

ROUGH GUIDES



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THE ROUGH GUIDE to

# London BY THE BOOK

MAYOR OF LONDON



**THE ROUGH GUIDE TO**

# **LONDON BY THE BOOK**

**by Tom Bullough**



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# Introduction

From Bloomsbury to Bromley, Geoffrey Chaucer to Zadie Smith, *London by the Book* is a guide to the city through writers and their writing. Packed with obscure and intriguing information (how did Graham Greene survive the bombing of his Clapham house in 1941? Which nineteenth-century poet was in the habit of sliding naked down the banisters?), it chronicles the waves of novelists, poets and playwrights who have lived in London over the centuries, written about it, and developed its identity as a result.

“ I live in Regent’s Park near the Mosque. I love that the Mosque is my local place of worship. I have been inside and was absolutely stunned by the warmth of the welcome I received and by the beautiful interior. There’s a very intense sky-blue colour painted inside the dome and then an amazing carpet which has a pattern of individual prayer

mats woven into it. In my third novel, *The Last Hope of Girls*, the heroine’s father, a successful but rather cold novelist of the do-not-disturb variety, lives in a very grand house overlooking the park and the heroine remembers visiting the ducks with him as a child and discussing their appearance and their characters in great detail. But that novel’s main setting is Oxford Street, where the heroine was the caretaker of some flats that were being renovated in a style well exceeding the nines. One of the large department stores becomes a second home to her and she visits it daily and finds cheer in all its well-ordered plenty, entering into the life of its things when her own life is proving hard to steer. I’m also drawn to areas that are full of mansion blocks, like the short roads near Baker Street; I’m a bit fascinated by what goes on inside them. They can seem like Edwardian stage sets when you peer in through the bay windows and I imagine heroic Brookner-style loneliness among all the pianos and the chandeliers... My favourite book set in London is *Hangover Square* by Patrick Hamilton. Set in the seedy pubs, hotels and boarding houses round Earl’s Court in the late Thirties, it gives a powerful insight into a particularly painful way of living in London at a very acute point in European history. ”



Caroline Forbes

Susie Boyt

Dividing up London is always a tricky business. As Tobias Hill puts it: “London is a city full of quarters. Sometimes these quarters are called villages and sometimes neighbourhoods, but village is too quaint a term for London, and neighbourhood says too much about peoples and not enough about the bricks and stones they inhabit... The Thames is the city’s great dividing line, but the quartering of the capital has hardly begun with that simple halving.” In this book, the river is the line between the North and South (even if Chelsea is in SW3) while the Centre has shrunk by any normal standards and, among other controversial decisions, Wembley has slipped into West London. The end result is five main sections – Centre, North, South, East and West, each divided up into boroughs and localities – plus sections on the Thames and the Underground, both perennial sources of literary inspiration.

The next thing to do is to get stuck in. Have you read *Turtle Diary* by Russell Hoban? Or *Songs of Innocence* by William Blake? Or *The Unrivalled Spangles* by Karen Wallace? Or *The Lonely Londoners* by Samuel Selvon? Here are hundreds of new ways of looking at London.

Now turn the page...

## Get London Reading

The **Get London Reading** campaign aims to encourage Londoners to make more time for reading by connecting them with those who work with books and writers in the capital – publishers, retailers, libraries, museums, festival and event organizers. Such activity is at the core of Booktrust’s dedication to bringing books and people together. Booktrust is proud to be working with the Mayor of London’s Office and with Creative London to highlight the many ways in which London’s readers can find out more about the literary life of their city.

Of course, there would be no books without authors, and it is on these artists that this **London by the Book** concentrates; indeed, we have asked some of the capital’s best-known contemporary authors to tell us how they have been inspired by the city in which they live.

We hope that this Rough Guide will encourage you to find out more about the city’s literary history and its thriving book scene, and get involved in the activities that will be taking place throughout Get London Reading and throughout the year.

**Booktrust**



The Centre

# Bloomsbury

If any one place in London is synonymous with literature, then it is **Bloomsbury**. The “Bloomsbury Group” of **Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, E.M. Forster** et al gave the area its literary reputation, although its history really begins with the opening of the **British Museum and Library** on Great Russell Street in 1753. The museum itself has inspired innumerable writers – perhaps most famously Shelley, who wrote “Ozymandias”, and Keats, who wrote “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (both 1820), in response to a visit – while, more recently, Russell Hoban’s magnificent *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz* (1973) was prompted by a relief of an Assyrian royal lion hunt. The Reading Room in the British Museum has provided research material and a location for almost every great writer there is. In Peter Ackroyd’s *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994), this “true spiritual centre of London” has **Karl Marx, George Gissing** and the comedian Dan Leno all working side by side. Other famous researchers have included **Charles Dickens, Lenin** (who signed in as Jacob Richter) and Sherlock Holmes, who consults a book named *Voodooism and the Negroid Religions* in *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge* (1917).

## Nineteen Eighty-four

For all the brilliant imaginings of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, George Orwell set his novel in London, and many of its locations are based on actual places. The Ministry of Love, for example, where Winston Smith is tortured in Room 101, began life as Bethnal Green police station, where the author was detained in 1931 for being (deliberately) drunk and disorderly and where he, like Winston, spent the night counting the porcelain bricks on the walls. The Ministry of Truth, meanwhile – the “enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete” where Winston works – is based on Senate House on Malet Street, although its canteen was inspired by the canteen in the BBC where Orwell worked in propaganda during the Second World War. Other locations include Victory Square – Trafalgar Square, with Big Brother in place of Admiral Nelson – Victory Mansions, which was once a grotty block of flats in Canonbury Square where Orwell lived from 1944 to 1947, and a room in 18 Percy St in Fitzrovia, where Sonia Brownell – later the second Mrs Orwell – lived in the early 1940s and Winston and Julia carry on their affair.



“ I love the slow, dozing, grey atmosphere of Bloomsbury. Though it's so famous, non-Londoners often don't know that it exists in reality: they think it's a mythical place, a literary creation. What I find fascinating is that it's so very central yet it's still something of a no-man's-land – quiet, dreamy, academic, yet comparatively green with all its



Sarah Maingot

squares. At weekends, it's quite dead. I went to university there and just never wanted to move away, and of course I had to write about it, and it seemed the perfect location for *Sleep With Me* as it's small but offers a strange anonymity, and there's a sense of time having stopped still, with all the Georgian terraces and blue plaques and squares. I felt people could be secretive there.

When I drive through it now, strangely I think of my characters living there, rather than recalling the eighteen years I lived there myself. I think there's a flavour that central London has, with its plane trees and grey houses, tall windows, cast-iron railings and basement steps, with bright red postboxes interspersing the elegant gloom, that is unique to this city. It's much more understated in its beauty than Paris, quieter than New York, but it's still such a major city in world terms, and I can't imagine living outside it. ”

Joanna Briscoe

Of the Bloomsbury literary addresses of the nineteenth century, **Charles Dickens's** houses at 48 Doughty St, where he lived from 1837 to 1839, and on Tavistock Square, where he lived from 1851 to 1860, stand out. The former – now the “Dickens House” museum (for more on the museum and other Dickens locations see p.13) – was witness to a period of phenomenal creativity when Dickens finished *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), wrote *Oliver Twist* (1839) and almost all of *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), and began *Barnaby Rudge* (1839). His sister-in-law, Mary, also died here and became the model for such improbably pure women as Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1839). The Tavistock Square house was almost as important, although it was demolished in 1901, and *Bleak House* (1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857) and much of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) were written here, while Dickens put on plays with his friend **Wilkie Collins**.

Other nineteenth-century luminaries – real and fictional – to have lived around Bloomsbury include Isabella Woodhouse in **Jane Austen's** *Emma* (1816), who declares that “Our part

of London is very superior to most others”, **Dr P.M. Roget**, who devised his thesaurus at 39 Bernard St between 1808 and 1843, and the author and Prime Minister **Benjamin Disraeli**, who was born in 1804 at 22 Theobald’s Rd. The arrival of the twentieth century, however, saw an even greater explosion of talent in Bloomsbury. From 1896–1917, **W.B. Yeats** lived at 5 Woburn Walk, where he lost his virginity to his mistress, **Olivia Shakespear**, wrote such books as *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910) and, in the years before the First World War, was visited each Monday by occasional locals **Ezra Pound**, **John Masefield** and **T.S. Eliot**, who worked for the publishers Faber and Faber at 25 **Russell Square**.

The Bloomsbury Group may have assembled at Cambridge University, but it consolidated itself at **46 Gordon Square** where **Virginia Stephen** (later Woolf) lived with her sister, Vanessa, and brothers Adrian and Thoby from 1904 to 1907. Fuelled by a sense of the importance of an appreciation of beauty – acquired from the philosopher **G.E. Moore** – the Group included **Clive Bell** (Vanessa’s husband), **Roger Fry**, **John Maynard Keynes** and **Gwen Darwin**, granddaughter of the great naturalist, as well as **Forster**, **Strachey** and **Woolf**. They were praised at the time but also maligned, not

Karl Marx Beatrix Potter Charles Darwin Bram Stoker  
Charles Dickens Oscar Wilde Virginia Woolf HG Wells  
George Bernard Shaw George Orwell Samuel Beckett  
Thomas Hardy Mark Twain Rudyard Kipling George Eliot

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least for their pacifism – **D.H. Lawrence** dismissed them as “little swarming selves” – but the quality and bold modernism of Virginia Woolf’s novels, which were mostly written at 52 Tavistock Square between 1924 and 1939, is beyond question.

## Soho

Long a home to social and sordid activities, **Soho** is better known as a place to carouse than to live, although **William Blake** was born on Marshall Street in 1757 and lived here until the age of 25 – later moving to 28 Poland St, where he wrote *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790). In 1802, as he relates in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), **Thomas De Quincey** lodged at 61 Greek St and spent his days trudging down Oxford Street with a prostitute named Ann, and it was also on Oxford Street, at number 131, that he bought his first opium in 1804. Other Soho residents include **Percy Bysshe Shelley**, who lived at 15 Poland St from 1811 to 1814 after being sent down from Oxford for publishing *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), and **Karl Marx**, who wrote most of the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867) whilst living in a “hovel” at 28 Dean St.

Back to carousing. The clubs and bars of Soho have a long and colourful history. Back in the 1760s, **Samuel Johnson’s** Literary Club was held every Monday in *The Turk’s Head Tavern* at 9 Gerrard St, where, according to **James Boswell**, the likes of **Oliver Goldsmith** and political philosopher **Edmund Burke** “generally continued their conversation till a pretty late hour”. In the 1890s, **Oscar Wilde’s** venue of choice was the *Café Royal* on **Regent Street** where he would repair almost every lunchtime, and, by 1900, **George Bernard Shaw** and **John Buchan** were also regulars – Buchan setting the opening scene of *The Thirty-nine Steps* (1915) here.

In the 1920s, **Joseph Conrad** and **J.B. Priestley** frequented the 43 Club on **Gerrard Street** (**John Dryden’s** home from 1687 to 1700) which inspired the “Old Hundredth” in **Evelyn Waugh’s** *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), while the 1940s found **Dylan Thomas** and **Julian Maclaren-Ross** working for Strand Films at 1 Golden Square and drinking at the *French House* on Dean Street, where, in 1953, Thomas lost the original manuscript of *Under Milk Wood* (1952) whilst under the influence. These days, since **Martin Amis**, **Julian Barnes** and **Ian McEwan** moved on from *The Pillars of Hercules* on Greek Street in the 1970s, the main literary/celebrity haunt has been the *Groucho Club* on Dean Street, where the likes of **Ben Elton** and **Salman Rushdie** hang out.

In fiction, Soho is a place of crime as much as a place of revelry: Mr Verloc, in **Joseph Conrad’s** *The Secret Agent*

## Spoken Word

**Spoken Word** events, which take place all over the capital, give you the chance to experience books and writing in new and different ways. You might hear your favourite author giving a talk at the Royal Festival Hall ([www.rfh.org.uk](http://www.rfh.org.uk)), be inspired at a poetry workshop, or even come across a performance poet on your local bus... You can find listings of poetry events around the capital at [www.poetrylondon.co.uk](http://www.poetrylondon.co.uk).

**Apples and Snakes** ([www.applesandsnakes.org](http://www.applesandsnakes.org)) encourages and promotes poetry in performance and education. Contributing artists include Lemn Sissay, Linton Kwesi Johnson and Valerie Bloom.

The **Poetry Café** ([www.poetrysociety.org.uk/cafe](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/cafe)) has readings and open mic events nearly every night of the year.

The **South Bank Centre** ([www.southbankcentre.org.uk](http://www.southbankcentre.org.uk)) holds events and talks featuring a diverse range of established and up-and-coming writers.

**Spread the Word** ([www.spreadtheword.org.uk](http://www.spreadtheword.org.uk)) promotes new and creative writing with programmes of writers' events and workshops.

(1907), runs a Soho pornography shop – in fact, a front for espionage – while **Timothy Mo's** *Sour Sweet* (1982) sets the struggles of Chinese immigrants against the sinister activities of the Triads in Soho's **Chinatown**.

The worlds of crime and fiction have come together on **Great Marlborough Street**, where, at the Magistrate's Court, the trial of the Marquess of Queensbury for libelling **Oscar Wilde** began in 1894 and, in the 1960s, **Anthony Burgess** defended **Hubert Selby Jr's** *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964).

## Fitzrovia

Neighbouring **Fitzrovia** also has a long history of literary types hanging around in pubs. **James Boswell** lived (far from soberly) at 122 Great Portland St from 1788 to 1795 and finished his *Life of Johnson* (1791) here; **George Bernard Shaw** wrote his first well-received play, *Arms and the Man* (1898), at 29 Fitzroy Square; and Griffin, in **H.G. Wells's** *The Invisible Man* (1898), conducts his experiments in "a slum near Great Portland Street". But it is the likes of **Dylan Thomas** and **Julian Maclaren-Ross** who made Fitzrovia their own.

Notorious dandy Maclaren-Ross wrote relatively little but acquired his reputation on the back of his short stories, his unfinished *Memoirs of the Forties* (1965) and his persona as "King of Fitzrovia" – complete with teddy-bear overcoat,

carnation and silver-topped cane – which he would cultivate in *The Wreath* in **Rathbone Place**. Here, Dylan Thomas met his future wife Caitlin Macnamara in 1936, and a bohemian arts scene flourished until, in the 1950s, it began to slip south into Soho. The period is charted in detail in **Paul Willetts's** *Fear and Loathing in Fitzrovia* (2003).

