

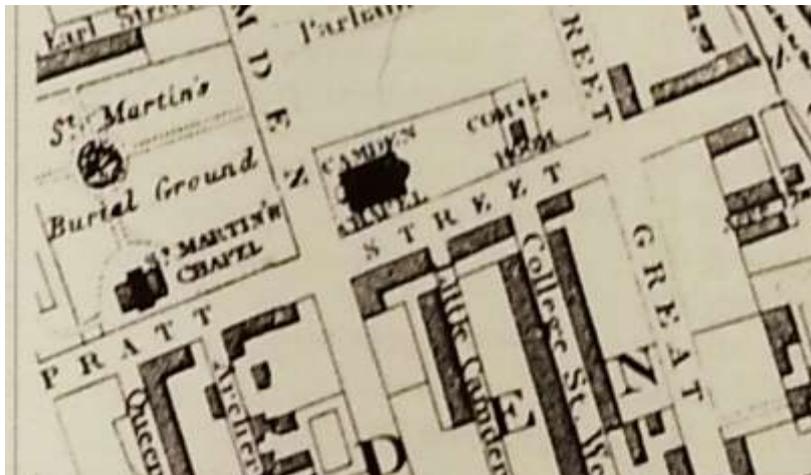
Adults learning

Education and learning was also for adults, and events in Camden Town complemented movements in central London.¹

The **Veterinary College**, which had opened in 1791, had sustained academic activities in College Street, near the Vestry. Several of the staff put forward patents at the 1851 Great Exhibition. And in 1904, the **Working Men's College**, with supporters including John Ruskin and William Morris, moved from Great Ormond Street to a site at the south end of Camden Street, where it flourishes now as The Camden College.

Camden Scientific and Literary Institute

Cline explains the inception related to the *Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, founded 1826, associated with University College. (Also, it was at a time of many similar institutions, as evidenced through Rules of Incorporation held at the National Archives.) A first meeting of seven men was at held Mr Wood's house, 24 Bayham Terrace, on the south side of Camden Road near Bayham Street, and a prospectus printed. Plans for a building (£1540) failed, and the Society instead rented rooms at the Commissioners for Paving and Lighting, next to Camden Chapel in 56 Pratt Street.



Lord Camden (John Jeffreys Pratt, who was by then Chancellor of Cambridge University) declined to preside at the initial lecture, and Presidency was given to Basil Montagu, QC. Vice-presidents included Dr Birkbeck, founder of the Mechanics Institutes and honorary librarian was James de Carle Sowerby (living at Camden Terrace West). Membership was one guinea per year.

¹ Roger Cline. 'A light that failed: The Camden Literary and Scientific Institution 1835-1839' Camden History Review 1997;21:7-9.

The Institute held 3 lectures initially in the Castle Tavern, at the north of the estate on Kentish Town Road in 1835, and from 1856 at Pratt Street. The topics included: 'Structure and history of corals'; 'Nature and revolutions of the heavenly bodies'; 'Divine creation compared with human ingenuity'.² Further speakers included George Birkbeck on 'Mechanisms of the human body', William Holt Yates on 'Monuments of ancient Thebes' and Nathaniel Rogers on 'Mythology of the Ancients'.³

In a lively talk, local zoologist James de Carle Sowerby described family life with a tame bat:⁴

LIII. *Observations upon the Habits of the Plecotus auritus, or Long-eared Bat.* By J. DE C. SOWERBY, Esq., F.L.S.*

ABOUT the beginning of August last, a living specimen of the Long-eared Bat was given to my children. We constructed a cage for him by covering a box with gauze and making a round hole in the side fitted with a phial cork. When he was awake we fed him with flies introduced through this hole, and thus kept him for several weeks. The animal soon became familiar, and immediately a fly was presented alive at the hole he would run or fly from any part of the cage and seize it in our fingers, but a dead or quiet fly he never would touch. At other times dozens of flies and grasshoppers have been left in his cage, and waking him by their noise, he dexterously caught them as they hopped or flew about, but uniformly disregarded them while they were at rest. The common Blatta, hard Beetles, and Caterpillar he refused, even after he had been induced by their moving to attack them. As we became still more familiar our new friend was invited to join in our evening amusements, to which he contributed his full share by flitting round the room, at times settling upon our persons and permitting us to handle and caress him. He announced his being awake by a shrill chirp,

Text from James de Carle Sowerby talk, 1836

Yet it was in Cline's words an 'intellectual success but financial failure'⁵ – the costs of renting and maintaining the reading and lecture rooms for day and evening use outstripped the income from patrons, and the society was wound up in March 1839. Kentish Town had a Literary Society by 1850, and the Athenaeum in Camden Road, just across into Islington, was successful in the 1860s.

In 1850, the **North London Schools of Drawing and Modelling** was set up to provide skills of design and trade in 'a locality favourable as the residence of a superior class of artisans'. Ford Maddox Brown was on the Committee.⁶ But again, this appears to have failed to maintain its activities.

