

## Camden Town science

**Oliver Heaviside** (1850-1925), who was born at 55 King Street and attended local schools, is perhaps the most distinguished son of Camden Town.<sup>1</sup> He is known to posterity for work on the mathematics of electricity, including showing that electrical power does not flow in a wire but in the space along side it. He recounted his early life as 'in a very mean street in London, with the beer shop and baker and coffee shop right opposite ...' His father was an engraver, but suffered the development of photography and his mother converted their home into a small school. His mother's sister, however, had been governess to Charles Wheatstone and, on becoming pregnant, married Wheatstone, who lived in a large house near Regent's Park. Wheatstone was an inventor and is remembered for sending the first electrical message, using codes, along the new railway from Euston to Chalk Farm station. Two of Heaviside's older brothers took up work in telegraphy – one a clerk, one a manager – and after two years at home in self-study, Heaviside went to work with an electrical cable company, and begin his studies on telegraphy mathematics, first in Denmark and then Newcastle. He returned to Camden Town in 1874. The Heaviside family had moved from King Street to College Street in 1863, and in 1875 moved again to 3 St Augustine's Road: and 'it was here, over the next fourteen years, that Oliver produced a brilliant succession of startlingly original papers' and was elected FRS in 1891. But in 1889 he remained without formal employment and with his aging parents he chose to move from London to the West Country, where he remained for the rest of his life.

**Augustus de Morgan** was professor of mathematics at the University of London from its foundation in 1828 through to 1866. From 1844 he lived at 7 Camden Street with a family of seven children. 'An inveterate Londoner, he loved the town, and had a humorous detestation of trees, fields, and birds.'<sup>2</sup> Through his wife's social connections with the Byron family, de Morgan became tutor to Ada Lovelace 1840-1842.<sup>3</sup> Also with his wife Sophia he became interested in spiritualism and carried out paranormal investigations in his own home with the medium Maria Hayden.<sup>4</sup> His specialty was algebra and he wrote for both academic and public audiences. He was

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<sup>1</sup> My account draws totally on Basil Mahon. *The forgotten genius of Oliver Heaviside*. New York USA, Prometheus Books, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Stephen, I. Grattan-Guinness. *Morgan, Augustus De (1806–1871), mathematician and historian*. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>3</sup> Recently reconsidered: Christopher Hollings et al. *The Lovelace–De Morgan mathematical correspondence: a critical re-appraisal*. *Historia Mathematica*, 2017 (pre-publication online)

<sup>4</sup> Oppenheim, Janet (1988). *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914*. Cambridge University Press. p. 335



Dr **George Swiney** (c1786-1844), a doctor 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'.<sup>7</sup>

**James De Carle Sowerby** was a botanical artist who lived at and worked from 5 Camden Terrace West in 1834-1839, and Pratt Street in 1840.<sup>8</sup> He was a member 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.<sup>9</sup> 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'<sup>10</sup>

[The Sowerby Collection] 1739-1985 Natural History Museum (London, England)

**The Sowerby family is without equal in the history of natural history for the depth and variety of its contribution to science.** Fourteen members of the family published, wrote or illustrated natural history works between about 1780 and 1954. Subjects covered included botany, zoology, conchology, palaeontology and mineralogy. They worked with and for most of the great names in nineteenth century natural history, and the family correspondence is an unparalleled source of biographical, bibliographical and historical information. James Sowerby (1757-1822) married Anne de Carle in 1786 and set up house in Lambeth. James De Carle Sowerby (1787-1871) was the eldest son did not add his name to any engraved plates until after his father's death in 1822. J. De C. Sowerby went into partnership with his younger brother Charles at this date, and moved to Camden Town with his wife and eight children when the partnership was dissolved in 1831. He specialised in zoological and fossil subjects, and undertook large numbers of plates for *Annals and Magazine of Natural History*. J. De C. Sowerby was secretary of the Royal Botanic Society from 1838 until his death. William Sowerby (1827-1906) was the second son of James De

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<sup>7</sup> 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".