In 1998, Fitzrovia was back in the literary headlines when **William Boyd**, with some help from **David Bowie**, launched *Nat Tate* (1998) – his biography of a fictitious American artist, which successfully hoaxed the art world – at *Mash* on **Great Portland Street**.

## The City

**T**he core of the capital, **the City** has a longer and more complex literary past even than Westminster. To go back to somewhere near the beginning, **Geoffrey Chaucer** was born in the region of Puddle Dock in 1333 or 1334, and, as a customs officer at the Port of London, lived in a fortified gatehouse on present-day **Aldgate High Street** from 1374 to 1386, where he wrote works including *Parlement of Foules* (1381) and *Troilus and Criseyde* (1385). In Newgate Prison on Newgate Street, **Sir Thomas Malory** wrote *Morte d'Arthur* (1485) while serving time (possibly) for murder. **Sir Thomas More**, who was born on Milk Street in 1478, wrote his *History of King Richard III* (1518) and the bulk of *Utopia* (1516) in a hall in Crosby Square, which was pulled down and rebuilt in Chelsea in the 1920s. In 1598, **William Shakespeare's** *Romeo and Juliet* may have premiered

“ I live in central London. I have never used it as a location, except of course that people pass through it to get anywhere at all. I stay at home to read and write. But I like to go to the City for inspiration. Also Clerkenwell is an especial place. I'm inspired by London's echoic history; favourite London books are *New Grub Street* by George Gissing and *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens. ”



Charles Hopkinson

Peter Ackroyd

at London's first theatre on **Curtain Road**, which was pulled down and rebuilt as the Globe in Southwark in 1599. From 1621 to 1631, **John Donne**, who was born on Bread Street in 1571, was Dean of **St Paul's Cathedral** where, among other things, the king's funeral is set in **William Shakespeare's** *Henry VI Part I* (1591). From 1660 to 1673, **Samuel Pepys** lived on Seething Lane, from where he observed the Great Fire of London, and at much the same time **John Milton**, who was born on **Bread Street** in 1608, wrote most of *Paradise Lost* (1667) in "a pretty garden house" on Aldersgate Street that survived until the Second World War.

The "horror that everywhere presented itself" during the plague of 1665 is perhaps best described by **Daniel Defoe** in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), a meticulously researched combination of fiction, reportage and his own childhood memories. As with the Great Fire of London, which effectively put an end to the plague in 1666, countless books have been written on this subject, but some of the standouts include *The Great Plague* (2004) by **A. Lloyd Moote** and **Dorothy C. Moote** and *The Dreadful Judgement* (2001) by **Neil Hanson**, as well as **Samuel Pepys's** *Diary* and **John Dryden's** long poem *Annus Mirabilis* (1666), while the restoration of some 15,000 houses and 87 churches – 400 acres of city in all – is covered in **Lisa Jardine's** *The Curious Life of Robert Hooke* (2003), about the artist, scientist and architect.

The City in the eighteenth century was home to many great literary figures – among them Lemuel Gulliver, of **Jonathan Swift's** *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), who lives in "part of a small house in the Old Jewry", and **Dr Samuel Johnson**, who wrote his *Dictionary* (1755) at 17 **Gough**

## The Tower

Innumerable writers and characters have been locked up (and executed) in the **Tower of London**. **Sir Thomas More** was beheaded here for treason in 1535, after he refused to accept the Act of Supremacy making Henry VIII head of the Church of England. **Sir Walter Raleigh** was imprisoned in 1592 for seducing one of Elizabeth's maids of honour, and later wrote his *History of the World* (1614) during an eleven-year stretch for treason, while **Francis Bacon** wound up here in 1621 for bribery, and **Samuel Pepys** was held in 1679 on charges of Catholicism and murder.

Probably the Tower's best-known drama is **Shakespeare's** *Richard III* (1594), in which Richard does away with his brother Clarence at the Tower, as well as Lord Hastings and "the Princes in the Tower" – Edward V and the Duke of York. **Christopher Marlowe** uses it in *Edward II* (1592), as does **Walter Scott** in *Peveril of the Peak* (1823), although by the time that David Copperfield visits in **Dickens's** novel, he is taking his mother's housekeeper, Peggotty, sightseeing.

## Dickens's London

Dickens has so many London associations that to name them all would take at least a book in itself. All the same, there are a few crucial spots – notably the Dickens House at 48 Doughty St, WC1, where he lived from 1837 to 1839; it is now a **museum** (Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm; £5). In 1828, Dickens worked as a clerk at **Gray's Inn** – one of the four Inns of Court – where Mr Pickwick's solicitor, Mr Perker, has chambers in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–7), as does Traddles in *David Copperfield* (1849–50), while much of *Bleak House* (1852–3) is set in the “strange medley” of the Courts of Chancery on Chancery Lane. When Pip first arrives in London, in *Great Expectations* (1860–1), it is in Barnard's Inn on Holborn that he stays with Herbert Pocket: “the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for Tom-cats”.

On the opposite side of Holborn – and of the law – Fagin's den is down “a narrow and dismal alley” named Field Lane in *Oliver Twist* (1837–9), and a little further on is Newgate Prison, once on Newgate Street, where Fagin is ultimately hanged and the simple Barnaby is imprisoned and then released by the Gordon Rioters in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841). In *Sketches by Boz* (1836), Dickens describes “the unhappy beings immured in its dismal cells... whose miserable career will shortly terminate in a violent and shameful death”.

Of Dickens's other central locations, two others that he has revisited several times are Smithfield cattle market, “all asmeared with filth and fat and blood and foam” – as he puts it in *Great Expectations* – and the Covent Garden fruit and vegetable market, where David buys flowers for Dora in *David Copperfield*, Pip spends the night at Hummums Hotel in *Great Expectations*, Arthur Clennam has lodgings in *Little Dorrit* and Job Trotter sleeps in a vegetable basket in *The Pickwick Papers*.



**Square** (now the Dr Johnson's House museum; May–Sept Mon–Sat 11am–5.30pm; Oct–April 11am–5pm; £4.50) – but above all the area has been defined by the nineteenth-century novels of **Charles Dickens** (see box above).

The nineteenth century brought many of the City developments that would later define it in the twentieth – particularly the grandiose banks around Cornhill and Threadneedle Street and the cluster of newspaper offices on **Fleet Street**. Numerous writers have doubled as bankers, as they have as journalists, and in the same place **Daniel Defoe** was pilloried in 1703 for his satirical pamphlet *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters* (1702), from 1917 to 1925



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**T.S. Eliot** worked for Lloyds Bank at 7 Cornhill – “a crime against literature”, according to Ezra Pound, even if the experience did inspire parts of *The Waste Land* (1922). Other banking writers include **Kenneth Grahame**, who worked at the Bank of England on Threadneedle Street from 1880 to 1908, and **P.G. Wodehouse**, who managed a couple of years at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank on Gracechurch Street from 1900 to 1902, but was forced to resign after admitting to having used paper from a new ledger to write a short story.

Of the many books written about Fleet Street, **Evelyn Waugh's** *Scoop* (1936) is the most famous: a riotous satire about a reluctant journalist, William Boot, who is dispatched by Lord Copper of the *Daily Beast* to cover “a very promising little war” in the fictional African country of Ishmaelia. Although not specifically about Fleet Street, **George Gissing's** *New Grub Street* (1891) is a vivid, bleak critique of journalism and its conflict between materialism and idealism.

Another great City location for fiction is, of course, the Central Criminal Court – the **Old Bailey** – where, in 1895, **Oscar Wilde** was found guilty on six counts of sodomy and sentenced to two years' hard labour in Reading jail, and, in 1960, Penguin Books was cleared of obscenity in publishing **D.H. Lawrence's** *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). The court appears in crime fiction from **Agatha Christie's** *The*

*Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1924) to **Julian Symons's** *The Blackheath Poisonings* (1978) to all thirteen (and counting) of **John Mortimer's** "Rumpole of the Bailey" series.

## Mayfair

Only the most aristocratic writers and characters have had much to do with **Mayfair**. The rules of Albany in Piccadilly, for example, meant that for many years it was home only to gentlemen bachelors with no connection to trade, and the residents of the nineteenth century included **Lord Byron** in 1814 and Fiacination Fledgeby in **Dickens's** *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), while **E. W. Hornung's** gentleman thief Raffles also had rooms here, as, in the twentieth century, did **J.B. Priestley**, **Aldous Huxley** and **Graham Greene**. In every direction, elegant rooms have housed elegant persons – most of them men. From 1911 to 1919, **Somerset Maugham** lived at 6 Chesterfield St with his American lover, Gerald Haxton, who was eventually deported after an incident in a hotel in Covent Garden. **Henry James** wrote *Washington Square* (1881) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) at 3 Bolton St, and **Benjamin Disraeli** wrote *Endymion* (1880) at 19 Curzon St – just around the corner from Count

“ I mainly think about London when it becomes an annoyance to me – an obstruction: London is what prevents me getting to London; it's the sweaty horror of the Northern Line in August, it's the misted-up top deck of a number 3 bus in January, it's the tourists jamming the pavements at Piccadilly Circus. But, as I travel, I do so in the belief that there's somewhere truly worth arriving: London. Only rarely have I felt that I've got there – that I'm where it's at, in the place to be. And although it's taken me a while to realize it (over ten years), *this* is what makes me want

Jerry Bauer



to keep on living here. In so many other places, you arrive and find yourself immediately there. For instance, New York as New York is always present in all its details. The moment you see the skyline, it overtakes you like one of the thousand songs about it. London, though, is constantly doubtful. “*Maybe* it's because...” Here, you never know where you are. I love that. ”

Toby Litt

Dracula, who buys a house at 347 Piccadilly under the name “Count de Ville” in **Bram Stoker’s** novel, and **Dorothy L. Sayers’s** Lord Peter Wimsey, who lives at 110a Piccadilly.

Of all the fictional Mayfair gentlemen, however, the best known is undoubtedly **P.G. Wodehouse’s** Bertie Wooster, who resides at 3a Berkeley Mansions, **Berkeley Square**, and, when not doing battle with aunts, spends much of his time at the Drones Club – modelled on *Buck’s* at 18 Clifford St, the home of Buck’s Fizz. The flipside of this amiable idiot are the Bright Young Things of **Evelyn Waugh’s** *Vile Bodies* (1930), whose excesses and exuberance mask a vulnerability caused by the horrors of the First World War.

The other famous Mayfair clubs include the **Albemarle Club**, on Dover Street, where **Oscar Wilde** received a card from the Marquess of Queensbury, inscribed “To Oscar Wilde posing as a somdomite” [sic.], and the extant *Savile Club*, at 69 Brook St, which has counted **Robert Louis Stevenson**, **Thomas Hardy** and **Rudyard Kipling** among its members, and continues to hold literary evenings with visiting writers such as **Margaret Drabble**, **Michael Frayn** and the biographer **Richard Holmes**.

## Westminster

Home to the Houses of Parliament, **Westminster** has had no shortage of books written about it. As far back as 1386, **Geoffrey Chaucer** was sitting as an MP, and numerous writers have followed in his footsteps – from **Samuel Pepys**, who was the member for Castle Rising, Harwich and (very briefly) Sandwich in the 1670s and 1680s, to **Jeffrey Archer**, who became member for Louth in 1969 (he later claimed to have been the youngest MP ever, although, in fact, he wasn’t even the youngest at the time) and was returned several times until the law finally caught up with him in 2000.

Without question, Westminster’s greatest gift to literature is satire. In 1703, **Daniel Defoe’s** pamphlet, *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters* (1702) was taken literally by MPs, who had it burnt by the hangman in the Old Palace Yard. In **Thomas Love Peacock’s** *Melincourt: Or, Sir Oran Haut-ton* (1817), an orang-utan is elected as an MP. In **Philip Hensher’s** *Kitchen Venom* (1996), whose publication lost the author his job as a House of Commons clerk, rent boys and murder are rife in the final days of the Thatcher era.

Beyond parliament’s walls, several writers have worked in government departments and lived in the vicinity. **Ian Fleming**, for instance, lived at 22b Ebury St (previously occupied by Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists) whilst working as personal assistant to the Director of Naval

## Libraries

### Public libraries

In London you're usually never more than a mile away from one of the city's 395 **public libraries**, where a plethora of books, audio books, CDs, DVDs, magazines, newspapers and journals awaits you, as well as access to the Internet. London's libraries offer a space for quiet study, the chance to join reading and writing groups, homework clubs for schoolchildren and storytime for under 5s. To find out the location of your nearest library, visit the London Libraries Development Agency website (W) [www.lda.org.uk](http://www.lda.org.uk) or (W) [www.londonlibraries.org](http://www.londonlibraries.org). The City of London's largest lending library is at the Barbican Centre; it has a year-round programme of events and exhibitions. Or check out Battersea Library's African, Caribbean, gay and lesbian, and local history specialist collections.

### Other libraries

London is also home to thousands of other libraries in universities, colleges, hospitals, professional and media institutions, and local and central government. From the Bishopsgate Institute's special collections on London to the Women's Library in London Metropolitan University, if you have an interest, there's likely to be a library to match.

**The British Library** (St Pancras, (W) [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)) is home to one of the world's largest collections of books and manuscripts, and receives a copy of every book published in the UK and Ireland. Among its treasures are the Magna Carta, the recording of Nelson Mandela's trial speech, and the earliest dated printed book, the *Diamond Sutra*. It is open to all (though you will need to apply for a Reader's Pass for access to the reading rooms), and the Library runs a programme of events and exhibitions throughout the year.

**The British Museum** (Great Russell Street; (W) [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)) houses the Reading Room within the Norman Foster-designed Great Court. Once used by Marx, Gandhi, and Oscar Wilde, it is now open to all, with access to the Paul Hamlyn Library and the multimedia database Compass.

**The London Library** in St James's Square ((W) [www.londonlibrary.co.uk](http://www.londonlibrary.co.uk)) was founded by Thomas Carlyle in 1841 and is the largest independent library in the world, with a collection of over one million volumes and an illustrious list of past members, including George Eliot, Siegfried Sassoon and Agatha Christie. Presidents have included T.S. Eliot and Isaiah Berlin; the current president is Tom Stoppard.

