

# THE GARDENS AT HARRINGAY HOUSE

the place, the plants the people



**HUGH FLOUCH**

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# Contents

1.	Introduction	I
2.	Harringay House	2
3.	Harringay House Grounds	4
4.	J.C. Loudon and Harringay House	10
5.	Edward Gray's Gardener: George Press	11
6.	The Plants of George Press	14
7.	George Press: Life after Harringay	21
8.	The Other Gardeners of Harringay House	25
9.	Bibliography	31
10.	Footnotes	31

# 1. Introduction

Harringay House and its grounds existed for a little less than a hundred years. But in those ten decades, a garden was created that became well-known in gardening circles and was celebrated for some of the plants that were cultivated, and in some cases, created there. It was also celebrated for the leading-edge technology that warmed its hot houses.

Built by wealthy Quaker merchant, Edward Gray, to the south-east of Hornsey village in 1792,<sup>1</sup> Harringay House was at the top of a knoll, on a site that is now between the top of Hewitt and Allison Roads on the Harringay Ladder. The cultivated gardens, or 'pleasure-grounds' were laid out on three sides of the house and were encircled by a big loop of the New River.

As Roderick Floud explained in his recent history of the English garden, gardens have been one of the most conspicuous, forms of expenditure on luxury in England since the seventeenth century. Gardening created a whole industry of nurseries, gardening suppliers and landscapers whose annual turnover has grown over the past few hundred years to exceed £11 billion. The gardens at Harringay were one the luxuries on which Edward Gray, who lived at the house for the first half of its life, spent his fortune.

I've been writing about the gardens for almost twenty years now, but in the course of writing this piece, I've dug deeper to get a much clearer idea of the gardens and its custodians.

## 2. Harringay House

Harringay House ranged diagonally across approximately where the houses and gardens of 18 to 28 Allison Road and 1 to 13 Hewitt Road are today. A separate wing spanned across where 180 Wightman Road and 2 to 18 Allison Road now are. With three floors and a basement, the main house had an east facing frontage of about 50 feet (15.25m). Constructed with wings running to the west behind it, its footprint stretched back 215 feet (65.5m) at its longest. The house was faced with white Suffolk brick and its entrance had a porch supported by columns. It was variously praised as 'handsome' and 'excellent'.<sup>2</sup>

Shire Hall in Chelmsford was almost exactly contemporary with Harringay House and might offer some sense of Edward Gray's mansion, since, like Harringay House, it too was built from white Suffolk brick.<sup>3</sup> The Google Street View snippet of Shire Hall's New Street face below, shows what a building made of Suffolk stone looks like.



*Fig. 1: Shire Hall, Chelmsford, was contemporary with Harringay House and all but its front was made of the same material as Harringay. At 90 feet square, it was almost twice the size of the main house at Harringay.*

To take another comparison, Harringay House followed a similar floor-plan to the one used at Kenwood House. Although Kenwood was built around the framework of a much older house, what stands today is essentially the creation of the mid and late eighteenth centuries. It is about twice the size that Harringay was, but its pattern is very similar – a main house with a conservatory (an orangery in the case of Kenwood) extending in line with the frontage of the main house and a wing (or wings for Kenwood) extending behind at a right angle. Harringay had a separate wing, probably a service wing;<sup>4</sup> Kenwood's service wing is attached. Excluding consideration of the service wings, if you were to slice off the eastern half of Kenwood, the floor-plan that remained would be very similar in size and shape to Harringay's. There were also similarities in the plants chosen for the two gardens. Walking around Kenwood's grounds today, you can still see some of the species planted at Harringay in the early nineteenth century, many of which were new to Britain at the time. At Kenwood, they include a thirty-foot magnolia and many rhododendrons.

Another eighteenth century house that warrants a horticultural comparison is Chiswick House. What is now believed to be the oldest collection of camellias under glass in the western world was planted there in 1828.<sup>5</sup> It included the Harringay-raised 'Gray's Invincible' (syn. 'Press's Invincible') camellia. In the then-prevalent belief that camellias could not survive outside in Britain, at both Chiswick and Harringay they were planted in the conservatory.



### 3. Harringay House Grounds

It is difficult to envisage the scene at Harringay House, since the only known image of it has been lost. However, we can get some idea of what the grounds and gardens were once like. Five texts, written between 1824 and 1907, along with an Ordnance Survey map and British Land Company estate plans, help us to see it in our mind's eye.<sup>6</sup> Using this information, I am going to attempt to take you on a brief guided walk of the grounds. First a map compilation.

