, London history has engaged with both of physical development and social conditions and also undertaken topic studies at local level. The place for Camden Town as a Georgian suburb deserves attention.

¹³ See associated document 'Local history and place': also lists a selection of the many published London studies by area.