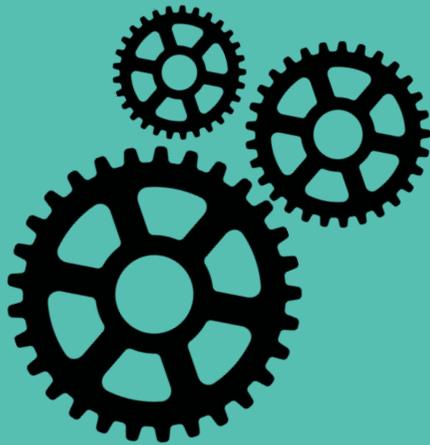


Who was
**Magnus
Volk?**



Volk's
Electric
Railway **VER**
1883



Magnus the Dreamer

‘Even as a child Magnus would rather act than watch - would rather find out by trial and error than listen to instruction’

Conrad Volk, Magnus’ youngest son

Have you ever heard of Magnus Volk? What do you already know?

Add all your information to a class display titled ‘Who was Magnus Volk?’

Magnus Volk was an engineer and inventor who was born in Brighton in 1851. At school he was known as ‘Magnus the Dreamer’ as he was easily distracted and not very good at listening to the teacher.

Young Magnus loved nothing more than to walk along Brighton seafront and watch all the new hotels being built. At the age of 12 he was even able to watch the construction of the West Pier.



Magnus the Dreamer

As he got older he was allowed to help out in his father's clock making workshop. Here he learned some important lessons about tools - including how important it was to hold them the right way, to put them back in the right place, and above all, to keep them really clean.

Imagine: What do you think Magnus was daydreaming about at school?

Find out: How much did Brighton change in Magnus' lifetime?

Add your findings to your class display



Magnus the Inventor

‘He was a unique man and his ideas were marvellous – little inventions thought up on the spot to remedy some fault or defect – sometimes I believe if he couldn’t find a fault or defect he would invent that as well for good measure!’

Clem Cozens, Engineer’s Assistant on Volk’s Electric Railway, 1915-17

Can you find out about his inventions? Add anything you find out onto your class poster.

As an adult Magnus’s favourite thing was inventing new things and experimenting with new technologies, particularly electricity. Quite often the experiments would go wrong, and once he caused an explosion that shattered every window in his house!



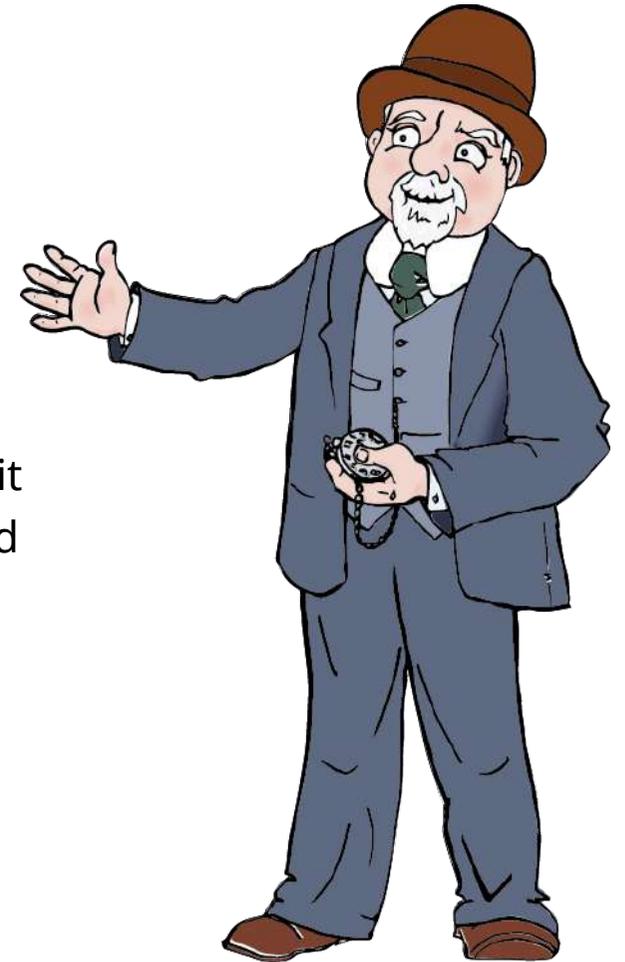
Magnus the Inventor

Magnus was a restless man whose mind was always working hard at solving new problems. Here are some of the things that kept him busy:

- he invented a game to play at dinner parties called the 'Shocking Coil', designed to give guests a small electric shock
- he put up the first ever telephone line in Brighton, between his home on Ditchling Rise and the home of his best friend William Jago, a science teacher who lived nearby

- he installed electricity for the first time in some of the most famous buildings in Brighton, including the Royal Pavilion, Brighton Museum, the Dome and the Corn Exchange

- he invented the first electric car (this didn't do very well as it was too new for old people and too slow for younger people)



Magnus the Inventor



Electric cars designed by Magnus. That's Magnus driving in the second picture.

Imagine: What would it have been like living with Magnus?

Find out: Are electric cars available today? What are the benefits of choosing an electric car over a traditional car?

Magnus & the Railway

‘I remember when the rails went over the sea and at high tide you could look down into the water. It was an exciting ride!’

Dorothy Hobbs, young passenger on Volk’s Electric Railway

What can you find out about the Volk’s Electric Railway? Add to your display.

Magnus was very interested in railways, and started making plans for his own electric one,

to run along the seafront at Brighton. On a sunny Saturday in August 1883, Volk’s Electric Railway opened for business. It was the first electric railway in Great Britain.

The original line was so successful that soon Magnus was able to extend it towards Kemptown in the East. But Magnus was so ambitious that even that wasn’t enough, so he decided to do the unthinkable, and run the railway tracks underneath the sea from Kemptown to Rottingdean.



Magnus & the Railway

The strange looking railway carriage got its nickname, the 'Daddy Long Legs' because it perched on four tall, spindly legs above the water. It also had life rings strapped to its side in case anybody fell overboard.

Although the underwater part of the line is no longer there you can still ride on the railway between the Sealife Centre and Black Rock, near the Marina, today. This makes the Volk's Electric Railway the oldest operating electric railway in the world.



Magnus & the Railway



Volk's Electric Railway on opening day, 4th of August 1883, and a picture of the track.

'People looked with alarm at the idea of an electric railway. It was said that the end of the world was coming' - Magnus Volk

Imagine: Lots of people in Brighton were against the railway. What do you think their reasons might have been?

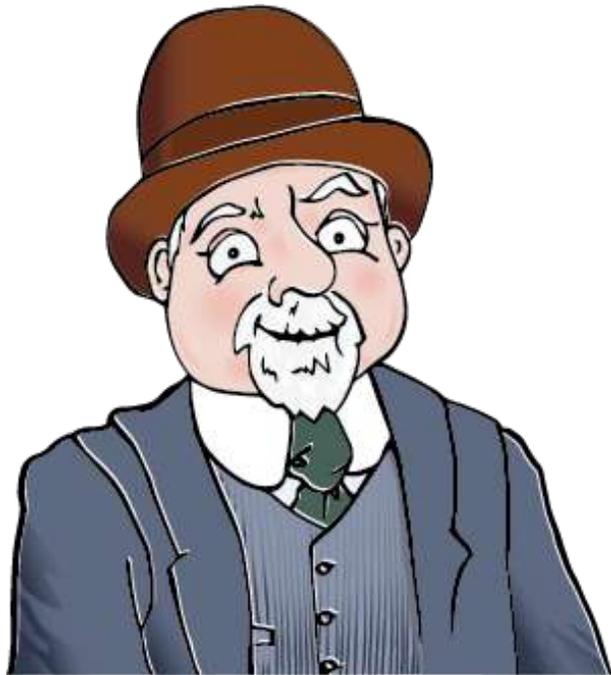
Magnus & the Railway



The Daddy Long Legs in action

Find out: What problems did the 'Daddy Long Legs' run into? Why did it end up closing?

Magnus the Family Man



‘He rarely joined in general conversation for more than a few moments. If you wanted to ask him something that called for an answer of more than a word or two, I would always look first to see if his postcard was out. This was a plain card he always carried in his pocket for making pencilled notes, jotting down ideas and so forth; and if it was on the table beside him then it was advisable to keep quiet.’