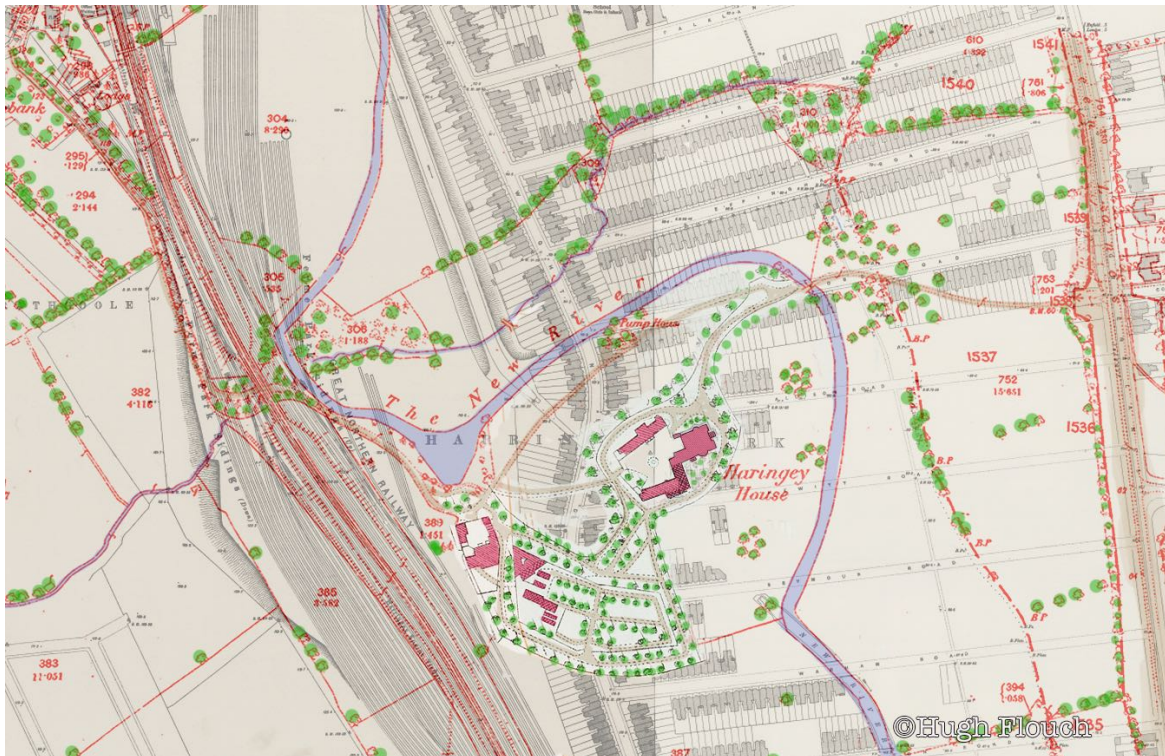


Fig. 2: Harringay House Estate - this image aims to help identify the location of various parts of the Harringay estate mentioned in this article. When used in conjunction with the article, it should also help the reader picture the estate as it was. The image mixes the 1863 Ordnance Survey (bright red lines) and the 1893 Ordnance Survey map (grey background map). The layers correlate almost exactly. The house, outbuildings and grounds are from the 1881 British Land title and the 1883 British Land sale plan because those two documents show clearer details of the buildings than does the 1863 Ordnance Survey map. The plan outlines correlate almost exactly with those on the maps, but the correlation is not shown for reasons of overall map clarity. The old course of the New River and the Stonebridge Brook, as shown on the 1863 map, have been coloured blue. Also using the details shown on both the 1863 map and the British Land plans, trees have been coloured green and roadways have been faintly coloured in brown. The two houses shown on Hewitt Road to the south of Harringay House are number 14 and 16. The buildings at the north end of the kitchen garden can be identified through [an article on Harringay Online](#).

Starting the tour at the entrance to the estate would have placed you on Green Lanes, then commonly called the Southgate Road, almost opposite where Colina Road is today. It is described as having been a broad entrance with ornamental wrought iron gates<sup>7</sup> and on either side stood gate lodges, built in a style matching the house; so I assume made of white brick. Stretching away on both sides of the entrance, the estate was bounded by hawthorn hedges and a belt of trees.

Standing at the gates on Green Lanes and looking towards the house, you would have seen the carriage-way curving up off to your right and then sweeping back across the hill with the house beyond, mainly obscured by trees. Half-way up the hill, the carriage-way crossed the New River on an ornamental metal bridge (roughly where the road is today between 58-60 and 61-63 Beresford Road). About twenty yards before the bridge, the way entered a copse composed of oak, elm, beech and birch. Beyond the river, it was lined with lime trees all the way up. At the top, in front of the house, was the gravelled carriage-circle, also fringed by limes.

Standing on the carriage circle in front of the house, you would have had commanding views, through the fringe of limes, to the north, south and east. Looking east, about half way down the slope, you would have seen part of the loop of the New River, over which you had just crossed. The area within the river's loop comprised about 15 acres of cultivated gardens, or pleasure-grounds, laid out on three sides of the house. They covered roughly the top half of the land now occupied by the houses on both sides of Seymour, Hewitt, Allison and Beresford Roads.

Starting your circular tour by entering the house through its porticoed entrance, not far beyond the hallway, you would have entered the 70-foot east-facing conservatory (now extending across where the houses and back gardens of 3, 5 and 7 Hewitt Road are). Set at a perpendicular to the end of the conservatory was a south-facing 22-foot greenhouse (diagonally across where the front gardens of numbers 3 and 5 Hewitt Road now are). After passing through the conservatory, in a large open area where it joined the greenhouse, you would have been surrounded by large camellia trees, acacias, orange, lemon and lime trees and eucalyptus and banksia from Australia. Elsewhere in the glasshouses were cactus, sugarbushes (protea), tropical orchids and exotic giant spider lilies. On a cold day, you would have been particularly grateful for the leading-edge steam-driven heating system that warmed both buildings. The heating had been installed by a company best-known at the time for their curvilinear glasshouses. So, speculating somewhat, it is possible that one or both of the Harringay glasshouse buildings, described as 'ornamental', were built in a curvilinear shape.

Taking the staircase from the far end of the greenhouse would have brought you out on the south side of the house. Immediately to your right was a fifteen foot south facing wall, against which had been planted some of the magnolia trees, for which the house became well-known. Some were already as tall as twenty feet as early as the mid 1830's.<sup>8</sup> Having admired the trees, walking on, heading south away from the house, you would have found the gardens bordered by evergreen oaks, a tulip tree, and a variegated holly. Through the trees, was a view of the New River as it flowed south towards Stoke Newington.





Fig. 3: Tulip Tree. Illustration from *Traité des Arbres et Arbustes que l'on cultive en France en pleine terre* (1801–1819) Pierre-Joseph Redouté.

Crossing the gardens on the south side of the house and turning to walk diagonally across the slope in front of the carriage circle, in the direction of Wood Green, you would have passed through more well-tended gardens which included rhododendrons planted shortly after the species was first introduced to Britain. Also in this part of the garden are “roses of the apple-bearing species, trained as trees”. This could refer to either roses with large rose-hips or

crab-apples (the plants are related), but I assume the former. There were also Lebanon cedars, various species of oak, acacias, pines, cypresses, walnuts, planes, purple beeches, Japanese pagoda trees (sophora) and some very large arbutus trees with their colourful curving trunks. Half-way down the hill, a path from the carriageway bridge followed the river around the north side of the house as far as the lake-like basin formed by a curve in the river (see fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> Just before the basin, beneath a weeping willow tree, was a dovecote (at a point now near the top of Allison Road).