Intelligence in the Admiralty from 1936 to 1941. The experience was invaluable to his James Bond books, and he used any number of details from this time – from *Boodle's* on St James's Street, which becomes M's club *Blade's*, to his occasional visitor at **Ebury Street**, John Fox-Strangways, whose name Fleming appropriated for *Dr No* (1958) and *Live and Let Die* (1961).

## The Thames

If **Stephen Croad's** *Liquid History* (2003) of **the Thames** is anything to go by, then the western perimeter of the ancient city of London is marked by the London Stone at Staines and the eastern perimeter by Yantlet in Kent. In between these two, it changes almost beyond recognition. In literature at least, the western parts of the river can be almost supernaturally idyllic. It is out near **Richmond** that Toad, Vole and Ratty live in **Kenneth Grahame's** *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) – their river “a babbling procession of the best stories in the world, sent from the heart of the earth to be told at last to the insatiable sea”. Animals they might be, but not animals beyond spring-cleaning, messing about in boats or going swimming, since the water is, of course, blissfully unpolluted. In **Jerome K. Jerome's** *Three Men in a Boat* (1889), the Thames might be more populated – “a brilliant tangle of bright blazers, and gay caps, and saucy hats, and many-coloured parasols, and silken rugs, and cloaks, and streaming ribbons, and dainty whites” – but it remains a place of pleasure, enjoyed by everyone from the Kenwigs on **Eel Pie Island** in Twickenham, in **Charles Dickens's** *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), to **Alexander Pope** in his nearby riverside mansion.

By the time you get to **Putney**, the associations are becoming more mixed. Putney Bridge is where the author of *Vindication on the Rights of Women* (1792) – and mother of **Mary Shelley** – **Mary Wollstonecraft** tried to drown herself in 1795 after she was deserted by Gilbert Imlay. For **John Betjeman**, the **Albert Bridge** was “one of the beauties of the London river” and, in “On Westminster Bridge” (1802), **William Wordsworth** declared that “Earth has not anything to show more fair”; but Westminster Bridge is also where **James Boswell** was picking up prostitutes ten years earlier, and, by the summer of 1858, the Thames at Westminster smelt so foul that the Houses of Parliament had to be evacuated. The “Great Stink”, as **Stephen Halliday** explains in his 1999 book of the same name, was the result of the sewage of two million people pouring straight into the water, and it was only the remarkable energies of Sir Joseph Bazalgette that “turned the Thames from the filthiest to the cleanest metropolitan river in the world”.

Further downstream, between **Southwark** and London Bridge, Gaffer Hexham collects floating corpses in **Dickens's** *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), and on London Bridge itself **Sir Thomas More's** head was displayed after his execution in 1535 and, supposedly, launched itself one day into the arms of his passing daughter. Helped by the arches, in former times the river here would freeze in the winter, and **Virginia Woolf's** *Orlando* (1928) describes the famous ice fairs as well as an incident when the ice begins to break up beneath a Jacobean crowd.

By the time you get near the **docks**, the Thames is getting pretty grim and, soon enough, muddy. In **Arthur Conan Doyle's**

*The Sign of the Four* (1890), Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson pursue Jonathan Small through the docks from the Tower of London to the **Plumstead Marshes**, where Small's wooden leg gets stuck in the mud. But the river here is perhaps most memorably described by **Joseph Conrad** in *Heart of Darkness* (1902):

The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth.

Mark Thomas, *Rough Guides*



One of the best-known fictional residents of **10 Downing Street** is Plantagenet Palliser, in **Anthony Trollope's** "Palliser" series, who ascends to the top job in *The Prime Minister* (1876) where he soon comes into conflict with his wife, Lady Glencora, who has aspirations to become society's most dazzling hostess, although these days he has probably been trumped by Francis Urquhart, who gets the top job in **Michael Dobbs's** *House of Cards* (1989) by means that make even Jeffrey Archer look positively scrupulous. **John Buchan**, as Head of Intelligence, lived at Number Ten during World War I and brought such writer-friends as **Arnold Bennett** and **Anthony Hope** into the fold with him.

In nearby Westminster Abbey, **Poets' Corner** has a memorial to pretty much every great poet that Britain has ever produced – **Byron** was finally included in 1969, having been refused in 1824 on the grounds of his "open profligacy". Among the writers buried here are **Ben Jonson**, who insisted on being interred upright – he told the Dean that "six feet long by two feet wide is too much for me. Two feet by two is all I want" – and all of **Thomas Hardy** except his heart, which is buried in the churchyard at St Michael's, Stinford, Dorset.

## Marylebone

**I**f fictional **Marylebone** means anything, then it means Sherlock Holmes. Since **Arthur Conan Doyle's** *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), **221b Baker Street** has probably been the most famous literary address in the world – although the actual number only came into being when Baker Street was extended in 1930.

Any number of places in Holmes's London feature as locations. When Doctor Watson is first introduced, in *A Study in Scarlet*, he is having a drink in **The Criterion**, at 224 Piccadilly, which still survives. When he and Holmes first meet it is in the chemical laboratory of St Bartholomew's Hospital, on Giltspur Street, and on Baker Street itself Camden House – at number 118 – is the scene of the apprehension of their would-be murderer, Colonel Sebastian Moran, in *The Adventure of the Empty House* (1905). Other essential Holmes-related spots are the London Library at 14 St James's Square, where Holmes goes to research Chinese pottery in *The Adventure of the Illustrious Client* (1924), and Conan Doyle's oculist practice, at 2 Upper Wimpole St, where he wrote *A Scandal in Bohemia* (1891) and *The Red-Headed League* (1891) whilst hoping for patients, as well as the *Sherlock Holmes* pub on Northumberland Street, W2, which contains numerous Holmes artefacts.

Elsewhere in Marylebone, **Elizabeth Barrett** began her affair with **Robert Browning** at 50 Wimpole St, where

“ Next to Dickens, there's no one who captures the spirit of foggy, hidden, lost Victorian London better than Conan Doyle. A love – and knowledge – of London runs through all the stories, from *A Study in Scarlet* – when veteran of the Afghan wars and medical man Watson first meets Sherlock Holmes after a chance encounter with an old friend in the *Criterion* bar – to the

*Adventures*, *Casebook*, and *Memoirs*, all recorded by Watson, the Boswell to Holmes's Johnson. All the respectable landmarks of Queen Victoria's capital city are there – the theatres, the *Langham Hotel*, the corridors of power in Whitehall, but so too are the pickpockets' alleyways of the East End, the pawnshops and taxi-dermists, the docklands where drunken sailors and working girls gather, the impoverished streets of Peckham and Camberwell. And there's no better river chase along the Thames – it makes James Bond look like an amateur – past Surrey Docks, through Deptford Creek and out towards Gravesend than the climax to *The Sign of the Four*. A loving A–Z of late nineteenth-century London, gas lamps and all. ”



Roderick Field

Kate Mosse

she lived from 1838 to 1850, while **Edward Gibbon** wrote *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776) at 7 Bentinck St and **Muriel Spark** edited *The Poetry Review* at 33 Portman Square, inspiring her 1981 novel, *Loitering with Intent*. In a more criminal mould, **Wilkie Collins** dictated his classic, Conan Doyle-influencing *The Moonstone* (1868) at 69 Gloucester Place while incapacitated by opium and grief at the death of his mother.

## Clerkenwell

The home of the original **Grub Street** (now Milton Street) where armies of hack writers struggled to make a living in the eighteenth century, over the past fifteen years **Clerkenwell** has been virtually annexed by **Peter Ackroyd**, who has set two of his most successful novels here. The first, *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993), is about a man, Matthew Palmer, who inherits a house (at, roughly, 14–16 Farringdon Lane) once occupied by the sixteenth-century alchemist and mystic John Dee, who appears as a character in alternating chapters. Although the second, *The Clerkenwell Tales* (2003), is set entirely in the fourteenth century – built around the cast of **Chaucer's** *The Canterbury Tales* – it is, similarly, a bringing together of the past and present, and gives a thriller

plot to the political intrigues of Henry Bolingbroke, Richard II and a sinister group of officials named Dominus.

Elsewhere in Clerkenwell, there are several other literary places of note. **John Milton**, for example, completed *Paradise Lost* (1667) and wrote *Paradise Regained* (1671) at the present-day 125 **Bunhill Row**, where he lived with his third, much younger wife, Elizabeth, and Riceyman Steps, which inspired **Arnold Bennett's** 1923 novel of the same name, can be found leading from Gwynne Place to Granville Square, near King's Cross station.

## Covent Garden

**C**ovent Garden vegetable market, which closed in the 1970s, held a great fascination for writers – not least of them **Dickens** (see p.13) and **Tobias Smollett**, who described how, in the market, “some fine lady of St James’s parish might admit into her delicate mouth those very cherries, which had been rolled and moistened between the filthy, and, perhaps, ulcerated chops of a St Giles’s huckster” in *Humphrey Clinker* (1771). Mostly more salubrious were the theatres and opera houses that arrived in the seventeenth century, followed by a boom in coffee houses: it was in the *Great Piazza Coffee House* that **Richard Brinsley Sheridan** sat to watch his charge, the Theatre Royal, burn to the ground in 1809, while other local cafés, such as *Will’s and Button’s* on Russell Street, were the haunt of the likes of **Jonathan Swift** and **Aphra Behn**, Britain’s first overt professional female writer.

Just on from **Leicester Square**, where Bertie is arrested in **P.G. Wodehouse's** *The Code of the Woosters* (1938) for stealing a policeman’s helmet, Charing Cross Road and Cecil Court have been a centre for bookshops since the beginning of the twentieth century, most famously depicted in *84 Charing Cross Road* (1970) by **Helene Hanff** – her twenty-year correspondence with Frank Doel of Marks and Co. Also on Charing Cross Road, at Cambridge Circus, is “the Circus”: the “anonymous government building” that houses Britain’s spy network in **John Le Carré's** “George Smiley” novels.

**Trafalgar Square** has been the scene of much political literary activity, from “Bloody Sunday”, when **William Morris** and **George Bernard Shaw** attempted to assemble the 200,000 protesters here on November 13, 1887, to Nobel laureate **Harold Pinter's** impassioned speeches against the British invasion of Iraq in 2003. The National Gallery is a perennial refuge and meeting-place for fictional characters. Here, Dora “felt a calm descending on her” in **Iris Murdoch's** *The Bell* (1958) and Chris and Toni ogle women through their binoculars in **Julian Barnes's** *Metroland* (1980).

# North London



# Camden

When **Charles Dickens** lived at 141 Bayham St at the age of 10, **Camden** was a poor, semi-rural suburb where tenements stood back-to-back with hay meadows, although in his books he tended to emphasize its run-down dinginess – with the Cratchits and the Micawbers living here in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *David Copperfield* (1850) respectively. In 1873, **Arthur Rimbaud** and **Paul Verlaine** lived at 8 Great College St – a time that inspired the “Foolish Virgin” section of Rimbaud’s *A Season in Hell* (1873) – but even they stuck it for only a few months.

Since then, the literary spotlight has fallen on Camden mainly thanks to the work of **David Storey** and **Alan Bennett**. Written in only three weeks, Storey’s *Flight into Camden* (1960) is the hard-nosed story of a miner’s daughter from the author’s native Yorkshire who elopes to London with a married art teacher. Bennett sees the world through

“ I live in Kentish Town. Like or not like has never been an issue. I am not some Johnny-come-in-from-the-boondocks-oo-hisn’t-Notting-Hill-nice. I was born in north London, I live in north London, I will die in north London. My novel *Winkler* is set in an unnamed city that is modelled on London because I had nowhere else on which to model it. The central event – a random assault on a blind girl in a subway underpass – is simply a description of something I witnessed in the Archway underpass in 1993. I read in my study, in my garden, on Hampstead Heath, at a café on Swain’s Lane called *Kalendar*, and on the Underground. I’m not inspired by one particular place: the views of the Canary Wharf development give me the spooks a bit I suppose, a sort of general sense of foreboding and the imminence of Armageddon. Favourite London books are *New Grub Street* by George Gissing, *Henry IV Part One* and *Part Two*, some of A.A. Milne’s poems, *Asterix in Britain*, *The Counterlife* by Philip Roth. ”



Chloe Solomon

Giles Coren

more whimsical eyes. A resident here since the 1960s, in *The Lady in the Van* (1989) he describes his bizarre relationship with “Miss Shepherd”, who lived for years in an old van in his driveway. In both *The Lady in the Van* and **Graham Greene’s** *It’s a Battlefield* (1934), Palmer’s Pet Store on **Parkway** puts in an appearance – with Miss Shepherd claiming to have seen “a long grey snake – a boa constrictor possibly” after a break-in at the shop.

## Primrose Hill

**H**ome to the likes of **Ian McEwan** and **Michael Frayn**, over the last twenty years **Primrose Hill** has become a fashionable, exclusive place to live, although earlier local writers were mostly considerably worse off. As an assistant schoolmaster, **H.G. Wells** lived at 12 and 46 Fitzroy Rd from 1888 to 1891, and he used the area several times in his work – particularly the Hill itself, which the Martians try to use as a base in *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Fitzroy Road, however, is best known in the literary world for number 23, where **W.B. Yeats** lived from 1867 to 1872 and **Sylvia Plath** lived from 1962 to 1963, after her break-up with Ted Hughes. It was here, on February 11, 1963, that she gassed herself in the oven – six days after writing her last poem, “Edge”, in which the body of a woman is “wearing the smile of accomplishment”.

The best-known Primrose Hill novel of the past few years is probably *The Folks that Live on the Hill* (1990) by **Kingsley Amis**, based on his *ménage à trois* with his ex-wife, Hilly Bardwell, and her husband, Lord Kilmarnock, at 194 Regent’s Park R.d. **Helen Falconer’s** *Primrose Hill* (1999) is a trendier and more youthful affair, about 17-year-old Si who gets sucked into his best friend Danny’s plan to kill his mother’s violent, junkie boyfriend during a stiflingly hot summer.

### London Zoo

“The London zoo is an animal microcosm of London, and even the lions... behave as if they had been born in South Kensington,” wrote **Leonard Woolf** (husband of Virginia) in *Downhill All the Way* (1966). The idea has been pursued, in one form or another, in many other books – notably, **Russell Hoban’s** magical *Turtle Diary* (1975), about a pair of lonely people, William G. and Neaera H., who decide to try and liberate three green turtles from “their little bedsitter of ocean”. **Tobias Hill** published his third collection *Zoo* in 1998, as the Zoo’s first Poet in Residence.