Conrad Volk, Magnus’ youngest son

What can you find out about the Volk family? Add to your display.

Magnus the Family Man

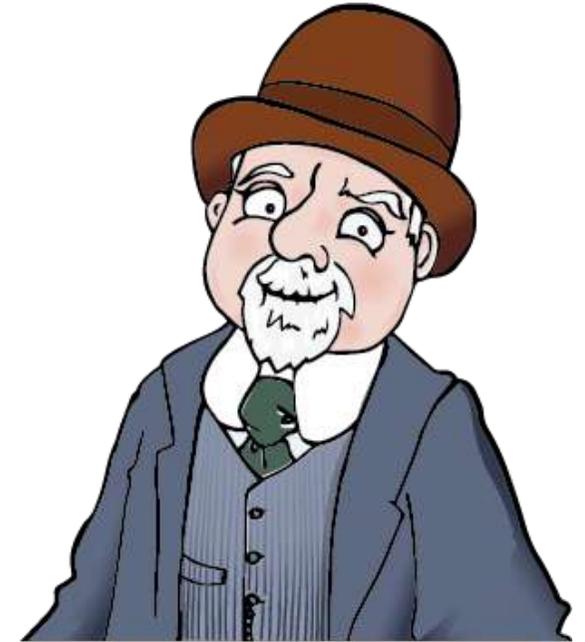
Magnus, whose family was from Germany, was married to a tall woman with dark brown hair from Sussex called Anna. Together they had seven children over nineteen years – Herman, George, Cecil, Gordon, Edgar, Muriel and Conrad. As a family they enjoyed exploring the countryside around Brighton, where Magnus also liked to take photographs.

Anna worked at the railway alongside running the busy household. It sounds like she was a bit better than Magnus at managing the money side of things!

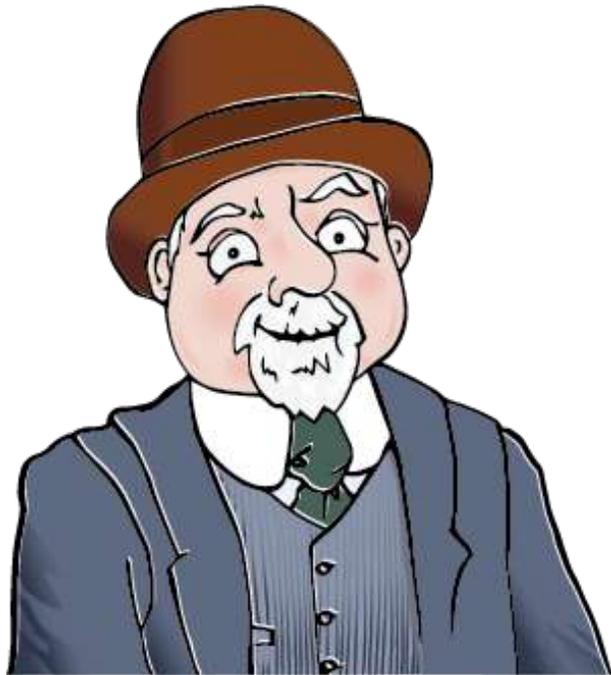
Magnus loved to travel and when his sons were old enough sent each of them off to Europe on their own for a few days to experience life outside of England. His children ended up living and working all over the world, including Brazil, South Africa and Canada. Herman took over the management of the railway and went on to open a seaplane station on the beach too.

Imagine: What do you think it would be like to grow up with six brothers or sisters?

Find out: What is a seaplane? What happened to Herman's seaplane station?



Magnus the Volunteer



‘Mr. Volk was a lovely old gentleman who always used to wear a frock-coat and Churchill type hat as well as sporting a white goatee beard. As soon as he appeared (during playtime) the children would rush up to greet him and grab his hand. He would leave rolls of tickets to enable each child to have at least one free ride on the railway he invented.’

Keith Tuppen, former pupil at Stanford Road School

What can you find out about the role Magnus played in the local community?

Add to your display.