*Fig. 4: The dovecote, looking west, with the railway embankment in the distance. Sept, 1888, Artist unknown.*

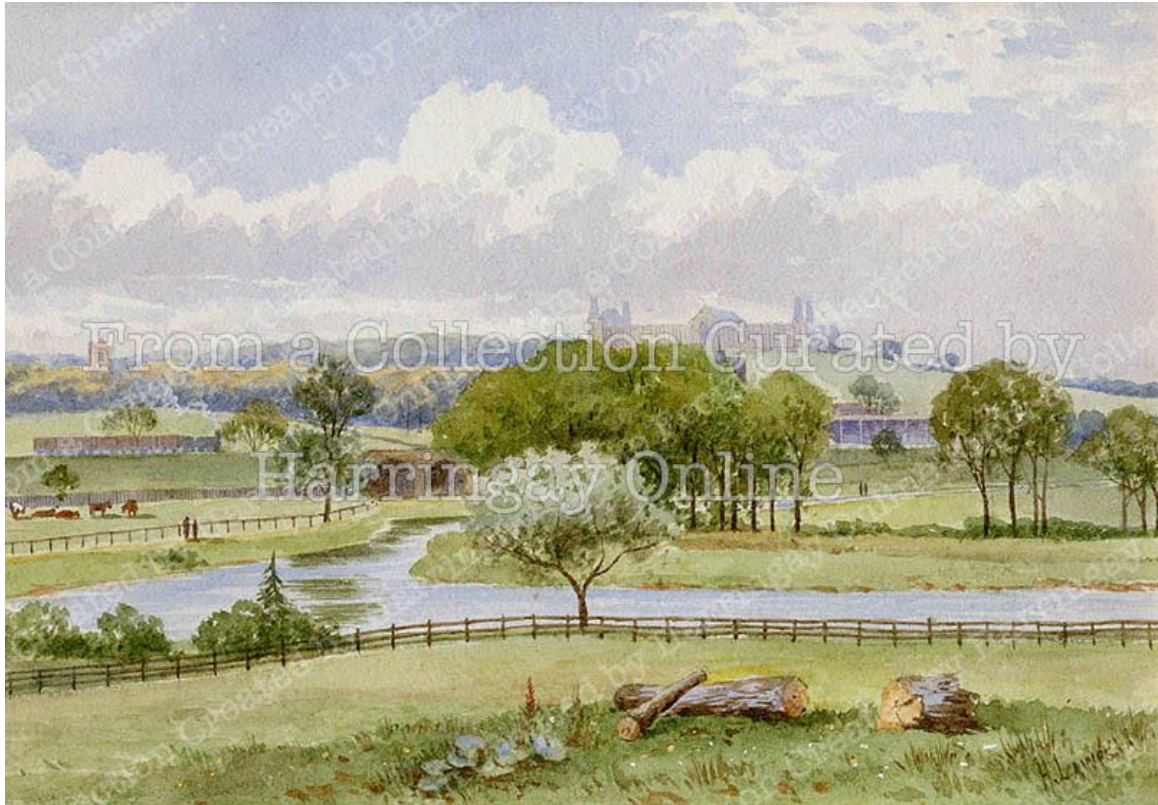
Standing at the dovecote and looking south back towards the house, you would have seen the detached service-wing ranged at a slight angle to the house.





Fig. 5: Looking south-west at what I believe is the detached service wing of the house. The dovecote is just behind the fence. I believe the wavy lines in front of the fence represent the New River. In the background is the embankment of the railway line. Artist unknown, date c1884. (Image: Copyright Bruce Castle Museum).

Crossing behind the service-wing, would have brought you to the yard. Set on the lower part of the slope, behind and to the west of the main house, this included the coach-house, boiler-house, dairy,<sup>10</sup> wash-house, brew-house and stables. Further to the west, the yard was bounded by walls with high gates, the posts of which were covered with ivy. Beyond the gates, a track led to where the station now stands in Tottenham Lane. When the railway was built as a two-track line in the late 1840s, a gap was left in the high railway embankment, spanned by a stone viaduct with a two (or possibly five) arches. Today, this spot is about 750 feet directly east of Beresford and Effingham Roads, buried deep under the railway line after it was widened and further embanked.<sup>11</sup> Depicted below, in a watercolour from the 1880s, the viaduct allowed free passage along the track to Haringay House and the unimpeded flow of the Stonebridge Brook.



*Fig. 6: Looking north west, from a point to the west of where the junction of Allison and Wightman Roads is today, perhaps on the site of one the gardens of 191 to 201 Wightman Road. The lake-like basin is on the left. There is evidence of tree-felling in the foreground. Harold Lawes, c1885 (Image: Copyright Bruce Castle Museum).*

To the south of the yard, you end your short tour in the much-praised kitchen garden with its collection of leading-edge hothouses. In the 18th and 19th centuries, kitchen gardens grew a wide diversity of crops, sufficient to cater for much of a grand house's needs for fruit and vegetables and cut-flowers. Such gardens were expensive undertakings and were carefully planned for maximum productivity. Floud made no bones about what he feels was their purpose.

"the serried ranks of vegetables, with never a weed to be seen, the walls, covered with carefully trained fruit trees, the Gothic greenhouses, were indeed, beautiful and, at the same time utilitarian. But they were also as important means of displaying the wealth and taste of the owners as the statues, temples, cascades, or artfully, placed clumps of trees. They, like the pleasure gardens, or the lakes, with there to be seen, to be viewed, and to incite envy and emulation as part of the guests' tour of the estate.

"They were also, like the paintings that adorned the walls of the stately homes that they served, a sign of luxury, clearly not justified by the monetary value of the fruit and vegetables they produced. They were status symbols, the embodiment of Thorstein Veblen's conspicuous consumption..... Relying solely on produce from the kitchen gardens, particularly of the great states, was a wildly impractical solution to the feeding of a whole household."

To the south of the yard, you end your short tour in the much-praised kitchen garden with its collection of leading-edge hothouses. In the 18th and 19th centuries, kitchen gardens grew a wide diversity of crops, sufficient to cater for much of a grand house's needs for fruit and vegetables and cut-flowers. Such gardens were expensive undertakings and were carefully planned for maximum productivity. Harringay's kitchen garden was set on the west-facing slope behind the main house (partly under where 143 to 183 Wightman Road now are and partly under the since-much-widened railway). Like most kitchen gardens of the period, Harringay's were half-walled. A range of kitchen garden buildings were heated by the same steam-driven boiler apparatus that warmed the domestic glasshouses. These included two 40-foot (12m) graperies, two pineries (for pineapples), a peach house, a mushroom house and a 40-foot strawberry pit.<sup>12</sup>



## 4. J.C. Loudon and Harringay House

The man thought by many to have been the leading garden designer and theorist of the early nineteenth century, Scotsman, John Claudius Loudon (1783 -1843) was apparently a regular visitor to Harringay House. He may even have been involved in the creation of its hothouses.

