

# Wander about Wednesday: The longest alleyway in London

## Wednesday 10 June 2020

Welcome to Wander about Wednesday: The longest alleyway in London - sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Today, we are focussing on the work of local historians John Hinshelwood (who, as we have described before, wears many hats - including [Hornsey Historical Society](#), [Crouch End U3A](#) and [Friends of Bruce Castle](#)) and Hugh Flouch of [Harringay Online](#). Both have carried out extensive research into the area of Harringay (with knowledge and input from others of course), and the resources they have created both in book form and online are wonderful.

If anyone is a follower of the [Ian Visits blog and weekly updates](#), then you will know it brings together and highlights the quirky, the unusual, the hidden and the overlooked around London (mainly). Whatever the day of the week, *Ian Visits* will have listed something interesting to engage with, enthral and delight. We noticed in 2018 that he put the spotlight on what might appear at first like an unpromising feature in the midst of Harringay – an alleyway known as Haringey or Harringay Passage. Drawing us in, he says: ‘At just under a mile in length, this is the longest alley in London.’



This original sign for 'Haringey Passage', just has the postal district 'N' on it. This indicates that the sign dates from pre-1917. That year, numbering was introduced to help create 'post codes' and more order in the sorting of the post. (See below more about whether it is 'Haringey' or 'Harringay').

For those of you who are confused or are finely tuned in to the spelling and the use of 'Haringey' and 'Harringay', you will have spotted already in this post the two different ways to spell what sounds like the same name/ word. But before we go any further down this alleyway, do not alarm and despond. Thanks to Hugh we have an accurate and well written explanation [here](#) which tells us the history of the use, spelling and origin of the name. As Hugh and others state, the knowledge we have today, that helps to inform our discussion on the origins of the name Harringay, Haringey and Hornsey, is all down to one person - a local school teacher, Stephen Madge. He spent 35 years painstakingly researching

and then published the definitive text on the subject: *Madge, Stephen J. (1936). The Origin of the Name of Hornsey. Public Libraries Committee Hornsey.*

We also note that the very old sign above says 'Haringey Passage', whereas other more recent signs (and Google Maps) say 'Harringay Passage'. This nods towards the historical wrangling from over 100 years ago that accounts for this – but we will leave it to the discussion [here on Harringay Online](#) to explain.

Haringey / Harringay Passage in Harringay, in the London Borough of Haringey has, needless to say, an interesting history. It is built on land once part of the estate of [Harringay House](#) (see the photograph of its grounds below). Just click on the link to discover the fascinating research about this house and estate history, as well as the area of Harringay, all uncovered and diligently drawn together by Hugh Flouch.



The grounds of Harringay House, c.1870. The house is situated behind the trees on the right of the picture.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The area was developed between 1880 and 1900 as two housing estates:

- Hornsey Station Estate (at the north end)
- Haringey Park Estate (at the south end)

The area is now known as The Ladder - which is precisely what it [resembles on a map](#). It is bordered by Wightman Road and Green Lanes. (Click on [the link here](#) for more on the names of the roads, with embedded links to further information and details from Harringay Online).



Before 1880, the estate of Haringay House was open land. As we have seen in the photograph above and the watercolour painting below (also on maps today) there was the meandering New River running through it.