# Hampstead

**H**ampstead has been one of London's homes of literary activity ever since the eighteenth century when its "medicinal" waters began to be advertised in the city and a Pump Room was opened in the then-village – attracting, among others, **Samuel Johnson**, **Alexander Pope** and **John Keats** (see below), who spent some of his last, consumptive days here. This "most delightful place for air and scenery near London", as **Robert Louis Stevenson** put it, became a refuge from the smog-ridden city and, in the 1820s and 1830s, **William Blake** and **Charles Dickens** were among those to stay at Old Wyldes, the popular retreat of the artist John Linnell.

By the twentieth century, the Hampstead literary scene was as huge as it was labyrinthine. In 1915, **D.H. Lawrence** moved to 1 Byron Villas with his wife Frieda von Richthofen (a cousin of legendary First World War flying ace, the Red Baron), where he ran a short-lived literary magazine, *The Signature*, and received visitors including **Aldous Huxley** and **Bertrand Russell**, whom Lawrence lampooned as Sir Joshua Malleon in *Women in Love* (1920). His co-founder of *The Signature*, **John Middleton Murry**, and his wife **Katherine Mansfield**, who lived at 17 East Heath Rd, also found their way into

“ I live in Dartmouth Park, near Hampstead Heath. I used to love living in Bloomsbury; here, however, there is both variety – Vietnamese restaurants, fishmongers, Greek bookshops, glamorous MittelEuropeans – and the Heath, with its Italian café and swimming ponds and wild woods. It also smells fantastic: woodsmoke, garlic, clean(ish) air and rain on leaves. My new novel is set all around North London but particularly in Gospel Oak and Holloway; Dartmouth Park beckons for the next. In terms of fiction I love the fact that London's scale is an illusion. There's just as much potential for entanglements, infidelities, dark secrets and shocking discoveries here as in the smallest village. It's very dangerous to think that no one will catch you; indeed, the very last person you want to meet is usually just around the corner. ”



Anne Eyre

Charlotte Mendelson

“ Best place to read or write? Everyone must say this but it's true: I'll take a café pretty much anywhere in London. You can't throw a stone in Hampstead now without hitting one. Writers love cafés. We have very simple needs. London's most useful quality is that it is busy, so it makes me busier and harder-working than I would be in Devon or on the Isle of Mull. Although now I think about it – what's so good about busy? For best London book I'd love to say Dickens or Colin MacInnes, but *Money* by Martin Amis had the virtue of capturing the modern London (Notting Hill, Queensway) I knew or sensed – energizing but tiring, casually violent but funny if you looked at it from the right angle. ”

Simon Nye

*Women in Love*, where they became Gerald and Gudrun, while, in Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928), they were Burlap and Beatrice. And, as if this all didn't smack of incestuousness enough already, after Mansfield's death from TB in 1923, Murry and Frieda von Richtofen embarked on an affair.

**George Orwell**, too, was living in Hampstead at this time, and he wrote about it particularly in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), his satire of the lower middle classes. His love-hate relationship with the place began in the 1920s, when he would visit friends on Oakwood Road so as to dress as a tramp and set out into the East End to research *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). It was also here that he acquired his aversion to the kind of bourgeois socialists that he savaged in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Among the countless Orwell-associated spots in Hampstead are Booklovers' Corner on Pond Street, where the author worked from 1934 to 1936, and 77 **Parliament Hill**, on the edge of the Heath, where he wrote much of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.

The Regency villa where **John Keats** lived from 1818 to 1820 is open to the public (Tues–Sat 10am–noon, schools and pre-booked group visits 1–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; £3.50), and can be found on Keats Grove in Hampstead. The house and garden inspired some of Keats's most memorable poetry, including “Ode to a Nightingale” (1819); it was here that he fell in love with Fanny Brawne, and here also where he first coughed up blood, the portent of his tragic early death from tuberculosis.

In literature, as in reality, the **Heath** itself has tended to signify escape, but its emptiness has also signified danger. In Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), “few would venture to repair at a late hour [here] unarmed and unattended”, while in **Mary Shelley's** *Dracula* (1897), children are found here “slightly torn or wounded in the throat”. Of the countless other fictional corpses to have turned up on Hampstead Heath, one of the most memorable is the old White Russian General whom George Smiley finds just before dawn in **John Le Carré's** *Smiley's People* (1979).

Today's Hampstead writers include **Esther Freud** and **Tracy Chevalier**.

## Highgate

Sitting comfortably on the other side of the Heath among woods and golf courses, **Highgate** has been popular with writers – and poets especially – for much the same reasons as Hampstead. At 3 The Grove, where **J.B. Priestley** lived later (from 1935 to 1939), **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** saw out his last thirteen years with his friends Ann and James Gilman, battling with opium addiction. He is buried at St Michael's Church in South Grove, his coffin having been moved here from the chapel at Highgate School in 1961.

Highgate's best-known native poet is **John Betjeman**, who was born in Kentish Town but spent his first ten years at 31 West Hill, which he eulogized as “a world of trains and buttered toast” in his autobiographical poem, *Summoned by Bells* (1960). At the nearby Highgate Junior School, his teachers included **T.S. Eliot** whom, at the age of 10, he presented with a collection of his poems entitled *The Best of Betjeman*. Despising Chelsea, where his family moved when he was 10, he continued to carry around his childhood teddy bear, Archibald Ormsby-Gore, even as a student at Oxford – inspiring Sebastian Flyte and his bear Aloysius in **Evelyn Waugh's** *Brideshead Revisited* (1945).

**Sidney Day's** *London Born: A Memoir of a Forgotten City* (2005) could hardly be more of a contrast to this aristocratic world. Born in 1912, Day grew up in a Highgate “street where there was so much villainry going on, so many drunks and gambling and gawd knows what, that at night the police would only come down in twos”. Unable either to read or write, he dictated his story to his granddaughter, Helen.

## Angel, Highbury, Islington and Holloway

Unlikely as it might seem these days, prior to the Industrial Revolution **Islington** was something of a precursor to Hampstead: a semi-rural retreat from the city and a place with definite appeal for writers. **Thomas Paine** is supposed to have written *The Rights of Man* (1791) in the *Angel Inn* that gave **Angel** its name, while **Oliver Goldsmith** wrote his long poem *The Traveller* (1764) in

Canonbury Tower, in Canonbury Place, where **Washington Irving** also lived in the 1820s, until he could bear the Goldsmith tourists no more. From 1797 to 1801, **Charles and Mary Lamb** lived in Chapel Market after Mary had been released from an “Islington madhouse” for stabbing her mother to death, and, from 1823 to 1827, they lived in a cottage on Duncan Terrace, overlooking the New River which their shortsighted friend, **George Dyer**, managed to fall into in November 1823.

Yet, as the nineteenth century progressed, so Islington was engulfed by London’s sprawl and became the sort of unsavoury place where Mrs Micawber, in **Dickens’s** *David Copperfield*, might run a Boarding Establishment for Young Ladies to which no “young lady ever came, or proposed to come”. In parts, it was a “suburban Sahara”, as Dickens puts it in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865): a nineteenth-century Metroland, where the likes of the pompous, aspirational Charles Pooter might live in **George and Weedon Grossmith’s** *Diary of a Nobody* (1892). In other parts, it was a notorious slum area, as **Jerry White** relates in *Campbell Bunk: The Worst Street in North London* (2003), about the transformation of **Campbell Road**, near Finsbury Park, between the 1880s and the 1950s.

From 1959 to 1967, **Joe Orton** and his lover Kenneth Halliwell lived in Flat 4, 25 Noel Rd, and it was here that their bodies were found, in August 1967, after Halliwell beat Orton to death with a hammer and then took a Nembutal overdose. The writer of *Loot* (1966) and *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (1967) was a controversial local figure. His penchant for sex in the public lavatories on **Holloway Road** is documented in detail in *The Orton Diaries* (1986) and, in 1962, after a sting operation by a particularly zealous librarian, both he and Halliwell served six months in Wormwood Scrubs for stealing and defacing library books – adjusting titles, pictures and the synopses on dust jackets so that, for example, a **Dorothy L. Sayers** murder mystery appeared to concern a lesbian policewoman with a passion for sado-masochism.

Since then, with Islington’s gentrification, several well-known writers have lived here. From 1977 to 1999, these included **Douglas Adams**, whose *Dick Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency* (1987) is set locally. But it is **Highbury**-based **Nick Hornby** who really put Islington on the literary map. His first book, *Fever Pitch* (1992), is an autobiographical, genre-defining account of his obsession with Arsenal football club – going “way beyond fandom” into every aspect of his emotional life – his subsequent books, such as *High Fidelity* (1995) and *About a Boy* (1998), both set in part in Islington, have been every bit as popular.

Another take on Arsenal comes from *My Story* (2005) by **Charlie George**, who was synonymous with the club in the 1970s – as famous for his footballing skill as he was for his reputation as a temperamental rebel.

# St John's Wood

Aside from the brief residency of **George Orwell** and **Stephen Spender**, **St John's Wood** is best known in literature for two things: Lord's cricket ground and certain high-class nineteenth-century brothels. Of the brothels, probably the most famous is Verbena Lodge, at 7 Circus Rd, where **Algernon Charles Swinburne** would travel from Putney to indulge a taste for flagellation supposedly acquired as a schoolboy at Eton College – as **Allen Michael** relates in his play *What's to Be Done with Algernon?* (1996), whose second act is narrated by Verbena's proprietress, Mrs Doris Addams.

Writers have both written about **Lord's** and, from time to time, played here. In 1902, **Arthur Conan Doyle** captained a team of authors (including **P.G. Wodehouse**) against a team of publishers. Both **Siegfried Sassoon** and **J.M. Barrie** have eulogized the place and, more recently, the caddish Harry Flashman took to the wicket here in **George MacDonald Fraser's** *Flashman's Lady* (1977) – defeating three of the finest cricketers of the 1840s – while in **Douglas Adams's** *Life, the Universe and Everything* (1982) the Ashes trophy is stolen from Lord's by robots from the planet Krikket.

For a slightly more historical view of Lord's, **Iain Sinclair's** *Downriver* (1991) describes the 1868 match between the MCC and the Australian Aboriginals – which concluded with the Aboriginals sprinting backwards, hurling spears and boomerangs.

“ In my first novel, *Reef*, the story begins in a petrol station in London, not far from where I lived, and goes to a house six thousand miles away. In my next book, *The Sandglass*, North London is the recurring setting from which Chip explores a network of lives in Sri Lanka. In my new novel, *The Match*, I have used several areas — Earl's Court, Archway, Hornsey — to tell a story of a man making a life as a photographer in London, falling in love and discovering a passion for cricket at the Oval. I came to London to find a place to write. For me it is a city of many voices, and many worlds; its writers, past and present, and its readers, are hugely important. I have lived in London longer than anywhere else now. It is a very special city and it put a spell on me. ”



Caroline Forbes

**Romesh Gunsekera**

## Crouch End

American mystery and horror writer **Peter Straub** lived on Hillfield Avenue in the 1970s, and it was he who introduced **Stephen King** to the area – resulting in his story, “Crouch End”, in which **Crouch End** becomes a portal into another, horrific dimension. The story was included in the **H.P. Lovecraft**-inspired *New Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* collection (1980), and has since been reprinted in *Nightmares and Dreamscapes* (1993). Why this particular patch of suburbia should inspire such associations is unclear, but its other well-known literary reference is in **Will Self**’s story “The North London Book of the Dead”, from *The Quantity Theory of Insanity* (1992), in which the narrator encounters his dead mother here “on a drizzle, bleak, Tuesday afternoon”.

## King’s Cross

For trillions of readers around the world, King’s Cross station means **J.K. Rowling**, the Hogwart’s Express and **platform 9¾**, which, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997), Harry finds that you can access if you “walk right through the wall” between platforms nine and ten. The station now has a “Platform 9¾” sign on a wall in its suburban building, complete with a luggage trolley which appears to be disappearing into it. Neighbouring literary associations are a good deal more obscure, although more writers have been attracted recently by the **British Library**, which moved here from Bloomsbury in the 1990s.

## The suburbs...

Previously overlooked in literary circles, **Willesden Green** found itself suddenly the centre of attention with the publication of **Zadie Smith**’s *White Teeth* (2000): her debut novel about three generations of two Willesden families – one Bangladeshi, the other (like Smith’s own) half-British and half-Jamaican. In *The Autograph Man* (2002) and *On Beauty* (2005), she has focused increasingly on America, but much of her most successful writing remains Willesden-based.

Since 1571, **Harrow public school** has produced a steady flow of literary alumni. **Lord Byron** is rumoured to have had homosexual orgies during his time here from 1801 to 1805,

although “Lines Written Beneath an Elm” (1807) restrains itself to reflections on a favourite spot in the graveyard where he liked to compose verses. Other “Old Harrovians” include **Anthony Trollope**, **L.P. Hartley** and, more recently, biographer **Francis Wheen** and novelist and barrister **John Mortimer**, who has described the place as “a pretty vulgar school”.

Elsewhere in the suburbs, **Virginia Woolf** wrote memorably about the British Empire Exhibition at the newly built **Wembley Stadium** in “Thunder at Wembley” (1924) – describing the colonies “perishing and dispersing in a spray of inconceivable beauty and terror which some malignant power illuminates” – while **Robert Rankin** has made **Brentford** his own with his daft, dark “Brentford series” about the drunken Jim Pooley and John Omalley and their fight against evil.

**Edward Platt**’s highly unusual *Leadville: A Biography of the A40* (2000) follows the history of **Western Avenue** (from White City to the Hanger Lane Gyrotory) from its 1920s futurist conception to congestion and partial demolition seventy years later – charting the lives of local residents on the way.

## Artists’ books

A paperback’s easy disposability is part of its charm. At the other end of the spectrum, however, are books that hold their own as **works of art**. Each December, the British Library ([www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)) celebrates the work of contemporary bookbinders with a competition and exhibition. Their Turning the Pages™ technology allows visitors to virtually “turn” the pages of manuscripts in a realistic way, using touch-screen technology and interactive animation. In this way, rare and precious works such as Leonardo’s sketchbook, Vesalius’s sixteenth-century anatomy, and Baybar’s Qu’ran are accessible to all.