In the *Gardener's Magazine* in 1840, Loudon wrote that he had known the garden at Harringay House for twenty years. The accounts he gave of his visits contributed to the celebrity of Harringay's gardens. At a time when touring country houses was spreading beyond the gentry, Loudon's book *Gardening Tours*, probably did as much as anything to spread the fame of the Harringay House magnolias, camellias and hot houses. He referred to the:

“beautifully situated villa of Harringay, noticed for some of the largest specimens of Magnolia in the neighbourhood of London, especially *M. macrophylla*, the second largest in England”

From 1813 to 1814, Loudon began to focus on the improvement of the construction of greenhouse technology. He experimented with the layout and design of glass roofs and walls and developed the curvilinear greenhouse. The design was subsequently sold to Messrs W. and D. Bailey of Holborn, the very firm who installed the steam system for the hot houses at Harringay. This coincidence of connections is what has led me to speculate that the Harringay conservatory may have been constructed to Loudon's curvilinear design. It has also led me to consider the possibility that the hothouses and conservatory may have been an early nineteenth century addition to the house, or a final building phase.<sup>13</sup>

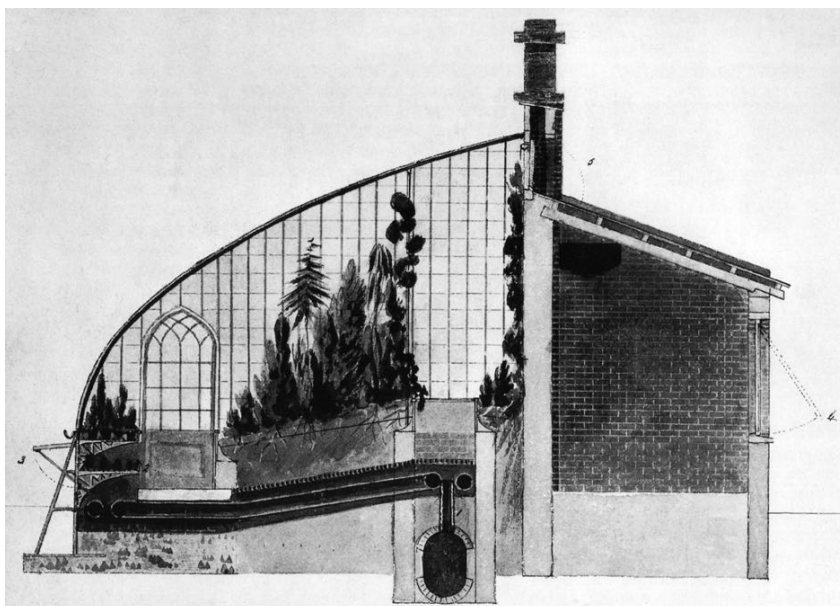


Fig. 7: Loudon's design for Horticultural Society 1818, Wikimedia. Original from an unidentified book in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



## 5. Edward Gray's Gardener: George Press

In the few historical mentions that the gardens of Harringay House have received, credit for the garden is given to Edward Gray. No doubt he had a deep and abiding interest in his garden and he clearly spent serious sums of money on it; he was also an early fellow of the Horticultural Society.<sup>14</sup> However, we should assume that much of the praise for the success of Harringay's gardens belongs to his gardener, George Press.

Born in Great Yarmouth in 1790, Press had arrived in London during the first decade of the nineteenth century. His marriage in Southwark in 1809, suggests that this may have been where he settled initially. This would certainly have been a good choice for a young man intent on following a career in gardening, since it had, since the Restoration, been one of the principal centres for London's nurseries and market gardens.



Fig. 8: Even as London's tentacles were making deep inroads into Southwark towards the middle of the century, nurseries and market gardens still survived there. (Greenwood's map of London, 1830).

A letter, published in *The Gardener*<sup>15</sup> in 1835, from George Press's son, Thomas, dates his father's arrival at Harringay House to no later than 1814. At this point, George was just 25 years old. Thomas's 1815 baptism record, describes his father as a gardener, living in Hanger Lane (St Ann's Road), just yards away from the Harringay House gates.

We have no direct evidence of George's journey from Great Yarmouth to Harringay, other than this, but we can make some guesses about his story based on what is known of the history of gardening.

The eighteenth century had seen a transformation in the gardening sector and the garden industry was well-established before the age of the Industrial Revolution. By the early years of the nineteenth century, gardening was increasingly coming to be regarded as a profession. As well as gardeners, both jobbing and employed, there were nurserymen, seedsmen and several other associated roles. The business of gardening was also increasingly crossing national borders. Many gardeners were training abroad and imports of plants from Britain's overseas colonies and trade connections were becoming more and more common. Plant imports from the Americas had started in the early eighteenth century, possibly even in the late seventeenth. Magnolia trees, for which Harringay became so well-known, were described in catalogues as early as 1739. The world into which George Press had been born was, then, possessed of a large and well-established gardening profession.

At this time in Britain, nearly half the male population followed their father's occupation. Whilst we know that George Press's father, John Press, lived in Norfolk, we know nothing else about him. But we know that statistically, there is a good chance that he too was a gardener. This would make good sense, since we know that George was employed at Harringay House and planting valuable magnolia trees at the age of 25. To have been sufficiently prepared to secure a job in charge of an important garden at this age, he would need to have started learning at the age of 11 or 12. Such an early start was common in this period and would, most likely, have been at the behest, and probably under the tutelage of his father. The famous early nineteenth century gardener Joseph Paxton,<sup>16</sup> was appointed Head Gardener at Chiswick House at the age of 23, in 1826. So, Press's appointment as the 'Head Gardener' for Harringay at around the age of 25 looks perfectly realistic.

This trajectory suggests that Press's move to London at around the age of 16 was probably made to continue his learning and advance a career in gardening. Southwark would have been a good place for that.

I should point out that Press is only ever referred to as 'Gardener' at Harringay. However, by 1826, he was listed in *Pigot's Directory* as the Gardener for Harringay House. His was one of only fifteen entries for tradesmen listed in Hornsey. That and the other references to him in journals from the early 1820s suggest that it is likely that he was the head gardener in all but name, probably from the outset, but almost certainly by the 1820s.

Press's role at Harringay House would have been one with many responsibilities. The design of the garden would most likely have been first amongst them. The great majority of country house gardens in this period were designed by the head gardener, not by a travelling professional designer. Press would also have been responsible for raising and procuring plants, for the care and maintenance of the pleasure garden, kitchen garden and all the hot-houses. He would also have had a team of staff to manage. It is known that by the time of Gray's death, there was a staff of three in the garden,<sup>17</sup> but it may have been twice that number when the garden was in its heyday.