Magnus the Volunteer

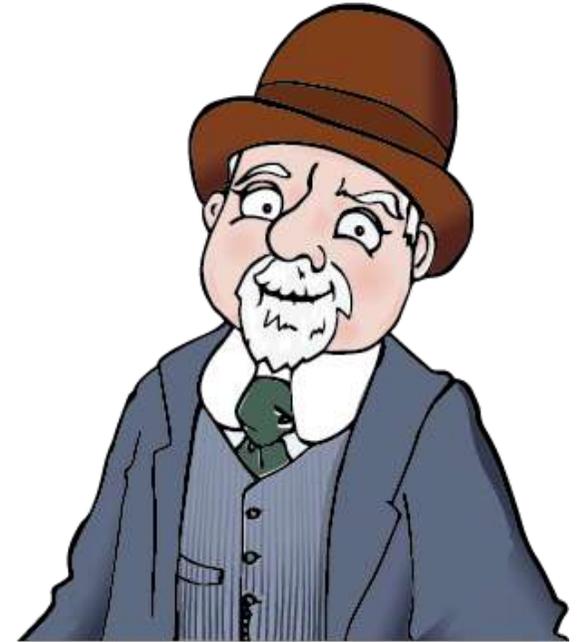
During the First World War Magnus volunteered for the X-ray department at Brighton Hospital. At home, Anna turned the family drawing room into a workshop to make clothing for soldiers fighting overseas.

After the war Magnus continued to volunteer for the hospital as well as becoming a familiar face at local schools, where he would often visit with sweets and free tickets to the railway. He loved children and would also invite them into his big garden to pick fruit or bring them back gifts from his travels

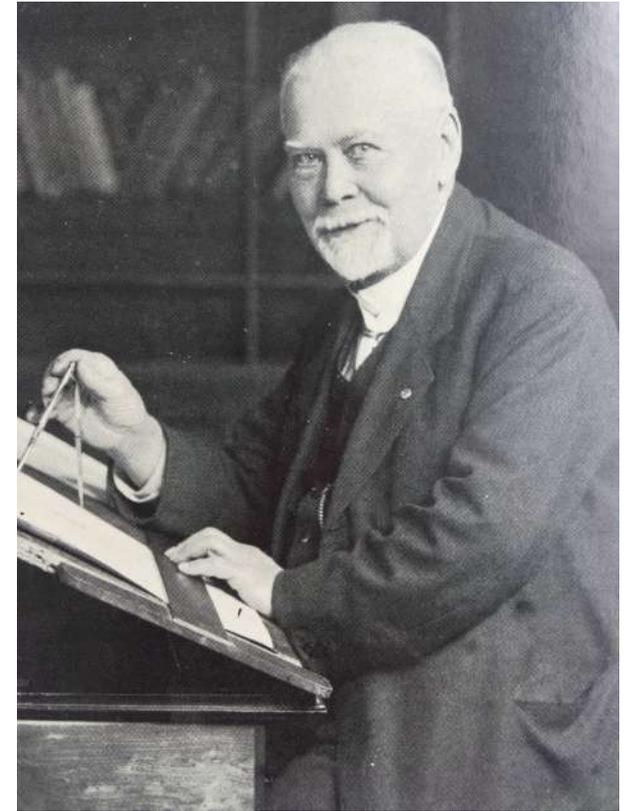
abroad.

Imagine: Why do you think Magnus was particularly interested in X Rays?

Find out: When were X Rays invented? Why were they called X Rays?



Pictures of Magnus



More about Magnus

Take a Walk Next time you walk along Brighton Seafront imagine Magnus walking the same route 150 years ago, when he was a boy. What would have been the same? What would have been different? What do you think Magnus would have thought of the changes?

Ride the Train In the summer you can still board the carriages and travel between the Sealife Centre and Black Rock, near the Marina. Get off

at Halfway Station to visit the Workshop and find out how the old trains are looked after and repaired.

Meet Magnus Ask your teacher if your class can come and meet Magnus Volk himself at Aquarium Station on the seafront and help him think of new ways to improve his railway.

Be an Engineer Would you like to have a go at designing your own form of transport? Download the 'Be an Engineer'