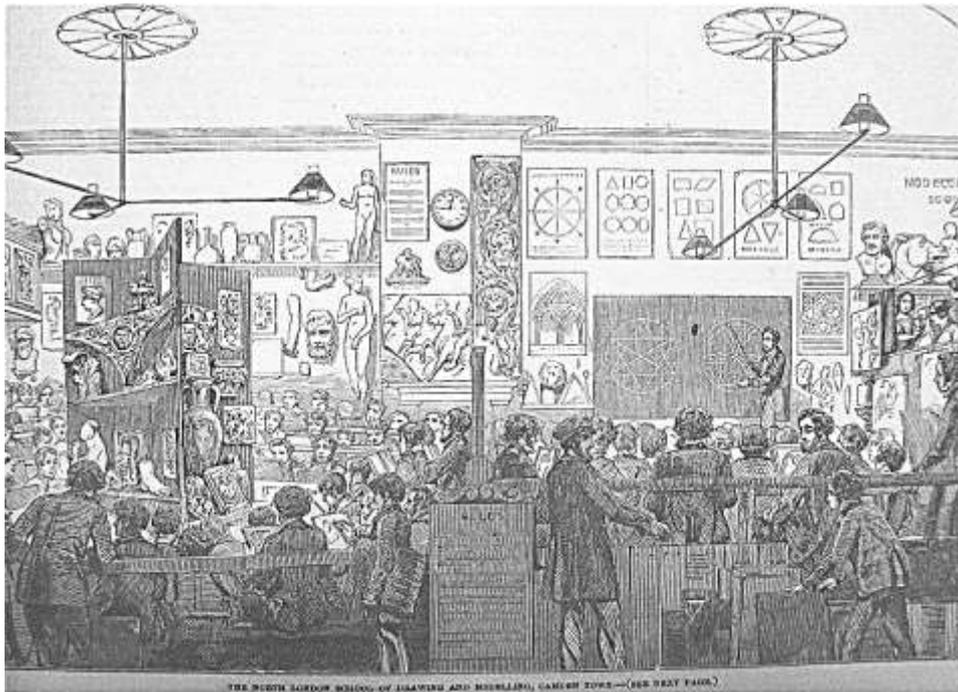
² CLSAC, Heal collection:A/8/38.

³ Birkbeck: a founder of London University and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge; Yates: a physician and Egyptologist; Rogers <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathaniel_Rogers>

⁴ James Sowerby, *London and Edinburgh Philosophical Magazine, Third Series* April 1836:265-6.

⁵ Roger Cline. 'A light that failed: The Camden Literary and Scientific Institution 1835-1839' *Camden History Review* 1997;21:7-9.

⁶ CLSAC, Heal:A/8/4. 'Suburban artisan schools', *Illustrated London News* 17 January 1852:4



The North London Schools of Drawing and Modelling.

More successful was the Camden Town **Working Man's Club and Institute** at Camden Hall in Pratt Street, with lectures each Tuesday evening at 8.30 and titles including 'A budget of jokes' and 'A history of Lucifer [friction] Match'. The subscription was 1d per week, or 2d to use the reading room. Instruction included arithmetic, writing, shorthand, singing, history, elocution, French, chemistry, minerology, drawing and 'an instrumental band'.⁷

Camden Hall in Pratt Street also held other meetings and talks.

Three talks were published as pamphlets-

12 August 1858: 'The bright side of Calvinism', by the Rev. Benjamin Davies, in reply to lectures on 'The dark side of Calvinism' by Mr. Jabez Inwards.

18 December 1865: Rev. Charles Lee's objections to total abstinence answered by the Rev. Dawson Burns in a lecture.

21 November 1875: 'A neglected view of education' by Mr. M.D. Conway.⁸

⁷ CALSC, Heal:A/8/19. 'Penny readings': Brad Beaven, *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain, 1850-1940*, Manchester 2005.

⁸ British Library: pamphlets collection.



Camden Hall: LMA Collage 182225

Non-conformist churches also contributed - The Christian Men's Union and Gospel Mission at 4 Camden Street, and Camden Road Young Men's Literary Society at the Presbyterian Church.⁹

By 1883, a **Free Library** is recorded at 29 Camden Street, with Canon Spencer, vicar, as President and from 1888 Ambrose Heal on the committee. There was a call for free public libraries elsewhere in the borough in 1894, rather than 'numerous subscription libraries attached to shops which supply the worst class of fiction at high rates'. The libraries, it was claimed, would be 'a formidable competitor to the public house and prison'.¹⁰

In Booth's survey, Rev C.W.Wannell, [1898] describes that he and his wife run a **School of Telegraphy** from 41 Camden Road

⁹ LMA: DDCL/3360, 1880; LMA: LMA/4303/E/02/014

¹⁰ CALSC, Heal:A/8/24b