In his recent history of the gardening trade, Roderick Floud calculated that a head gardener in the nineteenth century earned an average of £53,000 at today's values. In some cases, gardeners combined their 'day-job' with running a commercial nursery. We know that Press had a nursery on Tottenham Lane by 1841 and that he owned various other properties nearby. Given the wealth revealed by his will, we might assume that he had such a second string to his income bow from an earlier, rather than a later, point in time.<sup>18</sup>

There is no record that Press ever lived at Harringay House. He can be placed, however, nearby. Voting records from at least as early as 1832, show that George owned five freehold houses in West Green, including some in Hanger Lane. We might reasonably assume then that he lived in one of his own properties.<sup>19</sup>

## 6. The Plants of George Press

Press was at Harringay from c1814 until around the time of Edward Gray's death in 1838. During his quarter-century stewardship, he oversaw a garden that became somewhat celebrated and raised at least five recognised Camellia cultivars, all of which are thought to survive to this day, albeit mainly in the hands of collectors. 'Press's Invincible' (syn. 'Gray's Invincible') is thriving at Chiswick House, both in the conservatory and at several locations in the garden.

A letter about Press's camellias published in J.C. Loudon's *Gardener's Magazine* in May 1827, said the following).

"I understand that the best judges consider these flowers as the finest that have hitherto been raised in this country. It is said the Fellows of the Horticultural Society were quite ravished with them and I have no doubt they will be in greater request than any of the varieties now in the nurseries. I hope justice will be done to the extraordinary merit and good fortune of Mr Press who is really an excellent gardener, as his superb Magnolias, pines in fruit every month in the year, grapes and peaches now nearly ripe, and, indeed, all his other articles, evidentially show."

His Harringay Camellia creations are described briefly below.<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 10: 'Gray's/Press's Invincible' at Chiswick House, April 2022 (Image: Hugh Flouch)



**Harringay Camellia I - *Camellia japonica* 'Gray's Invincible' (syn. 'Pressii Invincible' / 'Imperialis' / 'Pressii Punctata' and many others)**

Bred in 1824, this is perhaps George Press's best-known cultivar. During the course of researching this subject, I got in touch with the gardeners at Chiswick House and one day in mid-April, travelled there to meet estate gardeners George and Chris along with new Head gardener Rosie. I was delighted to be able to see George Press's Harringay child thriving. The examples I saw were of the palest most delicate clear pink with deeper pink flecking. The camellia specialist at Chiswick described it as the team's favourite. I was thrilled to be given a two-year old example to bring 'home' to a site that used to be part of the Harringay House gardens. So, now, for the first time in probably 150 years, Harringay is once again home to a 'Press's / Gray's Invincible' Camellia.



Fig. 9: 'Gray's Invincible' (syn 'Pressii Invincible') published in Edwards's Botanical Register, James Ridgway, London 1829.

**Harringay Camellia 2 - *Camellia japonica* 'Press's Eclipse', (syn. 'Eclips C Pressii' and many others!)**

Bred in 1827. This was apparently similar to and believed to have been bred from the same capsule (seed pod) as 'Invincible', but differs from it in that it has a white background.



Fig. 11: 'Press's Eclipse' from Collection de Camellias, Baumann, Charles & Napoleon, 1828.



**Harringay Camellia 3 - *Camellia japonica* 'Pressii Rosea' (syn. 'Pressii Pink' / 'Anemoniflora Rosa de Press') c1836**



Fig. 12: *Camellia* 'Pressii Rosea' from Paxton's Magazine of Botany, and Register of Flowering Plants, Volume 5, 1838.

**Harringay Camellia 4 - *Camellia japonica* 'Press's Single Red' (syn. 'Press Simple'), bred 1827.**

**Harringay Camellia 5 - *Camellia japonica* 'Coronata de Press', first recorded 1839.**

### **George Press's Magnolia's**

Press and Harringay also became well-known for huge magnolias.<sup>21</sup> In the mid 1830's, Thomas Press singled out a number of his father's prize trees for mention. They included,

- a twenty-year old twenty-feet high, twenty-two foot span *Magnolia grandiflora*.



Fig. 13: Botanical study of a Bull Bay (*Magnolia grandiflora*) by Georg Dionysius Ehret (1708-70); watercolour and gouache on vellum; London; 1743, RHS.

- a twenty-five foot *Magnolia conspicua*, which Press Junior said produced at least 2,000 blooms;
- what was claimed to be, at twenty-two-feet, the largest specimen of *Magnolia macrophylla* (Big leaf magnolia) in the country;
- a twenty-foot *Magnolia cordata* (Cucumber tree); and last, but not least, a *Magnolia soulangeana* (Saucer magnolia). This is the magnolia tree most commonly seen in gardens today.<sup>22</sup>



Fig. 14: *Magnolia soulangeana*, from *Traité des Arbres et Arbustes que l'on cultive en France en pleine terre* (1801–1819) Pierre-Joseph Redouté.



Harringay's garden also contained many other exotic plants that appear to have been less well known beyond gardening circles. Two trees of note in the conservatory were the Banksias, named in honour of Sir Joseph Banks, a botanist who was with Captain Cook during his first voyage (1768-1771).

The *Banksia marginata* was a species of tree or woody shrub from south-eastern Australia. One of the first places it was grown outside Australia was at Harringay House. The others were Kew Gardens, Cambridge Botanic Gardens and Woburn Abbey. Harringay also boasted, in the conservatory, a *Banksia latifolia*. In 1817, it became the first specimen to flower in this country.



Fig. 15: *Banksia Latifolia* from Curtis's Botanical Magazine, Vol 38, 1813.

## 7. George Press: Life after Harringay

Edward Gray died in 1838. He left Press the sum of £40 in his will, about £50,000 in today's values.<sup>23</sup> This was half the amount left to the Butler and 20% less than the amount left to the Housekeeper, but Press did better than the rank-and-file servants, who were bequeathed only a 'suit of morning'.