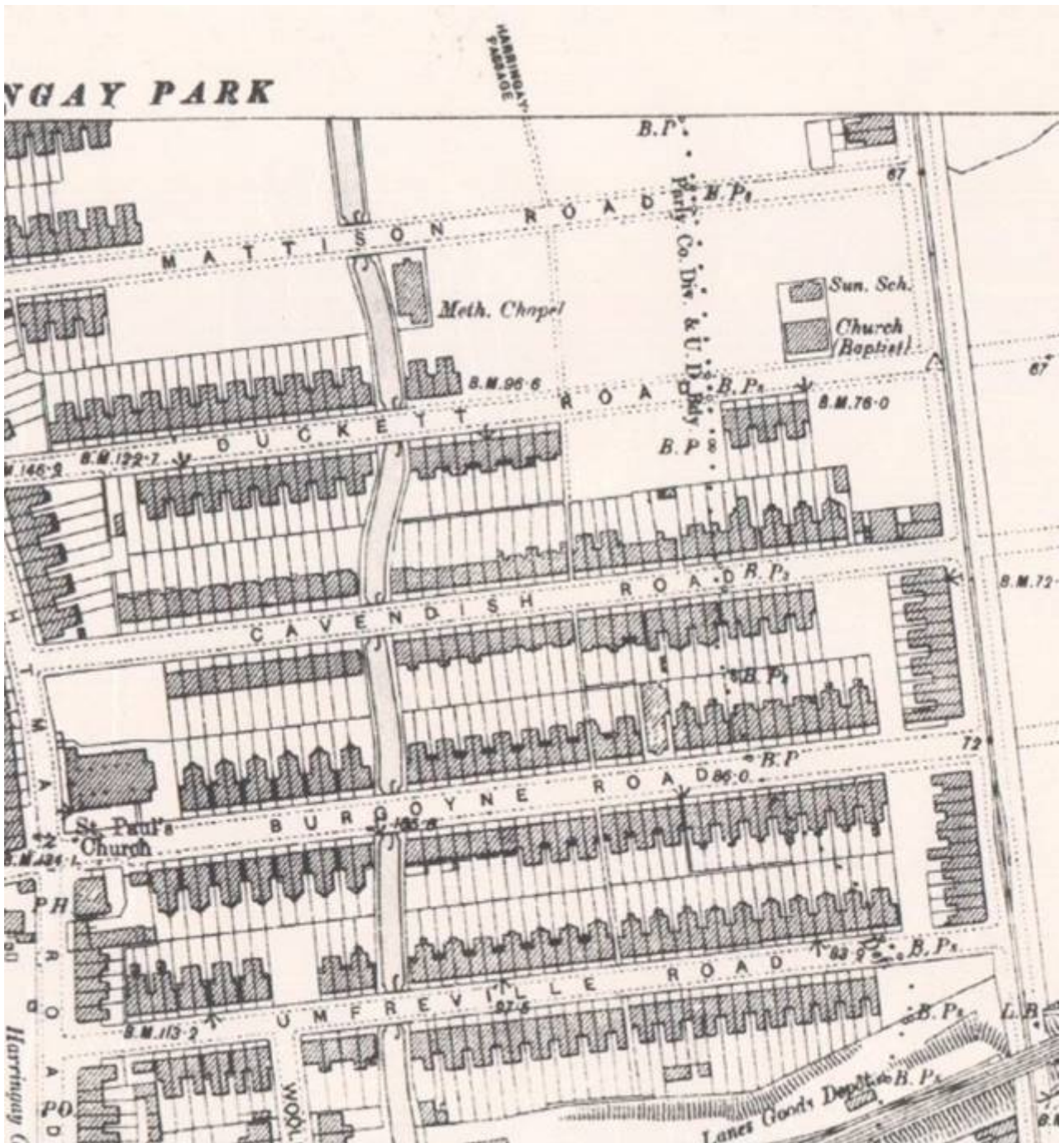
This rural landscape painted by Harold Lawes dates from 1884. The view is taken from Haringey Park looking across the fields towards Alexandra Palace. The New River flows through the foreground, with Hornsey Station and the top of the tower of St Mary's Church, Hornsey just visible in the middle distance. On the top of the hill stands the second building of Alexandra Palace, and to the west can be seen the tower of Holy Innocents Church, Hornsey.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

But surprisingly, amidst this open countryside, there was a sewer too. Industrial archaeologists out there might know that the sewer was a result of a decision by the Hornsey Local Board in 1869 to improve the sewage system.

We will hand over to John Hinshelwood to pick up this story from his research as part of a community project in 2007, telling us about the history of the sewer and the development of the Passage between the new houses that were being built. You can see all the details, and look at maps and other evidence via the link [here](#).

And for those who have never ventured along the Passage, you can do so without even taking a single step. You can follow Simon Leigh's excellent short homage to this Haringey landmark journeying along the entire length of the alleyway in [this 3 minute film](#) of photographs taken along the way.



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Above is a detail taken from the 1894 OS map, showing the southern end of The Ladder. Notice it still has some undeveloped parcels and sections of land. On the top edge of the map, you can see the words 'Harringay Passage'. You can follow it along the double dotted lines down through the undeveloped areas. Then the lines become joined up, indicating the thin gap of the actual Passage between the houses. This tells us the route of the sewer underneath as well as a possible footpath over the undeveloped land. The New River can also be seen flowing through, with houses built either side of its banks.





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In the building plan above, we can see the design and layout for 12 houses that were to be developed by William Piercy in Burgoyne Road on The Ladder. The plan is signed and dated by him on 31 January 1885.

Below is a photographic postcard view of those houses in Burgoyne Road c.1900, looking up the road from the Green Lanes end towards Wightman Road on the brow of the hill (with the outline of the old St Paul's Church just visible).

