OPELESS

Ope is not a term I've ever heard before and is not in any dictionary I own. I lived in Devon for eighteen years, have been in Cornwall for the past eleven, and this is the first time I have come across the word.

In Venice I followed a passage in the dark to the edge of the Grand Canal. In Dublin there are graffitied walls on industrial wasteland edging the river, if you follow unofficial paths. In Manhattan, small lanes break the city's grid. If you follow the track round the back of the quay here in my village, there's a scrubby mud beach at the end, on the creek. Behind my mum in London is the alley I played in as a kid. Are any of these opes?

I prefer *snicket*, maybe *ginnel*, *jetty* or *jigger*. *Twitten*, *vennel*, and *conduit* are all passages between houses, Japan has *yokochos*. There is no order to be found in this lexicographical chaos.

Beautiful maps are in circulation, drawn in incredible detail, including opes and alleyways. It all makes for very pleasant ambling around the streets and squares, but you wouldn't want to walk where I walk or to go to there starting from here.

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