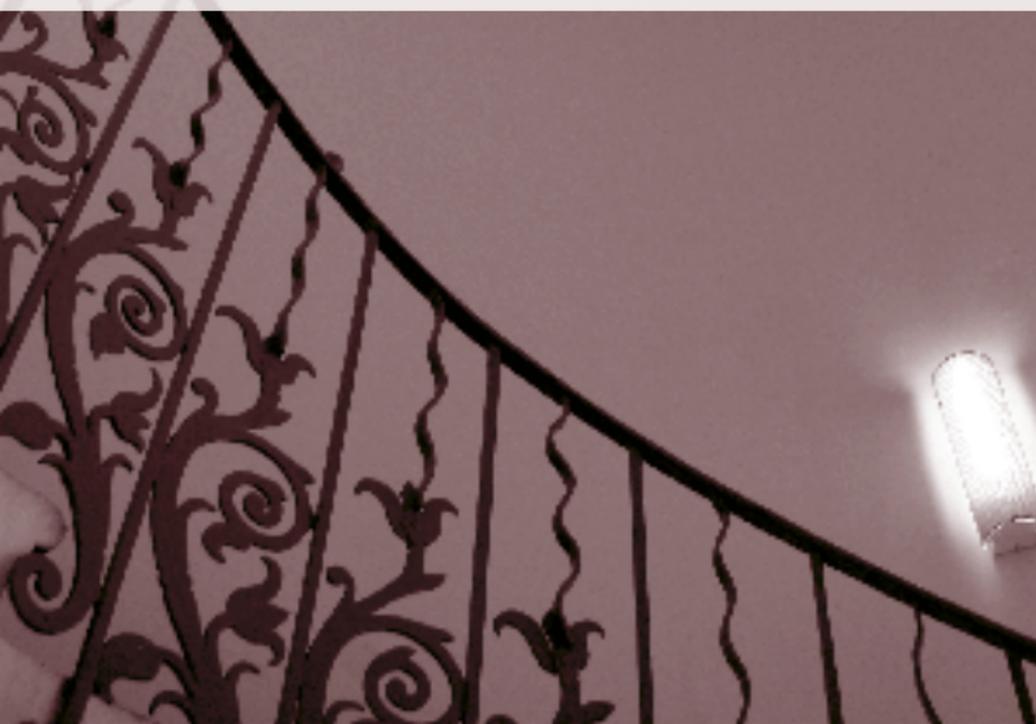
**Artwords** bookshop ([www.artwords.co.uk](http://www.artwords.co.uk)) sells books, magazines and videos about the contemporary visual arts. Artwords is based in Shoreditch (65a Rivington St, ☎ 020 7729 2000) and at the Whitechapel Art Gallery (80–82 Whitechapel High St, ☎ 020 7247 6924), or you can buy online.

**Bookworks** ([www.bookworks.org](http://www.bookworks.org)) is a contemporary visual arts publisher based in London. In addition to book publishing, they also produce text-based installations, videos and new media projects. Their limited edition, beautifully produced and affordable titles cover subjects from modern folk art to diamond mines in the Namibian desert.

**Ivory Press**, also based in London ([www.ivorypress.com](http://www.ivorypress.com)), are the aristocracy of the book world. Their books contain original works by contemporary artists such as Richard Long, Anish Kapoor and Anthony Caro. Hand-made and published in very limited editions.



South London



# Brixton

The transformation of **Brixton** from nineteenth-century middle-class suburb to today's edgy, trendy hub of Jamaican culture has been dramatic, and, in writing at least, the latter incarnation completely eclipses the former. For what it's worth, **Rebecca West** gives a fine depiction of Edwardian Brixton in *The Fountain Overflows* (1957) – based on her childhood of genteel, semi-rural poverty – but Brixton these days means two things: the immigrant experience, and crime.

For the past thirty years, the bard of Brixton has been **Linton Kwesi Johnson**, the king of dub poetry. Born in Jamaica, he moved to London in 1963 and joined the

“ It was while I was sitting on a bench in Brockwell Park, next to the lido where many children were enjoying a summer's day, that the first seed was planted for my novel *Brixton Rock*. It was this spot where I used to wander to get away from the madness of the Brixton streets in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Within 30 yards of my adopted bench in Brockwell Park, there was a tree that I used to climb and from this vantage point I could see a concrete landscape of tower blocks that stretched as far as the gas towers that overlook the Oval cricket ground. This view cemented itself in my mind and I described it my second novel *East of Acre Lane*.

Now, I live within a few minutes' walking of Clapham Common and Battersea Park. Whenever I need inspiration I take a leisurely walk from my home to the Clapham Common bandstand. On a hot Sunday afternoon I will see burly Aussies playing their brand of football. Families of all classes and creeds will be enjoying picnics and I always stop to watch the many soccer games taking place. There are teams consisting of peoples from every part of the world. This is what I love about London. Finally, I would reach the bandstand and join the overspill onto the grass from the pub that is located on Clapham Common Southside. There, freshly inspired, I will enjoy an ice-cold Guinness and look forward to returning to my work in progress. ”



Alex Wheatle

Black Panthers movement while still at school. His poetry, first published in 1974, pioneered the written use of the Jamaican dialect and he has also released numerous recordings of his work – frequently backed by the Dennis Bovell Dub Band. In 2002, a selection of his poetry, *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, made “LKJ” only the second living poet and the first black poet to be published in Penguin’s Modern Classics series.

A poet himself, although now better known for his hard-hitting novels such as *Brixton Rock* (1999) and *Checkers* (2005), **Alex Wheatle** is a second-generation Jamaican whose work is steeped in the black British community, their fears, pride, deprivation and aspirations. His Brixton is a place of rampant crime and simmering fury, which, in *East of Acre Lane* (2002), finds its expression in the riots of the 1980s.

In some ways, **Martin Millar**’s work is a logical extension of all these conflicts: his is a wild, countercultural voice weird enough to accommodate a cast of dealers, freaks and druggies. “Brixton’s answer to Kurt Vonnegut”, as he has been called, first came to prominence with *Milk, Sulphate and Alby Starvation* (1987), and, in the guise of Martin Scott, he has also found success with his fantasy books in which a detective based on Sam Spade pursues strange and fabulous criminals around the world of Thraxas.

## Deptford

**D**eptford’s literary history is dominated by the mystery of **Christopher Marlowe**’s death. On the face of it, the case is simple enough: at the end of a long drinking session in a Deptford tavern in 1593, the author of *Doctor Faustus* (1589) and *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587) got into an argument with one Ingram Frezer about the bill, then attacked him with a knife. In the struggle, Frezer managed to turn the knife back on Marlowe and killed him with a thrust to the head. In court, Frezer was acquitted on the grounds of self-defence, but literary historians have continued to speculate about what really happened and both **Charles Nicholl**’s history *The Reckoning* (1992) and **Anthony Burgess**’s novel *A Dead Man in Deptford* (1993) have suggested that Marlowe was a spy. In the tavern with them that night were a number of dubious characters, including a government agent named Robert Pooley and a servant of the Earl of Essex named Nicholas Skeres, while Frezer himself was a business agent for Lady Walsingham – wife of Queen Elizabeth’s famous adviser. Both Nicholl and Burgess dig deep into the “secret theatre” of Elizabethan espionage.

# Greenwich

Unlike the neighbouring shipbuilding areas of Deptford and Woolwich, **Greenwich** was styled a royal retreat as early as 1300, in the reign of Edward I, and over the years a range of literary figures have found their way here. In 1594, **William Shakespeare** is supposed to have performed his plays for Elizabeth I at Greenwich Palace, while **Samuel Johnson** and **James Boswell** enjoyed walking in Greenwich Park and **Samuel Pepys** was a regular at the St Alfege with St Peter Church on Greenwich High Road, where he liked to eye the “handsome women”.

As a location, however, Greenwich has been a bit less prestigious. **Chaucer**’s pilgrims pass through in *The Canterbury Tales* (1476) and **Dickens** found some space for it in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), but it wasn’t until **Joseph Conrad**’s *The Secret Agent* (1907) that it really came into its own. As Conrad explains in his foreword, the novel was inspired by a real-life incident when an anarchist, Martial Bourdin, was killed by a bomb that he was carrying towards the **Royal Observatory**. Conrad became intrigued why anyone should want to blow up so benign a target, and in the duplicitous stew of London, foggy, bourgeois Greenwich becomes a place of eerie calm.

# Waterloo and Lambeth

Today, as in the past, **Waterloo and Lambeth** combine very different worlds. The South Bank is a bastion of high culture, but this place of arts and yuppie flats borders some of the most run-down areas in the capital – even if they’re not quite the slums of **Somerset Maugham**’s *Liza of Lambeth* (1897).

Historically, Lambeth’s most significant writer is **William Blake**, who lived on Hercules Road from 1793 to 1802. To Blake, Lambeth was “the place of the Lamb” – an Eden in contrast with Soho, where he had lived before – and “Naked Blake reciting *Paradise Lost* in a leafy Lambeth bower” (as Iain Sinclair has put it) is now a key part of his mythology. It was here indeed that Blake was inspired to write “Jerusalem” (1804–08).

Ironically subtitled “A Lambeth Idyll”, *Liza of Lambeth* presents a very different picture. As a medical student at **St Thomas’s Hospital**, Maugham visited some of the most blighted and dangerous parts of the borough and the capital – places, he later claimed, where even the police wouldn’t go – and his experiences formed the basis of this surprisingly

“ I live in Kennington. I've been here for only a couple of years, but I love the area. I love its closeness to the river; I like the mix of people here; and I adore the architecture – a combination of Georgian terraces and squares, mid-twentieth-century blocks of flats, narrow Victorian lanes, and leafy open spaces. I've always thought Cleaver Square – one of my favourite bits of Kennington – would be a good title for a novel.



Charlie Hopkins

I use the British Library a lot when I'm researching; it's a fabulous resource. But there are many local archive centres, too, and most of these are at the heart of atmospheric areas of London – the London Metropolitan Archives, near Exmouth Market, and the City of Westminster Archives Centre, which is in the midst of all the wonderful streets just west of Millbank.

If I get stuck with my writing, I just go for a walk; I might walk around Marylebone, or Borough, or Clerkenwell. I like the areas where there's a real variety of people, and where there's still a strong sense of London's past. Those are the two things which really inspire me about London, I think: the richness of its history, and the fact that this history is still very visibly present on its streets; and the extraordinary complexity of its cultural and ethnic make-up. London is a city of immigrants, and immigrants always have fantastic stories to tell.

I've been reading lots of 1940s novels lately, and they've really made me see London with fresh eyes. Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* gives a wonderful idea of the extraordinary atmosphere of the city in wartime; Henry Green's *Caught* paints a vivid portrait of fire-fighting during the Blitz. But my favourites are the novels which capture the gloom, grubbiness and paranoia of Forties London life – for example, Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear*, and Patrick Hamilton's fabulously poignant *The Slaves of Solitude* and *Hangover Square*. ”

Sarah Waters

lively story about a factory-worker, her alcoholic mother and their struggle to survive.

The borough's most prominent writer, however, is blockbuster novelist **Jeffrey Archer**, who lives in the penthouse of Alembic House, near Vauxhall station, with views over the Palace of Westminster. He was visited here by **Iain Sinclair** in *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997); Sinclair explored his famous art collection, although Archer himself managed to be out at the time and avoided any awkward probing questions.

# Dulwich

An island of bourgeois leafiness between Herne Hill, Peckham and Crystal Palace, **Dulwich** never had any kind of Brixton-like revolution so its literary past and its literary present have a lot more in common. Its famous school, the super-bourgeois **Dulwich College**, produced two great writers at the start of the twentieth century: **Raymond Chandler**, whose *The Big Sleep* (1939) could hardly be less Dulwich, and **P.G. Wodehouse**, who fits the picture admirably. Resident in Dulwich until he left for America at the age of 23, Chandler wrote about the area mainly in essays condemning its middle-class complacency. Wodehouse, by contrast, who invented one of his best-known characters, Psmith, in his stories for the school magazine, revisited it many times, depicting it fondly as Valley Fields.

Subsequent writing about Dulwich has tended more towards Chandler. **Howard Jacobson's** *No More Mister Nice Guy* (1998), for instance, concerns a sex-crazed TV critic, Frank Ritz, who suffers a mid-life crisis, leaves his partner (a pornographic novelist named Melissa) and realizes, among other things, that Dulwich is really not the sort of place that he'd dreamt of winding up.

Other old boys of Dulwich College include **Graham Swift** and **Michael Ondaatje**, but neither has had much to say about the experience.

# Clapham

The large, comfortable houses in and around **Clapham** have been home to one or two interesting writers – notably, **Graham Greene**, who moved to the North Side of Clapham Common in 1935. *The End of the Affair* (1951) is probably his most autobiographical novel, set in Clapham in 1944, and among the actual incidents depicted is the gutting of his house by a German bomb (happily, he was visiting his mistress, Dorothy Glover, at the time). In the book, Clapham Common is a bleak reflection of adulterous guilt: a place where, in the rain, “the black leafless trees gave no protection: they stood around like broken water-pipes.”

*Home: The Story of Everyone Who Ever Lived in Our House* (2004), by **Julie Myerson**, is just that. Exploring the history of her Victorian terraced house – built on a cricket pitch in 1872 – the author encounters no fewer than 65 former residents, including the alcoholic son of a royal servant and, in the 1950s, the first black family to move into the street.

## Festivals

**Literature festivals** are proliferating across the country, and London is no exception. Here are two that are taking place during Get London Reading:

**Jewish Book Week** ([www.jewishbookweek.com](http://www.jewishbookweek.com)) is the world's pre-eminent festival of Jewish writing. This year's festival, in which authors of international repute will take part in more than 50 literary events, takes place from February 25 to March 5, 2006 and will be held at the Royal National Hotel, Bedford Way, London WC1. During the week, the Jewish Book Fair offers for sale a large and diverse selection of books on a Jewish theme. Entry to the book fair is free.

**Spit-Lit**, run by Alternative Arts ([020/7375 0441](tel:02073750441), [www.alternativearts.co.uk](http://www.alternativearts.co.uk)), is a literary festival celebrating women's writing. Based in Spitalfields, the week-long programme coincides this year with International Women's Week and as such will showcase writers from around the globe. Join over 100 women writers, artists and musicians on March 3–11, 2006 for debates, performances, readings, talks, a comedy night, the International Women's Day lunch and a series of writing workshops.

## Putney and Wandsworth

**A**lgernon Charles Swinburne was suffering from alcoholic dysentery when, in 1879, his friend Theodore Watts invited him to live at his house, The Pines, on **Putney Hill**. With Watts keeping an eye on him, Swinburne managed to get his drinking under control and, over the next thirty years, produced a prodigious number of poems, plays and essays, although Watts's tempering influence also involved the destruction of *Lesbia Brandon*: a novel about Swinburne's passion, sadomasochism.

