

Places of worship

Churches

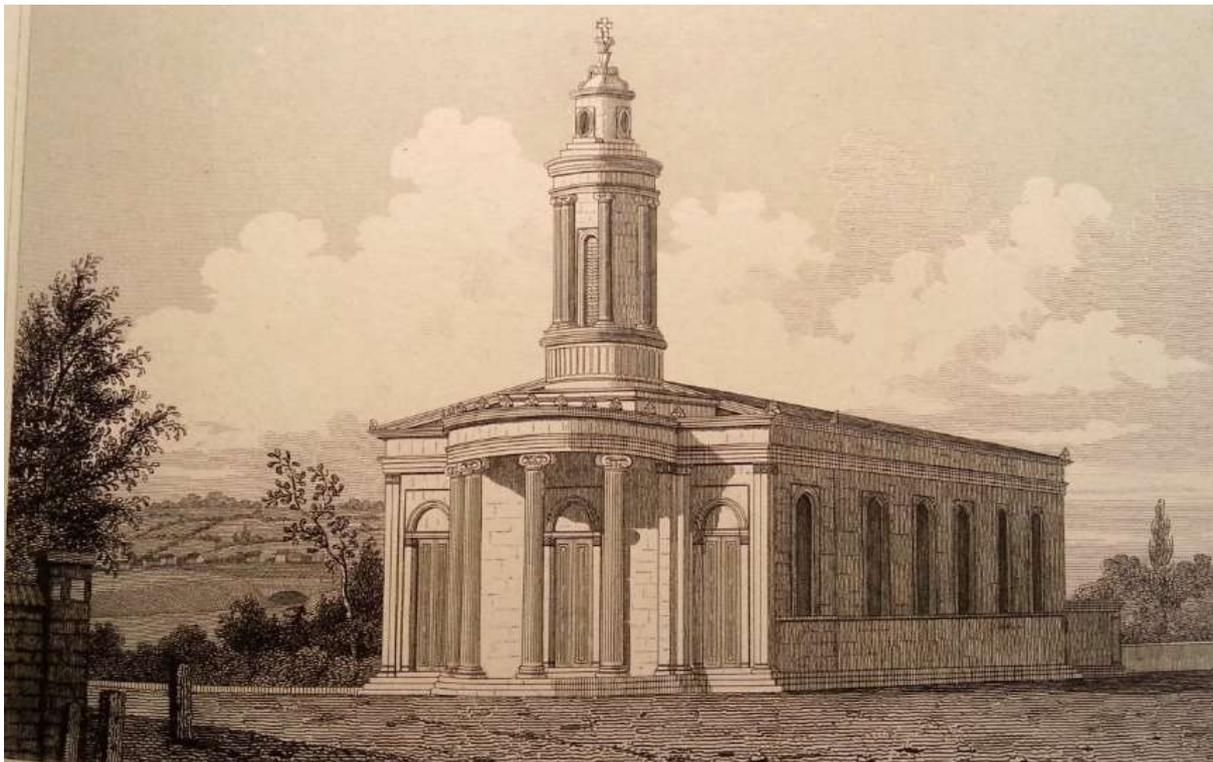
Until reforms of the 1850s, St Pancras Parish stretched from Holborn to Highgate. The Church of England parish church, St Pancras, was at the corner of King's Road and Crowndale Road, beside the workhouse and vestry. Chapels at Kings Cross and Camden Town were subservient. However, with the expansion of population, the parish was divided.

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

Church of England

St Stephen's Church

The four Church of England churches reflect the social mix of Camden Town at the time of their construction. Camden Chapel, built in 1824, held a central position on College Street in south Camden Town. The church was designed by William Inwood and his son, Henry William, following the new St Pancras church as second among four churches erected by these architects. It cost nearly £20,000: the stone was brought to the site from the canal. It was originally consecrated as Camden Town Chapel, it was known locally as St. Stephen's, and dedicated to All Saints in 1920. It came under the vicarage of St. Pancras until 1868.



At its start it had prestigious officers – Samuel Wesley as organist and Alexander d'Arblay, son of society writer Fanny Burney, as priest, although perhaps neither of these luminaries showed much interest in the Camden Town congregation. 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', yet '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.¹ Charles Whittington, organist at the Camden Chapel, published musical arrangements of the liturgical Responses in 1868.²

From 1948 the church became a cathedral for the Greek Orthodox Church, serving the local Cypriot community and linked with the former St Barnabas (changed to St Andrew) on Kentish Town Road at the corner of Rochester Road, just in the Camden Town estate.