<sup>8</sup> Royal Society MS/682.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> RJ Cleevley. Sowerby, James De Carle, (1787-1871) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Carle Sowerby and Anne, and followed his father as an artist and engraver, although his output was much smaller. He succeeded his father as Secretary of the Royal Botanic Society, and lived in Regents Park all his life. John William Salter (1820-1869) was bound apprentice to James De Carle Sowerby (1787-1871) in 1835, and lived with the family in Camden Town and later Regents Park. He worked as artist and engraver, before obtaining a post with the Geological Survey of Great Britain in 1846. He married Sarah (known as Sally) Sowerby, his master's daughter, in the same year.

The Sowerby Collection (1739-1985) Finding Aid, prepared by John Thackeray is available on-line through A2A.

Thackray, John C. The Sowerby Collection (1739-1985). General Library Manuscripts Finding Aid. 1993.

### **Joseph Dyer, (1780–1871)**

He first came to England from America in 1802, and in 1811 married Ellen Jones, daughter of Somerset Jones of Gower Street, London, and set up house at Camden Town, where they raised three sons. He was active in introducing into England several American inventions, including Perkins's plan for steel-engraving (1809); fur-shearing and nail-making machines (1810), and the carding engine (1811).

He moved to Manchester in 1816 where he took out his first patent for a roving frame used in cotton-spinning. He aided in establishing the Royal Institution and the Mechanics' Institution at Manchester, engaged in the struggle for parliamentary reform and in the promotion of the Liverpool and Manchester railway, and in later years was closely associated with the Anti-Corn law League, both in its formation and operations. He cherished a strong hatred of slavery, and wrote several pamphlets on the subject, both prior to and during the American war.

(ODNB)

**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,<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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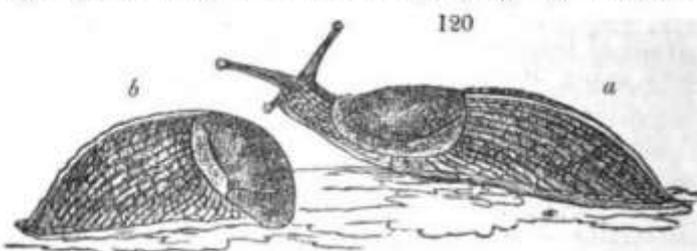
<sup>11</sup> J A Secord. Salter, John William (1820–1869) Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

<sup>12</sup> John W. Salter: the rise and fall of a Victorian palaeontological career. Archives of Natural History / 1985, Issue 1. The Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society. 1870 vol 27, Proceedings of the Geological Society pxxxvi

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

rupted travelling.

Of the existence of this species at Bayswater, Mr. Sowerby was not previously aware; but mentioned, as additional localities in which it occurs, the neighbourhood of Camden Town and the neighbourhood of Lambeth, and suspects that it is common all round London.

In two of the few Bayswater gardens with which I am acquainted, *Limax Sowerbyi* is most troublesomely abundant;

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

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,

\* Read at the first Philosophical Meeting of the Camden Literary and Scientific Institution, January 26, 1836: and now communicated by the Author.

*Third Series.* Vol. 8. No. 47. April 1836. 2 E

The painting of plants and molluscs required fine skill, and also fine printing. **James Edwards**, living at 69 Camden Road Villas led the firm Savill, Edwards & Co from premises in Chandos Street, Covent Garden.<sup>13</sup> Among publications was *Conchologia iconica, or, Illustrations of the shells of molluscous animals* by Lovell Reeve, which from 1843 – 1878 went through 20 editions

Directly next door to the Sowerby family, at 4 Camden Terrace West, lived **John Buckingham** (1786-1855). He was a professional explorer who had previous travelled and written about the Middle East and in 1842 published his 2-volume 1500 page study *The slave states of America* with a Dedication to Prince Royal.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> MH 13/268/259

<sup>14</sup> The slave states of America 1842 .Fisher & Son

**George James Symons** FRS (1838-1900) was a meteorologist who created the British Rainfall Organisation to collect meteorological data across Britain 'a mass of data of standard value, unmatched in any other country'. 'He turned his gardens in his house at Camden Square into a 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.