Press didn't let the grass grow under his feet after Harringay. He bought a property in Prospect Place, Turnpike Lane (just to the east of the railway line). I suspect that it was bought at the 1840 Garaway sale, shown in the newspaper clipping below. The site became the Prospect Nursery and Press as its occupier was described as florist and nurseryman.<sup>24</sup>

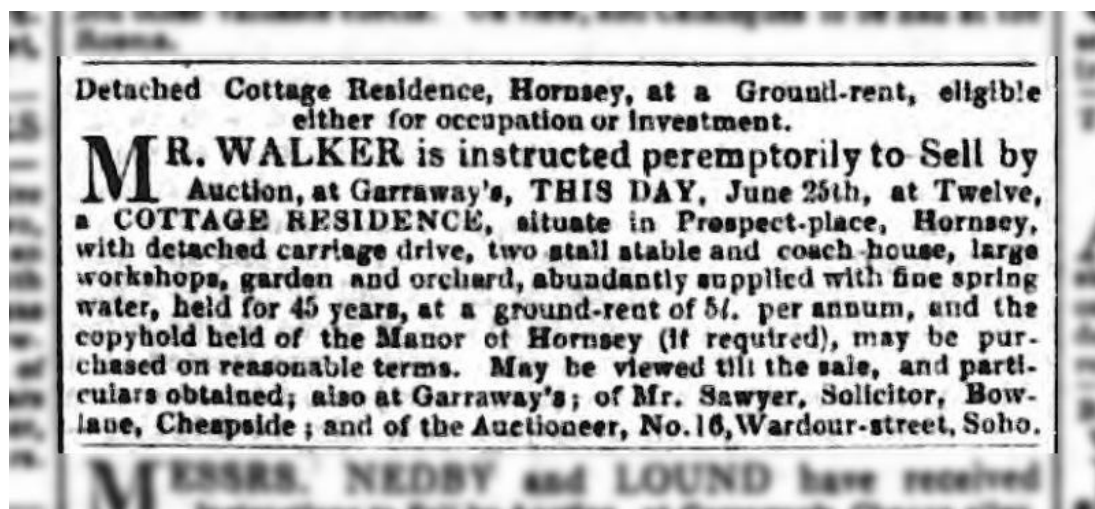


Fig. 16: Morning Post, 25th June 1840.

Press's retirement wasn't without its troubles, however. Six years after he bought the property, the Great Northern Railway Act was passed. The new railway cut across the corner of Press's new property and it eventually resulted in a court case between Press and the Great Northern Railway Company.

**SHERIFFS' COURT, RED LION-SQUARE, NOV. 27.**

(Before Mr. Under Sheriff Burchell.)

**PRESS V. THE GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY.**

This was a Special Jury case. The plaintiff, Mr. Press, who is a gardener and florist at Hornsey, sought compensation in damages for a small piece of freehold land, upon which an embankment of the York and London Railway has been raised.

The defendants suffered judgment to go by default; the Jury, therefore, were simply to assess the damage.

Mr. Edwin James appeared for the plaintiff, and Mr. Baxter, the company's solicitor, for the defendants.

The only question in the case was one of value, the plaintiff claiming 300*l.*, whilst the company considered 95*l.* was a fair value. The plaintiff, it appeared, is a very old man, having spent all his life in the culture of fruit and flowers, in both of which he excelled. Some few years ago he bought the fee simple of half an acre of land at Hornsey for 700*l.*, on which he erected a house, and converted the ground into a fruit and flower-garden. The Great Northern Railway crosses a corner of this garden, and in consequence of the embankment thrown up on the spot the garden has been considered less valuable, both as regards the extent of land as well as by the genial air being shut out from the garden, and the cold winds being concentrated at that point.

Evidence of the usual character was brought forward in support of the plaintiff's claim, from which it appeared that the piece of land appropriated by the Company contained but six poles, and was not worth more than from 10*l.* to 12*l.*, but the consequential damage to the property, by reason of the embankment, was estimated at from 250*l.* to 302*l.*

Mr. Baxter having addressed the Jury in mitigation of damages,

The Learned Under-Sheriff summed up.

The Jury, without any hesitation, gave a verdict for the plaintiff, estimating the value of the land at 10*l.*, and the consequential damage at 250*l.*—total damage 260*l.*

Fig. 17: From the Morning Advertiser, 28th November 1849.

Press continued to develop camellia cultivars after he had left Harringay House. A further four are recorded at the International Camellia Society as having been created by him in the 1840s. All but one of them are now classed as 'believed extinct'.





*Fig. 18: Prospect Nursery shown on the 1863 and 1893 Ordnance Survey maps. Where the railway crosses the road, in the bottom left-hand corner of the map, is where the bridge across Turnpike Lane is today. The 1851 census described Press's address as Prospect Place "under railway Bridge".*

In 1851, Press was in his sixties. His oldest son Thomas had moved out to a cottage in Park Road near to the centre of Crouch End and was working as a gardener. Younger son George jnr. was still at home. Three years later, George snr died, leaving the nursery and all his plant stock to George jnr., who carried on the business until the early 1870s. By 1881, George jnr.'s son, yet another George was living in Brook Road, Hornsey and became the third George in succession to earn his living in the gardening business.

By 1875, the Prospect Nursery had been sold and it was changing hands again from nurseryman James Whittaker to a Joseph Pollard. From 1880, it was run by Thomas Gayton. Then, in about 1895, it was taken on by former Paddington Florist's Assistant, Alex Macgregor. He ran the premises as a nursery and florist until 1935, when Prospect Place was demolished to make way for the widening of Turnpike Lane.

Today, Press is not completely forgotten. He usually warrants a nod in descriptions that appear in specialist lists of what these days is most commonly referred to as 'Gray's Invincible'. He has also and earned a place in Ray Desmond's 2002 *Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturalists Including Plant Collectors, Flower Painters and Garden Designers*.

## 8. The Other Gardeners of Harringay House

It seems likely that Edward Gray made some arrangements for tending for the grounds from soon after he built Harringay House, in 1792, but there are no records until the arrival of Press. It may simply be that the records have not survived, or, as I suggest in note 12, it might be that Gray's passion for gardening didn't consume him until later in life. Perhaps earlier in life, he did little more than keep the grounds of Harringay House in a tidy condition.

After Gray died, Harringay House was sold to ship owner, merchant of Leadenhall Street, Director of the Bank of England, prolific investor in small railways and JP, Edward Chapman, from the well-established and landed Chapman family in Whitby. The new owner saw to it that the gardens were maintained, although perhaps not to the same degree as they had been under Gray's stewardship.

For thirty years, from 1839 to 1869, they were under the tender care of gardener Charles Collins. In 1824 he had been a gardener living in Highbury. By 1841 he was at Harringay House. We know that in 1851, he was living above stables.