Adjacent was the cemetery land taken by St Martins in the fields. Part of the land was later the site of building in the 1850s³



St Paul's church

A new church was proposed in 1840 for the growing population of north Camden Town. The first plan was for it to be within a new crescent to the northwest side of Camden Road. A lease was taken on the land by builders, Pearse and Guerrier, who were not otherwise active

¹ Lambeth Palace, Visitation returns 'Camden Town, Parish chapel'. <archives.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/CalmView/Overview.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog>

² Charles Whittington, Responses: arranged for the liturgy of the new church, London: James Speirs, 1876 (music).

³ 'Desecration of dead at St Martin's graveyard' *Morning Post*, Wednesday 10 November, 1858:3;

on Camden Town Estate, although working on first rank houses in Regent's Park Road. They agreed to villas in a ring around the central crescent. However, a Temporary Church, with curate, was already operating on Camden Square and, as a signed Memorial sent to Lord Camden showed, many residents wanted the site more central. Among signatories were several developers of the estate:

Richard Richardson, 50 Queen St, Edgware Road.

George Richardson, 115 Prade [sic] Street, Paddington

John Darlington, 120 Camden Road Villas

Pearse and Guirrier, 26 High St Holborn

Robert Rogers, 30 King Street Covent Garden

Robert Pulford, 65 St James Street.

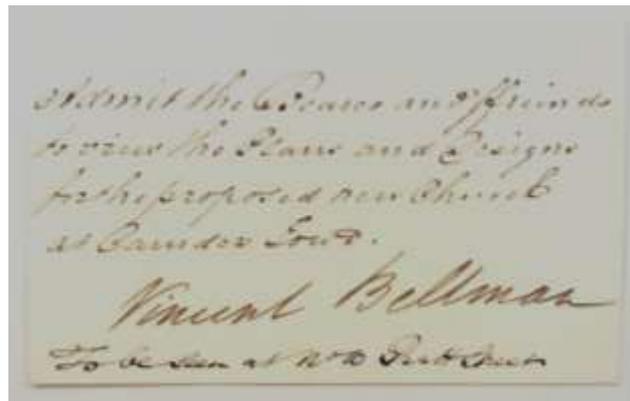
Joseph Kay, who acted on behalf of Lord Camden, writes indicating that Rev Randolph, the Prebendary, took the chair at a meeting – the only record of his presence in Camden Town:

Tower Street
April 12. 1845

My Lord

I attended at the meeting of the Committee on the reception of the Designs for the new Church at Camden Town - Mr. Randolph who was present & presided, took much interest in the inspection of the Drawings, as did Mr. Hannam who also attended - The meeting however, was not very methodically conducted the time entirely occupied by a cursory glance & general observation on the Drawings (which are numbered from 16 Candidates - many of them not

A viewing and debate was made on the architectural proposals:



Two thousand pounds had been raised through local subscriptions, mostly at £10 but with some larger contributions: Lord Camden offered £500, Thomas Randolph £200 plus £10 annually, agents Aldersey and Kay each giving 20gns and Vincent Bellman giving 50gns. The Rev Stebbing, of St James' chapel, offered £1500 to the church fund on the basis that he would become the vicar. The balance was expected from the Church of England authorities.

The church was named after St Paul's Cathedral because of the Cantlowe prebend link. The consecration sermon was given by the Bishop of London, followed the next Sunday by the parish vicar Thomas Dale. The three churchwardens were Vincent Bellman, Samuel Denton and John Darlington. The visitation in 1862 described the pew rents at £800 per annum.⁴

The chosen architects were Frederick Ordish and John Johnson.⁵ It was a large aisled church in stone, with transepts and a tall western tower and spire, all in the decorated style. The chancel was enlarged in 1900 by Sir Arthur Blomfield, who also designed the parish hall. After bombing damage, it was demolished in 1949, with the exception of the tower, spire and parish hall, while a temporary church continued on the south side.



Illustrated London News, 2 December 1848; Temporary church in hall, LMA: P90/PAU/038

⁴ Ibid, Visitation: 'Camden Town, St Paul's church'.

⁵ Oddly, Ordish was from Leicester, where the earlier John Johnson architect, sometime resident in Camden Street, had his most distinguished building. The (now Grade II) 'Old Vicarage' at Oakley Square is by (new) Johnson; colleague engineer John Kelk advised on the St Paul's costs.

St Thomas' church, Wrotham Road

The Reverend Robert Clemenger had gained a reputation in Agar Town for the energy and charity of his ministry, and had plans for a church on King's Road. Clemenger wrote at the last 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'.⁶

When Mr Agar's land was bought by the Midland Railway, a church was built in compensation in Wrotham Road, to serve people living north of the railway lands. Although formally still on 'Agar' land, the postcard picture describes the church as Camden Town. The parish catchment was also drawn laterally, below Camden Square and across Camden Road to Kentish Town Road.