Other writers to have spent time in Wandsworth and Putney include **Laurie Lee**, who worked as a labourer on a block of flats at the top of Putney Hill in 1935, and **George Eliot** who lived on **Wimbledon Park Road** from 1859 to 1860 and wrote much of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) here. From the age of 8, **Antonia White** attended the Convent of the Sacred Heart on Roehampton Lane, although she left at 14 after the nuns found a novel she was writing, and her experiences of the convent's sadistic, disciplinarian regime formed the basis of *Frost in May* (1933).

## Underground

The construction of the **London Underground**, which began with the line between Paddington and Farringdon in 1863, threw a whole new element into London writing, although it took some time to be recognized. In an early example, the hero of **William Morris's** *News From Nowhere* (1890) uses this “means of travelling which civilization has forced upon us like a habit” to get to Hammersmith; but crime writers were soon waking up to its appeal. *The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans* (1908) by **Arthur Conan Doyle** concerns secret plans for a submarine and the discovery of the body of a government clerk on the tracks near Aldgate. Set among the pea-souper smogs of the Victorian era, the Underground here becomes a natural extension of the dangerous world overhead – if not on the scale of **James Herbert's** *The Rats* (1974), in which the system is flooded with giant mutant rats with a taste for human flesh.

Elsewhere in fiction, the Tube has been a refuge from bombing raids – **William Strange's** *The Brave and Happy Shelterers* (1941) – and a simple workplace. *Working the Transport* (1957) by



Mark Thomas, Rough Guides

**Samuel Selvon** describes the experiences of a Caribbean immigrant, *Small Change*, and his struggle to adjust to this English subterranean existence, while **Christopher Ross's** *Tunnel Visions* (2001) is a collection of musings and anecdotes drawn from sixteen months working as a Station Assistant on the Victoria Line at Oxford Circus.

The under-ness of the Underground has also attracted a more mythical approach. **Russell Hoban's** fixation with the Tube began with *Kleinzeit* (1974), in which Underground appears both as a character ("Are you Orpheus? said Underground") and as a kind of Underworld. It has appeared again, together with Orpheus's head, in several of his other novels – particularly his more recent books such as the Faustian *Mr Rinyo-Clacton's Offer* (1998). *Neverwhere* (1997) by **Neil Gaiman** – based on his BBC TV series – is about Richard Mayhew, who meets an injured girl named Door and accompanies her into "London Below", where the names on the surface take on their own meanings, so that the Angel becomes an actual angel and Knightsbridge a dangerous bridge.

Unquestionably the most innovative Underground novel of the past few years is *253* (1998) by **Geoff Ryman**. Originally created as a website with hypertext links between each character, it describes the interactions among the 253 people on an ideally filled Tube train travelling from Embankment to Elephant and Castle on the Bakerloo Line.

“ From our house in Fulham, I can see the District Line trains on the far side of Eel Brook Common. I watch them at all times of the day and night. In my work, the Underground appears sometimes as the place where Orpheus can be found. I came to London originally in 1969 because I was so fond of British ghost stories and I wanted to see the places where the stories had happened.

London locations appear all through my books. What I like about London is that it is where I started to write so-called "adult" novels. So I'm very grateful to London for that, and it keeps providing me with material. The ghost story I would recommend to anyone is *The Beckoning Fair One*, by Oliver Onions. It's a story about a flat inhabited by the presence of a woman long gone, and the writer who rents this flat finds his whole life changed by his encounter with this presence. ”



Tara Hoban

**Russell Hoban**

# Peckham

Another part of South London to have changed beyond recognition, **Peckham** was a “pleasant village... with some of the finest dwellings about London” in **Daniel Defoe’s** *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1726). It was here, at the age of 9, that **William Blake** saw his first vision – “a tree filled with angels” – and **John Donne** repaired in 1604, having been sacked by his employer, Sir Thomas Egerton, for secretly marrying his underage niece.

The best-known writing about Peckham is probably **Muriel Spark’s** black comedy *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), about a devilish Scot, Dougal Douglas, who comes to Peckham to ghostwrite the autobiography of a fading actress and winds up spreading mayhem through a local textile firm and, ultimately, the whole area. Spark’s Peckham is a place of “upper-working” and “lower-middle” class people obsessed with status and getting their hands on bungalows, although the folkloric flavour running through it and the constant sitting around in pubs suggest some insularity from the rest of the capital.

No such insularity in **Debi Alper’s** *Nirvana Bites* (2004) in which a young woman, Jen, applying for a job at the BBC, finds herself being interviewed by a top executive and husband of a Tory MP whom she recognises from a fetish club as “Stapled Stan”. As comic chaos ensues, Stan is obliged to go into hiding in Peckham with Jen and her anarchist friends in the Nirvana Housing Co-operative.

# Wimbledon

For such a genteel and historical area, most of the notable **Wimbledon** writers are surprisingly modern. The poet and author of *I, Claudius* (1934), **Robert Graves**, was born in Wimbledon in 1895, and Irish novelist **Edna O’Brien** wrote her “The Country Girls” trilogy in Merton Park during the 1960s. But, even today, unquestionably the best-known books about the place are **Elizabeth Beresford’s** Womble series, inspired by a walk on **Wimbledon Common**, on which her daughter kept saying “Wombledon” by accident and Beresford dreamt up a family of hairy creatures devoted to collecting and recycling human litter.

**Graham Swift’s** *The Light of Day* (2003) is a novel almost lost beneath plaudits. Written in short, simple sentences, the book is the interior monologue of a private detective and

retired policeman, George, as he goes about his day, ruminates on the same day two years earlier, goes to visit a client in prison, works on a murder case and tries to get to grips with his life. Both the day and this banal, ostensibly safe corner of suburbia are mapped out in meticulous detail – in contrast with George’s disintegrating reality.

**Nigel Williams’s** “The Wimbledon Trilogy” also opens with a criminal theme, although its satire of middle England is more light-hearted – involving the plans of an unsuccessful solicitor, Henry Farr, to murder his wife, and a twenty-something loser who passes himself off as a Muslim to get a job in an Islamic school.

## Croydon and the suburbs...

**T**he southern suburbs of London are most famously portrayed in **Hanif Kureishi’s** *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), about Karim Amir, “an Englishman born and bred, almost”, who lives in anonymous **Bromley** with an English mother and an Indian father who acts as a guru for middle-class suburbanites. Kureishi depicts a world of racism and stifling small-mindedness – “We were proud of never learning anything except the names of footballers, the personnel of rock groups and the lyrics to ‘I Am the Walrus’” – and soon Karim escapes into a life of sexual adventure in London proper. Bromley does have one other literary connection, **H.G. Wells**, who was born on Bromley High Street, went to school at the local Morley’s Academy and visited the town in many of his books – notably, *Tono-Bungay* (1909),

### Book groups

With the support of libraries, reading agencies, the major publishers and newspapers, and Richard & Judy, **book groups** have never been so popular. To find the whereabouts of your nearest book group in London, go to [www.notjustanotherbookgroup.co.uk](http://www.notjustanotherbookgroup.co.uk). In addition, many **libraries** run book groups ([www.londonlibraries.org](http://www.londonlibraries.org)). Links on the Booktrust website’s reading groups page ([www.booktrust.org.uk/bookmates/index.html](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/bookmates/index.html)) will help you access national newspapers’ **online reading groups** and publishers’ dedicated reading group pages. Finally, **Opening the Book**, in partnership with Waterstone’s and with support from the National Lottery, has developed a Reading Group Toolbox. To get one, visit [www.openingthebook.com](http://www.openingthebook.com).

about a spurious miracle cure, and *The New Machiavelli* (1911), in which Bromley becomes “Bromstead”, a town being swallowed by creeping suburbanization.

Other writers in the suburbs have mostly tried to get out as quickly as possible. One improbable exception is French novelist, **Emile Zola**, who lived at *The Queen’s Hotel* in Upper Norwood for eight months between 1898 and 1899, and took over a hundred photographs of the area. From 1908 to 1912, **D.H. Lawrence** worked as a teacher in **Croydon** – his first letter home was “like a howl of terror” – although his half-wild class did inspire Ursula’s experiences in *The Rainbow* (1915) and the almost total absence of a social life gave him time to write his early poetry.

Even less inviting (by some margin) is New Addington Estate in Croydon, as described by **Kevin Lewis** in his memoir *The Kid* (2003). This “bleak, depressing place of faceless streets and tower blocks” provides the backdrop to a heartbreaking story of abuse and years as a teenager in the criminal underworld.

“ I was born in the old Charing Cross Hospital and live – as the crow flies – about a couple of miles from it in North Lambeth. So I’ve never really been anywhere much in my life. I’m a kind of London peasant – although I detest the estate agent jargon of “village London”. I live in the entire city. I grew up on the borders of the Hampstead Garden Suburb and East Finchley and have set a great deal of my work in that part of North London. Some wag once said – several hundred years ago – that the contemporary middle-class English novel was solely about “adultery in Hampstead” and I’ve done my level best to add to the genre, albeit in a rather strange fashion. I’ve lived in Kentish Town, Notting Hill, Islington, Brixton, Shepherd’s Bush and now down south. I’ve set things in all these locations, but for the North Circular Road remains my equivalent of Proust’s “two ways”. As for writing about London – I tend towards the peripheralists. Ballard’s mighty paeans to the Great West Road and the Chiswick Flyover, Iain Sinclair’s orbital peregrinations. I have time for Ackroyd’s psycho-biography of the city, and there are innumerable writers who catch aspects of London in their work with true justness. ”



Michael Wilksmith

**Will Self**

# East London



# Whitechapel

The East End, more than anywhere else in London, has been transformed in the past century, and when **Jack London** arrived at Flower and Dean Street in 1902 – posing as an American sailor, to explore the flipside of the British Empire – he concluded that “If this is the best that civilization can do for the human, then give us howling and naked savagery”. Both Jack London, in *People of the Abyss* (1903), and **George Orwell**, whose *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) he inspired, approached the area in much the same way – essentially as travel writers, concealing their real identities, tramping the streets and staying in such doss houses as Tower House in Fieldgate Street (where, improbably, **Stalin** also stayed in 1907).

These days, the East End has writers of its own, although **Whitechapel** remains best known for the sickening crimes of Jack the Ripper in the 1880s and the glamorized violence of the Kray twins eighty years later. Even today, the Ripper provides fuel for literature. **Patricia Cornwell** spent six million dollars of her own money researching *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper – Case Closed* (2002), in which she concludes that the Ripper was none other than nineteenth-century British Impressionist **Walter Sickert**. **Philip Sugden’s** *The Complete History of Jack the Ripper* (1994) is a more convincing study, and goes some way to disentangling the truth from the rumours, while **Ellery Queen’s** *Sherlock Holmes vs Jack the Ripper* (1967) does pretty much the opposite.

The Kray twins, too, appear in countless books. An early standout is **Jack Pearson’s** *The Profession of Violence* (1972), although more recently **Jake Arnott** has made East End gangsterism his own with *The Long Firm* (1999) and other novels – blending fiction with such real-life characters as the

“ I think the thing about London, and writing about London, is the way that high and lowlife co-exist. Right back to Chaucer, the pilgrims meeting in a pub in Southwark. Right back to Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* – Prince Harry in Cheapside – and the whole of Dickens, you’ve got a sense of people living cheek by jowl. That’s what I was trying to do in *The Long Firm*, really, to put across the idea of London as the great leveller. Colin Maclnnes’s *Absolute Beginners* – his evocation of the late Fifties – is a fantastically prescient book. You see London emerging from the gloom of postwar Britain... ”



Nigel Spalding

**Jake Arnott**

Krays, Judy Garland and Jack “The Hat” McVitie. His latest, *Truecrime* (2003), features Ronnie Kray’s funeral and follows the criminal underworld into the 1990s.

Ronnie Kray’s widow, **Kate Kray**, is one of the many gangland figures to have made the transition into writing. *The Black Widow* (2003) tells the story of the notorious Linda Calvey – dubbed “The Black Widow” due to the high mortality rate of her boyfriends and husbands.

## Shoreditch, Hoxton and Spitalfields

**T**he nineteenth-century Jewish community in Whitechapel and **Spitalfields** has inspired much literary activity – from the devious Fagin in **Charles Dickens’s** *Oliver Twist* (1839), who was based on a local pick-pocket named Ikey Solomons, to the first Anglo-Jewish best-seller, *Children of the Ghetto* (1892) by **Israel Zangwill**. With the end of the Second World War, the community began to disperse, but the subject has been revisited recently in *Rodinsky’s Room* (1999) by **Rachel Lichtenstein** and **Iain Sinclair**. David Rodinsky was a reclusive scholar, who lived above the synagogue at 19 Princelet St but vanished mysteriously in 1969 – his room remaining untouched for eleven years – and the book blends the story of his family’s exile from Poland with Lichtenstein’s own and that of the wider Jewish population.

Of the many East End fictional voices, in Spitalfields at least **Monica Ali** has received far and away the most attention. *Brick Lane* (2003) is set among the Bangladeshi curry houses on the street of the same name, and tells the story of Nazneen, who moves from Bangladesh to an East End council estate as part of an arranged marriage to a much older man, and slowly begins to assert herself. Also set on **Brick Lane** is **Jeremy Gavron’s** *An Acre of Barren Ground* (2005): a novel-cum-social

### Jonson Vs Spenser

On September 22, 1598, the playwright **Ben Jonson** killed a fellow-actor Gabriel Spenser in a duel on Hogsden Fields – the present-day Eagle Wharf Road, in Hoxton. In Newgate Prison, he escaped hanging only because of a hasty conversion to Roman Catholicism and his ability to read the Bible in Latin, which allowed him to be released on “benefit of clergy”. With an “M” for murderer branded on his left thumb, he wrote *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599) and, in due course, such classics as *Volpone* (1606) and *The Alchemist* (1610).

“ I’ve lived in lots of different parts of London. Shoreditch was the backdrop for my second novel, *My Lover’s Lover*, as it seemed a very eerie, liminal place to me – a good setting for a modern ghost story.

I love local libraries to work in. Keats Library in South End Green, where I’ve lived for five years, is perfect. It’s quiet, populated by genteel OAPs reading the newspapers, some boisterous toddlers, and a marmalade cat. It also has a wonderful, domed, stained-glass ceiling that you can stare at while you’re thinking.