Collins continued the tradition of the Harringay House gardener being recognised for their horticultural expertise. In 1847 he was awarded the silver medal by the Horticultural Society for "12 Greenhouse and Stove plants".<sup>25</sup> In 1855, he was given recognition for his plants in a show at the Horticultural Society.

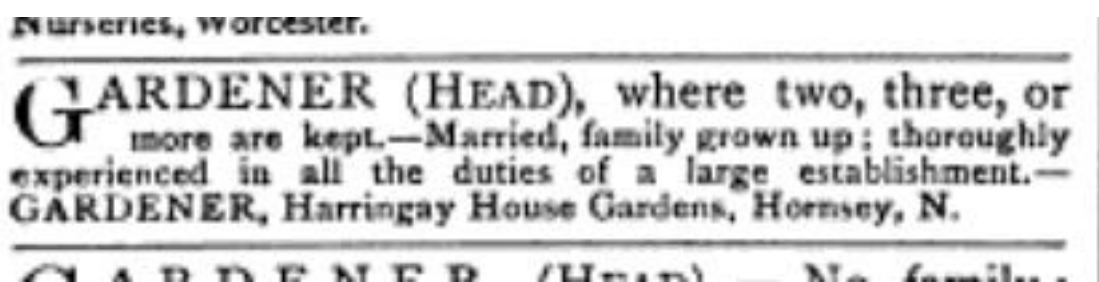
*The rest of the cut flowers was a large box of thirty-two kinds of camellias from Mr Collins, gardener to E. H. Chapman Esq., Harringay House. These were much admired for the large size and brilliant tints of the individual blooms.*<sup>26</sup>

We know from a plant sale after Chapman's death, that the camellias, citrus trees and many other hot house plants had lived on and grown to significant sizes by 1869. The last record we have of the magnolias is from 1840.

Following Chapman's demise, Harringay House was let and Collins moved about half a mile away (as the crow flies) to Hanbury Road, off Tottenham Lane. A two-minute walk from his front door, he could have looked across the still-verdant valley to the tree-shrouded Harringay House. Aged 70 and a widower, he was still working as an occasional gardener, living with his dressmaker daughter. By 1881, aged 82, Collins had moved to Campsbourne Road, off Hornsey High Street.

In 1870, banker William Alexander took on Harringay House.<sup>27</sup> According to the census of 1871, gardeners Robert Whiting and John Knight were sharing the 'Gardeners Cottage'. No records of the garden survive for this period, but both Alexander and his wife were keen amateur artists and I suspect that watercolours of the garden exist somewhere in a family collection.

The last tenant of the house, probably from 1877 was Frederick William Price. The 1881 census shows Rick King as gardener, living in 'Harringay Lodge', probably one of the buildings clustered around the yard, behind the main house. Price held on in the house till 1882.<sup>28</sup> In the same year, the following advertisement was placed, I assume by Rick King.



*Fig. 19: The Gardeners' Chronicle Volume 18, 1882.*

Harringay House was demolished in late 1884 or early 1885 and between April and September that year, there was a series of sales of its building materials. The outbuildings, possibly including the service wing, survived till 1887 in use by a company called Foster and Barry who were expanding the railway sidings for the Great Northern Railway Company. An extensive fire in July of 1887 destroyed all remaining buildings with the exception of the coach-house. By the mid-1890's all trace of the house and gardens had gone, to be replaced by the rows of housing that stand there still today, but in a small part of the site of Harringay House gardens, a very beautiful George Press Camellia is taking root, hopefully to flourish as a reminder of horticultural glories past.



*Fig. 20: The site of Harringay House in August 1887. The photographer gives this as looking south-east. I suspect that the view is across the former carriage circle. The two trees on the right perhaps mark the start of the carriage drive down to Green Lanes. The line of trees in the distance, on the left, probably fringes the New River. In the foreground, on the left, is one of the Lebanon cedars noted by visitors and mentioned in my description of the park. This is one of the photos described at the end of n 6. (Photographer Charles Beadle, 63 Lothair Rd N, part of a record of the North Middx Photographic Society).*

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The will of Edward Gray, with much gratitude to the HoL member who transcribed it for me.

## Footnotes

1. The 'Abstract of title of the British Land Co. Ltd. to freehold land in parishes of Hornsey and Tottenham, being part of estate formerly known as Harringay Estate' says explicitly that Harringay House was erected in 1792. The document is held at both London Metropolitan Archives, LMA ACC/0178/007 and Hornsey Historical Society, Map Chest Dr 9 D 99.

2. See Fig. 2 for a map showing the house on today's road layout. The house dimensions are approximate and were both calculated using Fig. 2 (see fig. for map details) and Google Maps measurements as well as by reference to the sale details of the house in October 1883. The description of white Suffolk Brick is from an advertisement for the sale of the house, published in the Evening Standard on 31st May 1839. The description of the house entrance comes from an advertisement for one of the sales of the house building materials following its demolition, published in the Shoreditch Observer on 18th April 1885.

The discovery of parts of surviving walls underground during building work behind 22 Allison Road, raise the possibility that parts of the basement may survive under the gardens of today's houses.

3. Although mainly built of white Suffolk brick, Shire Hall's front was faced with Portland stone.

4. No direct evidence exists to confirm the nature of the detached wing at Harringay, but we can make an informed assumption. The National Trust says that "by the 18th century, country house design shifted to move servants – and their associated duties – out of sight.....entirely separate service wings were added."

5. We have evidence that camellias were being grown at Harringay at least as early as 1824. So, it is possible that the Harringay collection predates the Chiswick one by as much as a decade.

Chiswick may also have had a further horticultural connection to Harringay. It was an early base for the Horticultural Society (the RHS, a few decades before it became 'Royal'), of which Gray was an early member.

6. The following four texts provide illustrative descriptions of the Harringay House gardens and grounds.

- William Gardener Keane, *The Beauties of Middlesex, being a particular Description of the principal Seats of the Nobility and Gentry in the County of Middlesex*, 1850, printed by T.Wilsher.
- C. Loudon in "Notes on Country Seats and Gardens", *Gardener's Magazine*, Vol 16, 1840.
- Memories of Mr S Holmes, of New Zealand, *Hornsey Journal* 1940 17th May p 4.
- "Gardens report and Kalender" (sic) for August, *Literary Gazette*, August 21 1824.