⁶ Ibid: Visitation 'Camden Town, St Thomas' Church'.

St Michael's church

There had been an 'iron church' at 5a Camden Road since 1860. It was the predecessor to the fourth Anglican Church, St Michaels, the biggest of the four churches, built in a quasi-Norman style, narrow and tall. The architect was Thomas Garner.⁷ The foundation stone was laid by Marquess Camden [who was aged 12]. The nave, costing about £10000, was built and consecrated in 1884; the chancel was added in 1893–94. A tower at the north-west angle was designed but not built. The parish for this church included areas of Hawley Road and Kentish Town. In 1888 Princess Mary Adelaide came to Camden Town to open the Mission for St Michaels in Camden Town High Street, which had cost £2000.

Dissenting churches

Ebenezer Gitten records the story of founding a dissenting church in Camden Town.⁸ As a young man coming in 1828 to work 'in trade' in Camden Town High Street, Gitten knew 'good men' 'who rented a building which stood up a yard in High Street Camden Town' and created there a chapel. Teachers from the Sunday School made a schism and moved to rooms nearby in Bayham Street. Gitten, who had by then developed as an occasional preacher at several other London chapels, became involved in 1832. In 1834 he founded a new church and in 1835 took on lease on land in Union Terrace on the west side of Kentish Town Road. His Ebenezer Chapel continues as now as Trinity Presbyterian church, near Camden Town Underground station.

Reflecting the artisanal population, there were more dissenting churches in the south of Camden Town.

A Wesleyan chapel was created on King Street in 1824 – the same year as the Camden Chapel – converting a former lint factory. There was a Wesleyan Chapel on Camden Street from 1851-1919. Following the Union of Methodist churches in 1932, the church on King Street (re-named Plender Street, 1937) became the main church, and Camden Street church became a mission hall and youth centre, c.1939. The Camden Street church transferred to London Mission (North) Circuit in 1960 when the premises were sold, subsequently demolished and rebuilt with Council housing.

In 1860, the Wesleyan Methodists sold their site to the Primitive Methodists, who rebuilt in 1890. At the Booth survey, 1891, Rev. Mincher of the Primitive Methodist Chapel lived at 39 St Paul's Road.⁹

⁷ <http://www.smct-history.com/history-of-camden/>

⁸ W T Gittens, *A new year's address to the Church of Christ worshipping at Ebenezer Chapel, Camden Town*, Lewis, London, 1853.

⁹ William Mincher, *A brief record of Primitive Methodism in Camden Town for fifty years 1850-1900*, London, Hurd, 1900.

On the east side of Camden Town, there was Baptists' Avenue Chapel at Great College Street



There was a large Congregational church near Camden Town,¹⁰ and other dissenting chapels were built in Kentish Town, Somers Town and Chalk Farm. The Presbyterian church in Camden Park Road was built 1869.

Booth's Survey of 1890 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 250.¹¹

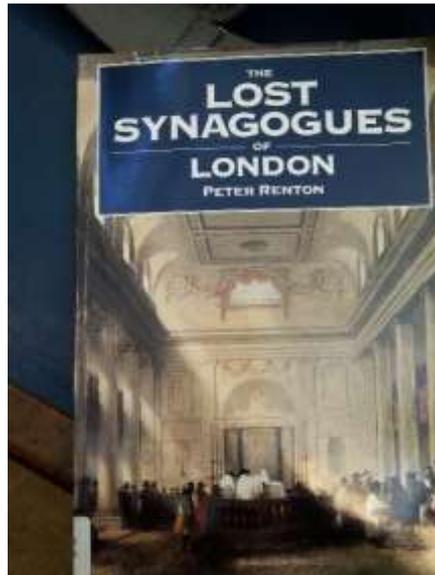
The religious survey of London in 1903 reports 1132 people attending four Camden Town parish churches for Sunday morning service and 1303 at evening service. The dissenting churches within Camden Town estate (Wesleyan, Baptist and Presbyterian, Primitive Methodist and Brethren) altogether had 923 in the morning and 1141 in the evening. There were also attenders at missions of various churches.¹²

A warehouse on York Way was a **synagogue** for the congregation *Beis Haknesses*. Rev. Wolf Estersen, who had been educated at the Jew's Free School in Stepney, was minister from 1894-1899, after which the synagogue moved to Caversham Road in Kentish Town.

¹⁰ Christopher Damp, 'Kentish Town Congregational Church', *Camden History Review* 2000 24:45-49

¹¹ Booth, 'St Stephen's Church', *Survey* 213:77-79.

¹² Richard Mudie-Smith, *The religious life of London*, London 1904:175.



Spiritualism also gained a place. In 1926 author Conan Doyle laid the foundation stone (and mostly paid) for a small spiritualist hall behind Rochester Square.