I love the glimpses of London you get in Austen’s novels – this glittering place upon which your future existence rests. George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* is brilliant about London. I also love Iris Murdoch’s *A Severed Head*, Muriel Spark’s *Girls of Slender Means*, Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop*, Barbara Trapido’s *The Travelling Hornplayer*, Graham Green’s *The End of the Affair* and all Jean Rhys’s books about the city.”



Double Vision

Maggie O’Farrell

history which takes in everyone from medieval nuns to James Boswell and the immigrant Jews and Bangladeshis.

**William Taylor’s** *This Bright Field: A Travel Book in One Place* (2001) is an unlikely addition to the East End travel canon. As a would-be priest, Taylor lived in Spitalfields for seven years – to learn “a little humility”, as his bishop put it – and he recounts his time here and his explorations of the area’s past with a refreshing lack of sentimentality.

## Bethnal Green

**I**n **Bethnal Green**, wrote **John Wesley** in his journal in 1777, “There is such poverty as few can conceive without seeing it. I have not found any such distress, no not even in the prison of Newgate.” The area’s transition from prosperous farmland to slum is one of the nastier aspects of London’s history, and its desperate condition in the nineteenth century was documented by **Arthur Morrison, who** was born in Poplar in 1863 and, in *A Child of the Jago* (1896), describes the life of a boy living in the Old Nichol area of Bethnal Green and his inevitable descent into crime.

A rare splash of Bethnal Green colour comes from **Karen Wallace’s** *The Unrivalled Spangles* (2005) – set in a circus here in the 1870s. Shortlisted for the Booktrust Teenage Novel Award, it takes great pleasure in the details of snake-swallowing, serving up soup in twists of greasy paper and not having your boots stolen whilst sleeping in a doss house. *My East End: Memories of*

*Life in Cockney London* (1999) by **Gilda O'Neill** is part memoir, part-collection of oral history, and describes the hardships and changes seen by the likes of her tug skipper grandfather and her great-uncle, once a minder for a gambling den.

## Stoke Newington

**S**toke Newington's chief place in literary history comes from **Daniel Defoe**, who was educated at the Reverend Charles Morton's Nonconformist academy at Newington Green – then a village several miles from the City – and, from 1708 to 1730, lived in a large house with a four-acre garden at 95 Stoke Newington Church St, where he wrote most of his best-known works, including *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722). From 1815 to 1820, Bostonian **Edgar Allan Poe** also went to school here – his experiences inspiring his story, “William Wilson” (1839), set in part in “a large, rambling, Elizabethan house, in a misty-looking village of England”.

Later Stoke Newington fiction is of a rather different bent. **Ernest Raymond's** *We, the Accused* (1935) – based on the crimes of Dr Crippen – was described by **George Orwell** as “a peculiarly sordid and convincing murder story”, while **Irvine Welsh** (who lived here for some years) wrote “Stoke Newington Blues” (1995) about cruelty among junkies, and sets Mark Renton's homosexual encounter with a waiter “called Gi, short fir Giovanni, ah'd imagine” just off Stoke Newington Church Street in *Trainspotting* (1993).

In *How the Dead Live* (2000), **Will Self** writes about Dulston: “a skinny district” just south of Stoke Newington, where Lily Bloom, a furious Jewish-American, is taken by minicab after her death from cancer.

## Hackney

**T**he writer most associated with **Hackney**, along with **Iain Sinclair**, is Nobel laureate **Harold Pinter**, who was born here in 1930 and educated at Hackney Downs School. The son of immigrant Jewish tailors, he experienced considerable anti-Semitism as a child, which – along with the competitive manner of Cockney speech – helped to inform the sense of alienation in his work. In his semi-autobiographical novel, *The Dwarfs* (1963), he describes a “working class area of big run-down Victorian houses... a soap factory with a terrible smell and a lot of railway yards and shops”. He and **Steven Berkoff**, whose work reflects

“ I live in Hackney. We settled here in 1969 and stayed. My writing began on my own doorstep: documentation (film, short prose pieces, poetry) of life and place. East London features in most of my books, from the Whitechapel of my first novel, *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings*, through the evolving docklands communities of *Downriver*, to a pedestrian circumnavigation of the M25 (accessed via the Lea Valley) in *London Orbital*. There are a number of places I go, on foot, to find

an oasis, to think about whatever project I'm working on: Bunhill Fields, Fountain Court, a café near Springfield Park. The inspiration of London comes from the argument between its multilayered past and its neurotic future: the impulse to erase memory and start again. The shifts and moods of London light, cloud mattresses broken by unexpected shafts of sunlight, that too is inspiring.

Favourite books range from L.F. Céline's *London Bridge and Guignol's Band* to Gerald Kersh's *Night and the City* and *Fowlers End*; Michael Moorcock's *Mother London* and Canetti's *Party in the Blitz*; Allen Fisher's *Place* and the Whitechapel poems of Bill Griffiths and Lee Harwood.

”

Iain Sinclair



Belinda Lawley

similar issues, were briefly at Hackney Downs together. Berkoff has since described it as “a shocking school” and “ghastly”.

## Shadwell

On October 4, 1936, **Shadwell** was witness to the “Battle of Cable Street”: a two-hour clash between local Jewish and Communist groups and the “black-shirts” of the British Union of Fascists – as well as the police, who were trying to clear the way for their legal demonstration. **Nicholas Mosley**, Whitbread prize-winning son of BUF leader Sir Oswald Mosley, describes the events of the day in unflinching detail in *Beyond the Pale* (1983).

## Wapping

The site of the original London docks until 1969, from 1374 to 1386 **Wapping** was the workplace of **Geoffrey Chaucer** – the Controller of the Customs and Subsidies of Wools, Skins and Hides – and it was here,

in 1870, that **Joseph Conrad** first arrived in Britain as a Ukrainian sailor, Josef Korzeniowski. In *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), he describes the docks as “unsuspected, smooth, and placid, lost amongst the buildings like dark lagoons hidden in a thick forest”.

But it is another East End murder that has given Wapping its main place in literature. On Saturday December 7, 1811, a draper, his apprentice, wife and baby were gruesomely killed in their house at 29 Ratcliff Highway, and, three days later, a publican, his wife and maid suffered a similar fate at the *King’s Arms*, 81 New Gravel Lane. As **Peter Ackroyd** describes in *Hawksmoor* (1985), a sailor named John Williams hanged himself before he was arrested, and his body was paraded through the streets – a stake driven through his heart, to stop him from becoming a vampire. Other writers to have explored the subject include **P.D. James** and **T.A. Critchley** in *The Maul and the Pear Tree* (1990), and **Thomas De Quincey**, who described the murders as “the finest of the century by some degrees” in his satirical essay “Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” (1827).

## Limehouse, Isle of Dogs and Docklands

Where Spitalfields was home to the Jewish community, so **Limehouse** was London’s first Chinatown and its infamous opium dens appear in a number of nineteenth-century novels – notably, **Oscar Wilde’s** *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890), in which they become “dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new”. **Charles Dickens**, whose godfather, Christopher Huffam, ran a chandler’s shop on Garford Street, also visits Limehouse in *Dombey and Son* (1848) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865).

The “unlucky Isle of Dogs”, as **Samuel Pepys** describes it in his *Diaries* (1665), has been largely overlooked in literature, and its most famous work – the long-lost *Isle of Dogs* (1597), a “lewd plaie” by **Thomas Nashe** and **Ben Jonson** – was suppressed for sedition on its first performance at the Swan Theatre, and led to the arrest of Jonson and the other actors (including Gabriel Spenser: see p.47). Nashe himself managed to flee the city, but all of his papers were destroyed and, as part of the official crackdown, every theatre in London was closed for several months afterwards.

Today, the **Isle of Dogs** has been transformed from teeming, impoverished docks to the present-day **Docklands** of warehouse flats and towering office blocks – as **Melanie**

**McGrath** describes in *Silvertown* (2002), about the life of her grandmother, Jenny Fulcher, who was born in Poplar in 1903. The development itself forms the backdrop of **Penelope Lively's** *City of the Mind* (1991), concerning an architect, Matthew Halland, who tries to fill the space left after his divorce with furious work on the new buildings.

## The suburbs...

Out to the east, the literary map looks exceedingly empty, although **William Morris** was born in **Walthamstow** in 1834, and the house where he lived from 1848 to 1856 – Lloyd Park on Forest Road – is now the William Morris Gallery (Tues–Sat & 1st Sun of each month 10am–1pm & 2–5pm; free), and contains copies of the many books published by his Kelmscott Press.

Born in Jamaica, bred in Birmingham and resident in **Newham**, **Benjamin Zephaniah** is the unrivalled poet of what he calls the “new East End”. His first novel for teenagers, *Face* (1999), is set in an East End suburb where “Many of the shops had metal shutters on their windows and doors to protect them from racist attacks” and a 15-year-old boy, Martin, is forced to come to terms with people’s reactions when “some-

“ I live in Newham, east London, and to date my three novels have all been set there. It is the major gateway to London, a place where new arrivals can feel at home, and a place where Immigrants from Birmingham like me can blend in and learn how to chat like a real cockney. You get me? Not far from Stratford there is a place called Maryland Point. There is a small roundabout in the middle of the road there. When I first came to London I used to sit there and read, every now and then a car may pass, and dogs and cats would join me depending on what I was reading. I couldn't sit there now, there are now so many cars that I would probably die of poisoning or get arrested for loitering with intent. Now I write in my study, I have a wonderful view of the girl next door.

I love the multicultural make-up of the city; when I say that I don't just mean the Asian culture, or the Jamaican culture, or the African or Irish culture, I also mean the hip-hop culture and the alternative culture. I love that thing that posh people call the underbelly of the city, I like hanging out with foxes, I like kissing freaks. My favourite London book is called *London AZ*, it gives me a sense of place. ”



Mark Rusher

**Benjamin Zephaniah**

thing terrible” happens to his face in a joyriding accident.

# West London



# Bayswater

Encompassing Hyde Park and Paddington, **Bayswater** is one of the most exclusive areas in London and its exclusiveness has done it well in terms of literature.

**J. M. Barrie** lived on Bayswater Road from 1902 to 1909, and wrote most of *Peter Pan* (1904) in his summerhouse here. **Lytton Strachey** spent most of his childhood at 69 Lancaster Gate, and, after the Second World War, **Muriel Spark** lived in the *Helena Club* at number 82, which she would later use as the May of Teck Club in *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963). Of the many other authors to have lived nearby, **Wyndham Lewis** had a house on Ossington Street in the 1930s, where he had several affairs and contracted a range of venereal diseases, while **Thomas Hardy** lived at 16 Westbourne Park Villas from 1836 to 1874, where he wrote his first, unpublished novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*.

Although most Bayswater writing has reflected this upper-class life, **Paddington station** has led to some different impressions – not least in **Michael Bond**'s “Paddington Bear” books – and both **Agatha Christie**, in *4.50 from Paddington* (1957) and **Graham Greene**, in *It's a Battlefield* (1934) and *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), have used it as a suitable place for murder.

In contrast with all of these, *Only in London* (2002) by **Hanan al-Shaykh** focuses on the *shawarma* houses of Edgware Road as it follows the intertwining lives of four characters from different part of the Arab world.

# Chiswick

Un glamorous as it might be, a fair few writers have chosen to live in **Chiswick** – notably **W.B. Yeats**, who lived on Blenheim Palace Road from 1888 to 1895, having lived on nearby Woodstock Road for a couple of years as a teenager, and **Anthony Burgess**, who wrote his biography of Shakespeare, *Nothing Like the Sun* (1964), on Glebe Street. For Yeats, it was here that “the troubling of my life began” when he met Maud Gonne – his muse and unrequited love. It was also at this time he wrote “Lake Isle of Innisfree” (1892) and became friends with **George Bernard Shaw**.

Books about Chiswick are not legion, but **G.K. Chesterton**'s *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908) is some compensation. A wildly coloured novel of elephants, hot-air balloons and a group of anarchists who name themselves after days of the week, it opens in Saffron Park (ie, **Bedford Park**) “on the sunset side of London, as red and ragged as a cloud of sunset”.

## Gay literature

Although not strictly a London-based initiative, queerupnorth's **Big Gay Read** wants to find out which of the hundreds of books capturing lesbian and gay experience published in recent decades the British public cherishes above all others. Have your say at [www.queerupnorth.com/biggayread](http://www.queerupnorth.com/biggayread).

The **Drill Hall** ([www.drillhall.co.uk](http://www.drillhall.co.uk)) is a big venue for gay writing, workshops and festivals, and is home to the Queer Storytelling festival.

**Gay London Writers** was founded in 1993. This group of male writers meets fortnightly to read work in progress to each other, give feedback and discuss publishing strategies ([www.geocities.com/gaylondonwriters/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/gaylondonwriters/index.html)).

**Gay's the Word**, the largest lesbian and gay bookshop in the UK, will be celebrating National Gay and Lesbian History Month in February 2006. Located in Bloomsbury (66 Marchmont St, [T 020 7278 7654](tel:+442072787654), [www.gaystheword.co.uk](http://www.gaystheword.co.uk)), the shop stocks an enormous range of books from the profound to the frivolous and entertaining, from prize-winning literary work to detective, romantic and erotic fiction, and a wide range of non-fiction. Sign up for their newsletter by emailing [newsletter@gaystheword.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@gaystheword.co.uk).

**London Out Writers**, another writers' group, is open to members of [www.loveeverywhere.com](http://www.loveeverywhere.com). They meet in Gay's the Word.

**Serpent's Tail** ([www.serpentstail.com](http://www.serpentstail.com)) has an ongoing commitment to publishing the best gay and lesbian fiction.

## Hammersmith

Squeezed between the river and the A4, **Hammersmith** has quite a distinguished literary past, with **H. Rider Haggard** living on Gunterstone Road from 1885 to 1888 at the period of his greatest success, when he published *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887), and **William Morris** living at Kelmscott House, where he set his twenty-first-century utopian novel, *News from Nowhere* (1891). On the river itself, the *Dove* – the oldest riverside pub in London – was once a haunt for **Ernest Hemingway** and **Graham Greene**.

In the 1920s, **Robert Graves** lived in bohemian style at 35a **St Peter's Square**, in a *ménage à quatre* with his wife Nancy, his lover, the American poet **Laura Riding**, and the young Irish poet **Geoffrey Phibbs**. In a famous incident in 1929, Riding threw herself out of a third-storey window, breaking her back, while Graves ran downstairs and – in a show of devotion – jumped out of a window on the upper ground floor and twisted his ankle.

