

Religion

Churches

Until reforms of the 1850s, St Pancras Parish stretched from Holborn to Highgate. Camden Town had dissenting churches as well as the Church of England, and some churches also had outreach in missions. Booth's surveyors spoke with several of the ministers. There is also material within the records of Church of England visitations.¹

The three Church of England churches reflect the social mix of Camden Town. Camden Chapel, built in 1824, held a central position on College Street in south Camden Town. At its start it had prestigious officers – Samuel Wesley as organist and Alexander d'Arblay, son of society writer Fanny Burney, as priest. But by the time of visitation in 1857 the prestige had gone. The 16000 population whom the minister, John Fitzgerald, considered he served, were three-quarters 'labouring poor': 'There are no church rates in any part of St Pancras' and parochial relief was 'unknown'. His congregation varied from 177 at Easter to 20 on an ordinary midday.²

The new church for the north of Camden Town, St Paul's, opened in Camden Square in May 1848. The consecration sermon was given by the Bishop of London, although there is no record of either Lord Camden or prebendary Thomas Randolph attending. Here the majority were middle class: the three churchwardens, Vincent Bellman, Samuel Denton and John Darlington, were builders and property holders on the estate. At a visitation, in 1862, incumbent Arthur described the pew rents of £800 per annum.³

¹ Lambeth Palace, *Visitation returns*
<archives.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/CalmView/Overview.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog>

² Ibid, Visitation: 'Camden Town, Parish chapel'.

³ Ibid, Visitation: 'Camden Town, St Paul's church'.

The Reverend Robert Clemenger had gained a reputation in Agar Town for the energy and charity of his ministry. When Mr Agar's land transferred to the Midland Railway, a church was built in Wrotham Road for people living north of the railway lands. Clemenger wrote at the visitation: 'Last summer persons went about preaching in the open air ... of various denominations – I am inclined to think highly of such preaching.' Most of the population were 'labouring classes and extremely poor ... quite careless and indifferent about religion.' 'The very moment the children are able to earn a few pence, they are sent to work.' There was 'a great deal done for the poor – soup kitchen, mothers meetings'. A Provident society flourished: 'fully a third are daily on parochial relief'.⁴

Booth's Survey also describes a less formal religious setting:

Mission Room at 78 Kings Road will hold 60 places. It is one of the strangest places I have seen. A lady has placed her back drawing room at the Missionary's disposal. Miss Caesar is a bright cheerful middle aged woman. Women attending... were mostly widows and elderly people with little or nothing to do – working women could not afford the time... Weekly service (Friday dinner hour) at Idris' [soft drinks] factory and an annual meeting for their employees, with attendance 250. ⁵

Churches were built for the growing population. Were they used? The religious survey of London in 1903 reports 1132 people attending four Camden Town parish churches for Sunday morning service and 1303 at evening service. The five dissenting churches within Camden Town estate (Wesleyan, Baptist and Presbyterian, Primitive Methodist and Brethren) altogether had 923 in the morning and 1141 in the evening. There were also attenders at missions of various churches.⁶

⁴ Ibid: Visitation 'Camden Town, St Thomas' Church'.

⁵ Booth, 'Survey' *St Stephen's Church*:213:77-79

⁶ Richard Mudie-Smith, *The religious life of London*, London 1904:175.