A series of photos from the 1880s, taken after the house was sold, are the only known pictures of the grounds, but they offer no insight into how the gardens once looked. These photos were rescued by the author and given to the Hornsey Historical Society. Sadly, I was too late to save an image of the house that was also part of the set.



7. Ornamental wrought iron gates were included in one of the sales of building materials, held after the house was demolished, advertisement in *Shoreditch Observer*, 4th July, 1885.

8. 'Description of some of the Magnolias grown at Harringay House', Article V, a letter from Thomas Press in "Notes on Country Seats", *The Gardener Magazine* Vol 11. Feb 1835.

9. The basin is now under the railway embankment behind 187 to 201 Wightman Road.

10. A dairy in a house of this sort at this time would have been primarily for storage. It would have been designed to resist water and regulate interior temperature. A dairy would have had two, three, or maybe more rooms. One or more would be for storage and the curing of cheeses and creams. Shelves and counters were preferably lined with or made from solid marble or slate for cleanliness and cooler surfaces. Another separate room would have been used for cleaning.

11. There is a detailed discussion about the viaduct on local website Harringay Online ([bit.ly/42UwgYI](http://bit.ly/42UwgYI) | [harringayonline.com/forum/topics/a-tunnel-under-the-great?groupUrl=historyofharringay&groupId=844301:Group:10&id=844301:Topic:169279&page=3#comments](http://harringayonline.com/forum/topics/a-tunnel-under-the-great?groupUrl=historyofharringay&groupId=844301:Group:10&id=844301:Topic:169279&page=3#comments))

12. The heating system also extended 550 feet (170m) to the main house to heat the conservatory and attached greenhouse. See my article, *Harringay Hot Houses*, on Harringay Online ([bit.ly/44GfDI8](http://bit.ly/44GfDI8) | <https://harringayonline.com/forum/topics/harringay-house-hot-houses?groupUrl=historyofharringay&>). For Floud's views on Kitchen gardens, see Floud, *Economic History*, pp. 255-284).

13. A comparison of the 1863 Ordnance Survey map with the 1807 Ordnance Survey drawing and the 1815 Hornsey Enclosure map shows different building outlines. Whilst we can be fairly confident that the later map reproduced the outlines with reasonable accuracy, we cannot have the same sense of certainty about the older maps. So, this comparison offers only a possibility. Having said that, it would make sense of the fact that nothing had been published about the garden, its plants or gardeners prior to 1815. Could 1815 have been the point at which the passing interest of a busy merchant, turned into an abiding passion? It may be no coincidence that Gray was about to turn 65 at this point.

14. The Horticultural Society was founded in 1804 by the son of Josiah Wedgwood. 'Royal' was added to the name in 1861.

15. See n 8.

16. "Sir Joseph Paxton (3 August 1803 – 8 June 1865) was an English gardener, architect, engineer and Member of Parliament, best known for designing the Crystal Palace and for cultivating the Cavendish banana, the most consumed banana in the Western world." (Wikipedia - [bit.ly/3XmCKyy](http://bit.ly/3XmCKyy) | [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_Paxton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Paxton)).

17. The accounts books of Gray's executors (Bristol Archives, 28048/S/58) for March 1839, include amongst expenses for staff wages, a line item for "Press the gardener for himself and three men". It should be noted that this was six months after Gray's death and the gardening staff may well have been reduced by this point, to a level sufficient to keep the gardens ticking over..

18. The accounts books of Gray's executors (ibid) for January 1839, include amongst expenses for staff wages, a line item for "Press the gardener for two weeks". It gives a figure of £8 3s 2d. That would give an annual salary of £212 13s 4d. At today's values, the Measuring Worth website calculates this at somewhere between £20,000 and £190,000, depending on the measure used. Floyd's £53,000 sits comfortably within this range. For Press's will, see n18.

19. In his will, Press left a total of fourteen properties, including seven in West Green, one in Tottenham, four in Essex, one in Kingston-upon-Thames and the Prospect Place property on Tottenham / Turnpike Lane.

20. All information verified with the International Camellia Society ([bit.ly/3Jr2hAU](http://bit.ly/3Jr2hAU) | [internationalcamellia.org](http://internationalcamellia.org)).

21. In his 1834 letter about the Harringay magnolias, Thomas Press says they were planted twenty years previously, giving a date of circa 1814, at which point the species was still relatively new to European gardens. The magnolia had only been named by Swedish botanist Carl Linneaus in 1737 in honour of the French botanist Pierre Magnol (1638-1715). Magnolias were one of the American trees which formed the first wave of the exotic plants to reach Britain's gardens from its colonies (and former colonies) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

22. The *Magnolia soulangeana* was bred from two Chinese magnolias by French botanist Etienne Soulangé-Bodin. In his 1835 letter, Press junior referred to the “short time it (the cultivar) has been in this country”. In 1834, this cultivar was very young, having only been announced to the French public in Bulletin des Sciences Agricoles et Économique in 1826, six years after it was created.

23. Figure calculated by Measuring Worth website, using income / per capita GDP conversion.

24. Traditionally a florist was a flower grower. The reference to Press having been a florist may refer to this activity or it may refer to his activity as the keeper of a shop Press had fronting on Tottenham / Turnpike Lane selling the produce grown in the gardens and greenhouses behind. George Press is mentioned in my history of Prospect Place on Harringay Online ([bit.ly/42ZxK3T](https://bit.ly/42ZxK3T) | [harringayonline.com/forum/topics/changing-prospects-in-hornsey?groupUrl=historyofharringay&](https://harringayonline.com/forum/topics/changing-prospects-in-hornsey?groupUrl=historyofharringay&)).

25. *The Journal of the Horticultural Society of London*, Volume II, published by the Society, 1847.

26. *Cottage Gardener and Country Gentleman's Companion* Volume 14.

27. See my history of the Alexanders on Harringay Online ([bit.ly/3r3wjuk](https://bit.ly/3r3wjuk) | [harringayonline.com/group/historyofharringay/forum/topics/harringay-in-grey-and-green-the-alexanders-of-harringay-house](https://harringayonline.com/group/historyofharringay/forum/topics/harringay-in-grey-and-green-the-alexanders-of-harringay-house)).

28. In a notice of Price's appointment as senior partner at Child's Bank, the *London Gazette*, 26 February, 1876, Issue 24300, p1646 gives his address as Harringay House. The Hornsey Register of Electors listed Price at Harringay House until 1882.

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