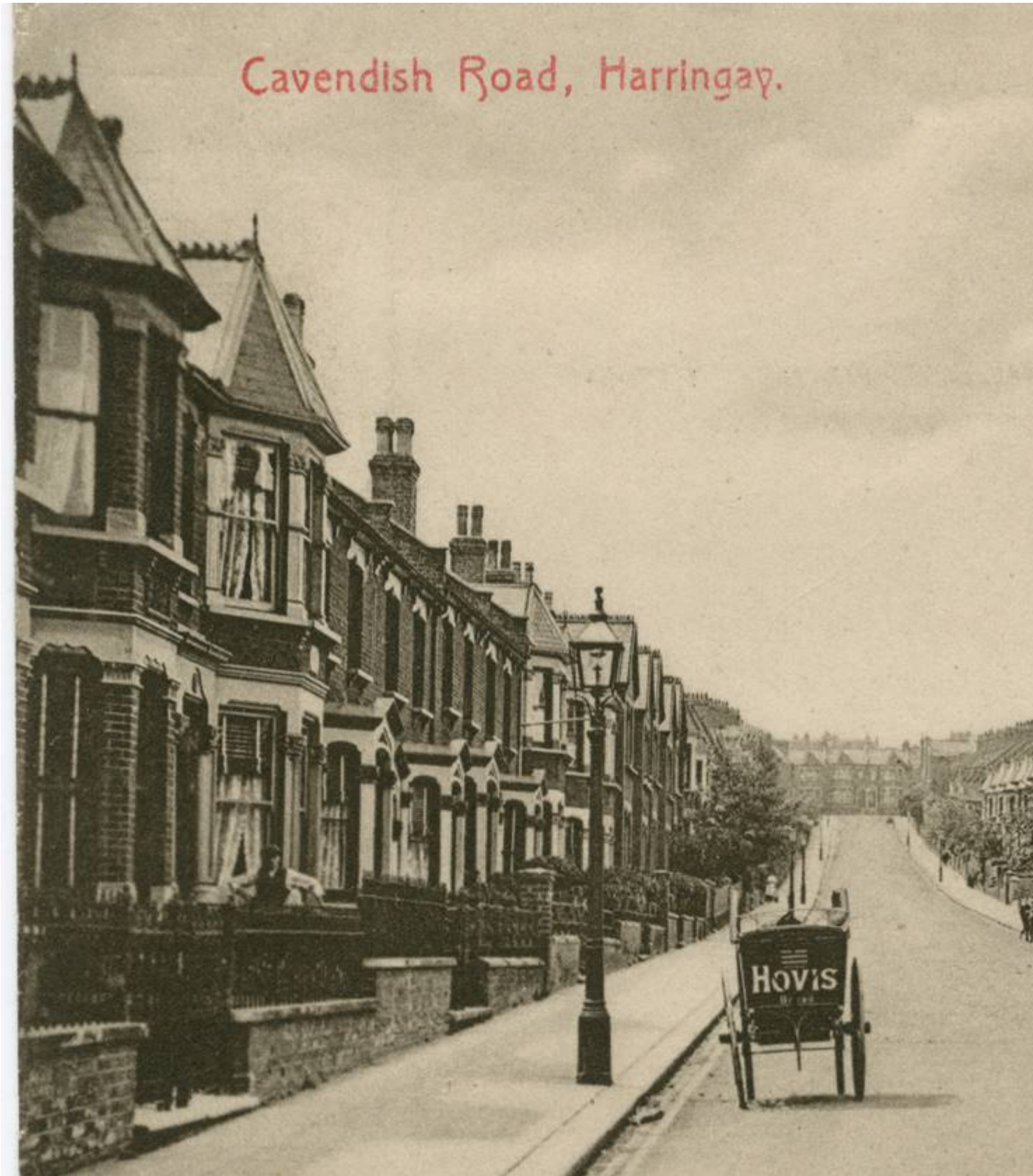


From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Here are houses in this photographic view (below) from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – they are in the next road up The Ladder from Burgoyne Road and show Cavendish Road. There's even a Hovis baker delivery cart parked outside.



## Cavendish Road, Haringay.



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The photograph below moves further up The Ladder, ending up in Seymour Road - and moving further forward in time to this scene from the late 1940s – 1950. The image shows the junction where Seymour Road meets Green Lanes. It has the corner shop of 'Jolly' which interestingly describes itself as the 'Appetite Creator'.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Our last photograph in today's post shows the side view of North Haringay school, seen from Frobisher Road and taken during the late 1940s. The school has been there since 1893 (originally as Haringay Board School), and called North Haringay since 1903. It has taught mainly infants and junior school ages, but also seniors at times in its long history. Today it is still a [primary school teaching up to the age of 11](#).





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So, that ends this brief overview and post on the history of Haringey/ Haringay Passage. With our thanks to John Hinshelwood, Hugh Flouch and the community discussion of Haringay Online.

And we will leave you with a look at this summary of the colourful variety of words we use in our language to describe an 'alleyway'. There are variations from the past and from different parts around the country – just check it out [here](#).

Another topic tomorrow – take care, keep well, stay safe

Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

**Deborah Hedgecock**  
Curator

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