In the 1990s, **Courtia Newland** put Hammersmith back on the literary map with his debut novel, *The Scholar* (1998) and a collection of short stories, *Society Within* (1999) – both of which are set in a crime-riven Hammersmith estate and address themes of alienation and racial tension.

## Kensington

At its peak, in the early twentieth century, **Kensington** was one of the centres of world literature and counted **G.K. Chesterton** and modernists **Wyndham Lewis**, **Ezra Pound** and **Ford Madox Ford** among its writers, who in turn attracted the likes of **T.S. Eliot**. Ezra Pound first moved to 10 Kensington Church St in 1909 and set about the London literary scene with typical belligerence – even challenging the poet **Lascelles Abercrombie** to a duel over remarks about **William Wordsworth**. In 1914, he moved to 5 Holland Place Chambers where he and Eliot first met in “his little triangular sitting room”; but the centre of Kensington literary socializing at this time was 80 South Lodge, on Campden Hill Road, where Ford lodged with the novelist **Violet Hunt**, ran *The Literary Review* and held parties at all possible opportunities.

Most Kensington of all, of course, is **J.M. Barrie’s** *Peter Pan* (1904). There are *Peter Pan* landmarks everywhere here – from the Round Pond in **Kensington Gardens** where Barrie first met Pan inspiration Jack Llewellyn Davies, to the Peter Pan statue on the west bank of the nearby Long Water. Another Kensington children’s classic is **Kenneth Grahame’s** *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), which Grahame developed out of the bedtime stories he was inventing for his son, Alistair, and he wrote whilst working as Secretary at the Bank of England.

Many other writers have lived and worked in Kensington – **William Makepeace Thackeray** wrote *Vanity Fair* (1847–8) at 6 Young St, and **Henry James** wrote *The Ambassadors* (1903) – his most “perfect” book – at 34 De Vere Gardens, where he lived from 1886 to 1902. But literature in the later twentieth century tended to focus on the grottier parts of the borough – specifically North Kensington where, in **J.G. Ballard’s** *Concrete Island* (1973), Robert Maitland crashes his car into the central reservation of the **Westway** and is unable to escape for several weeks, and, in **Martin Amis’s** *London Fields* (1989), Keith Talent lives in Trellick Tower on Golborne Road.

In Kensington proper, more recent books have often tended to relate to *Peter Pan*. *Kensington Gardens* (2005) by **Rodrigo Fresán** mingles London in the Swinging Sixties (Andy Warhol and the Beatles included) with the life of J. M. Barrie,

**Creased up**



**Tickled pink**



**Gobsmacked**



**Swept away**



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while **Sam Llewellyn**'s hit "Darlings" series – *Little Darlings* (2004), *Bad, Bad Darlings* (2005) and *Desperado Darlings* (2006) – are "inspired, if that is the word, by [a] lifelong hatred of *Peter Pan*". His Darlings – Primrose, Daisy and Cassian – are a crew of wicked, dangerous children, about as far from the Llewellyn Davies boys as it's possible to imagine.

## Chelsea

Improbable as it seems now, **Chelsea** was a bohemian kind of place as recently as the 1960s, with a serious literary pedigree. **Sir Thomas More** bought a piece of land here in 1523 and built a manor with a garden running a hundred yards to the Thames, where he was visited on several occasions by the leader of German humanism, **Desiderius Erasmus**. In the 1710s, **Jonathan Swift** lived on Church Lane and wrote about Chelsea in his *Journals to Stella* (1715), while **Tobias Smollett** wrote *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753) at Monmouth House (present-day Lawrence Street), where he lived from 1750 to 1762.

But, as with Kensington, literature in Chelsea really took off in the nineteenth century. In 1834, **Thomas Carlyle** moved into number 24 Upper Cheyne Row, then semi rural, and persuaded his friend **Leigh Hunt** to move next door. Here the "Sage of Chelsea", as Carlyle became known, had to write his two-volume history of *The French Revolution* (1837) twice, when, having already destroyed his notes, he lent the only copy to the philosopher **John Stuart Mill**, whose maid accidentally used it to light the fire. The Queen Anne house, where Carlyle and his wife played host to Dickens, Tennyson and Darwin, is now a **museum** (April–Oct Wed–Fri 2–5pm, Sat & Sun 11am–5pm; £4).

The next literary wave came in the form of poet and artist **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**, who arrived at 16 **Cheyne Walk** in 1862, where he was joined by a menagerie of animals, including a wombat, an opossum, a kangaroo, several owls and a white bull, as well as **George Meredith** and **Algernon Charles Swinburne**, who had a habit of sliding naked down the banisters. From 1884 until his arrest for gross indecency in 1895, **Oscar Wilde** lived at number 34 Tite St, where he wrote many of his best-known works, including *The Happy Prince* (1888), *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890), *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). The year before his arrest, he famously ejected the Marquis of Queensbury from the house, declaring his lover's father "the most infamous brute in London".

By the turn of the century, Chelsea was one of the few great literary areas. **Henry James** wrote his autobiography – all three volumes of it – first at 10 Lawrence St, then at

Carlyle Mansions on Cheyne Walk, where he died after a stroke in 1916. **A.A. Milne** wrote *When We Were Very Young* (1924) and *Winnie the Pooh* (1926) at 13 Mallord St – from where, as the rhyme relates, his son Christopher Robin would go with his nurse Alice to see the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. Also local were **Antonia White** and **Ian Fleming**, who lived at 119 Cheyne Walk from 1923 to 1936, and later set the trend for fictional, Chelsea-based spies – with James Bond living “in a converted Regency house” in Wellington Square in *Casino Royale* (1952), while **John Le Carré’s** George Smiley lives slightly more discreetly in Bywater Street.

Probably the last great literary force in Chelsea was Welsh poet **Dylan Thomas**, who lived on Redcliffe Street in the 1930s, and in Flat 3, Wentworth Studios, Manresa Road, from 1942 to 1944, but was more often to be found in *The Cross Keys* on Lawrence Street or the *King’s Head* and *Eight Bells* at the corner of Cheyne Row and Cheyne Walk, where he would play shove ha’ penny and goad people into fighting. **Laurie Lee** and **John Betjeman** both lived here in old age and **Anita Brookner** has written about lonely, ageing Chelsea women in *Brief Lives* (1990) and *Fraud* (1992), but **J.G. Ballard’s** *Millennium People* (2003) comes closest to recapturing some Chelsea spirit, with its shadowy group of middle-class terrorists, who wage war against consumerism from their gated riverside community.

## Fulham and Earl’s Court

**N**eighbouring **Fulham** has little historical to boast about, although **Samuel Richardson**, author of the ground-breaking *Clarissa* (1747–8), died at 247 New King’s Rd in 1761 and dramatist **John Osborne** was born on 2 Crookham Rd in 1929. It was left to Pennsylvanian **Russell Hoban** to give Fulham its voice in his mind-expanding novels, written on Musgrave Crescent – many of which, such as *The Medusa Frequency* (1986), about a frustrated, lovelorn writer who finds himself dogged by the head of Orpheus, are set in a recognizable Fulham.

Another recent writer to have focused on Fulham is **Anthony Horowitz**, who has set much of his “Alex Rider” and “Diamond Brothers” series for children in the area.

**Earl’s Court** has two claims to literary fame. The first is 2 Bolton Gardens, where **Beatrix Potter** was born in 1866 and lived until the age of 39. The second is *Hangover Square* (1941) by **Patrick Hamilton**: a classic set in a grimy Earl’s

“ I used to go to cemeteries to write. This isn't as odd as it sounds. Cemeteries are quiet and green. They have places to sit and think. The residents never complain. Brompton Cemetery is my favourite. We even filmed part of *Stormbreaker* there. As a Londoner, I draw constant inspiration from the River Thames and I still think the view from Waterloo Bridge one of the greatest in the world. My favourite book – based entirely in London – is *New Grub Street* by George Gissing. He was brilliant at examining the underbelly of the city. His London is dark, hostile and unforgiving. Very different to mine. ”



**Anthony Horowitz**

Court about a schizophrenic, George Harvey Bone, and his obsession with the sadistic Netta.

## Notting Hill

W ealthy and trendy, **Notting Hill** these days is home to the likes of **Helen Fielding** and screenwriter **Richard Curtis**, but as recently as the 1980s its associations were considerably darker, and more innovative.

The area's first novel of note was **G.K. Chesterton's** *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904) – an absurdist fantasy set in 1984, about a war between the London suburbs – although the first “Notting Hill novel” proper was **Wyndham Lewis's** *Rotting Hill* (1951): a furious satire on the degeneration of England, inspired by his bomb-damaged flat, 27a Notting Hill Gate, when he returned from America in 1945. In the 1950s, Notting Hill became the bohemian heartland that Chelsea had been before it – its cheapness attracting both artists and immigrants. **Samuel Selvon's** ground-breaking *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) is a Trinidadian-eye view of a city still reeling from the Second World War, while **Colin MacInnes's** *Absolute Beginners* (1959) evokes this changing world through the new youth culture, its jazz music and race riots. **Lynne Reid Banks's** *The L-Shaped Room* (1960) concerns a pregnant, unmarried woman who moves into a squalid Notting Hill bedsit where the neighbours include a Jewish writer, a black jazz musician and a number of prostitutes.

Since this clearly defined era, **Michael Moorcock** has

probably been Notting Hill's best-known resident writer. His "Cornelius Quartet", written between 1965 and 1977, follows the time-travelling adventures of postmodern, Notting Hill-based antihero, Jerry Cornelius, and many of his later books, like *King of the City* (2000), have also been set here. Another perspective comes from **Martin Amis's** *London Fields* (1989), in which Notting Hill is a nasty, immoral place where feeble upper-class Guy Clinch and racist, sexist, darts-obsessed working-class Keith Talent become entangled with a beautiful psychic called Nicola Six.

The most recent author to have written successfully about Notting Hill is **Alan Hollinghurst**, who won the Man Booker Prize for *The Line of Beauty* (2004), about a gay student who lodges in the Notting Hill mansion of 1980s rising Tory star Gerald Fedden.

## Shepherd's Bush

**M**ore run-down than Notting Hill, neighbouring **Shepherd's Bush** has attracted writers only recently, but its relative cheapness, and hotchpotch of cultures and classes, promises more to come. **Marius Brill's** *Making Love: A Conspiracy of the Heart* (2003) is about a young woman who steals an old book, also called *Making Love*, from Shepherd's Bush Library and discovers that the secret services are looking for it as well. Winner of the 2002 Whitbread prize, **Patrick Neate** lives locally, and Shepherd's Bush underpins such novels as *The London Pigeon Wars* (2003), in which a group of "twirtysomethings" find the London around them paralysed by bellicose pigeons.

“ I live in Shepherd's Bush which is, like most of London, a cheek-by-jowl kind of place in terms of race, class and wealth... That's what makes London interesting. The Bush hasn't exactly featured in my novels but it's been a fairly poorly hidden context in both the last two. Certainly there's a kid in my street who'll get a shock if he ever reads *City Of Tiny Lights*. Unfortunately I doubt he will. A confession: I'm afraid I write in my local quite a lot (the *Grove*). Any writer will tell you it's a lonely business so I often pop out with my laptop to have a drink and enjoy the illusion that I'm actually being sociable. I love voices ... The diversity of accents, languages and slang.”

**Patrick Neate**

# Richmond and Twickenham

Way out west, Richmond and Twickenham have been writerly hang-outs for centuries. **Alexander Pope** was a prominent Twickenham resident – as a Roman Catholic, he was unable to live more centrally – and he wrote most of *The Dunciad* (1728), his savaging of the likes of the poet laureate Colley Cibber, among his picturesque gardens on present-day Crossdeep. In 1747, **Horace Walpole** arrived in a riverside cottage on Waldegrave Road which he proceeded to transform into a “little Gothic castle” – adding battlements, towers and stained-glass windows – which in turn inspired *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the first Gothic novel. Further on down Waldegrave Road, at number 5, **Noel Coward** was born in 1899 and lived for the first ten years of his life.

**Richmond**’s literary connections are also mostly historical. Most importantly, in a spell away from Bloomsbury between 1915 and 1924, **Leonard** and **Virginia Woolf** set up the Hogarth Press at 34 Paradise Rd, where they printed books including **T.S. Eliot**’s *The Waste Land* (1922).

*A Year in the Life of Richmond Park* (2003) by **Joanna Jackson** explores the park from natural, literary and historical perspectives.

## The suburbs...

In the 1920s the marketing division of the Metropolitan Railway came up with the term “**Metroland**” to describe the **suburban** expanses of **Pinner**, **Neasden** and **Rickmansworth** – luring workers out of London with promises of greenery, fresh air and unparalleled transport links to central London. These far-flung suburbs had a particular appeal for **John Betjeman**, who romanticized the area in his 1973 TV documentary *Metroland* and in his 1977 poetry collection of the same name. **Julian Barnes**’s novel, *Metroland* (1980), meanwhile, concerns a pair of teenage boys, Chris and Toni, who dream of escaping to France and becoming “artists-in-residence at a nudist colony”. Ultimately (and fairly depressingly), Chris grows to appreciate the less idealistic pleasures of marriage, a mortgage and suburban reality.

Of the few writers to have lived in these parts, **Stevie Smith** deserves particular mention. Others grew up and fled, or visited and then fled, and **Douglas Adams** wrote about “a small café in Rickmansworth” in *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the*

*Galaxy* (1979) without ever having actually been there, but Smith lived at 1 Avondale Rd in Palmer's Green from 1907 until her death in 1971. She wrote her first and most famous novel, *Novel on Yellow Paper* (1936), here in the mid-1930s.

“ I live in Cricklewood now. The name means “bent forest”, though most of the woodland is long gone. For all its awkwardness, I like the name of the place; and for all its awkwardness, I like the place itself. The name seems to me to have a gothic or fantastical ring, like something from Lovecraft or Tolkien. *What creatures creep and crawl from Cricklewood?*



Caroline Forbes

*...or alternatively, Sam sighed and wrung the mud from his leggings. How very far he had come from his comfortable hearth in Cricklewood! North of Kilburn (which has always been wilder), and west of Hampstead (which has always been richer), Cricklewood grew up along the Midland Railway and the old Roman road known as Watling Street. Only taxi drivers know it by that name now, and in Cricklewood it is called the Broadway. Walk down the Broadway on a Saturday evening, and you'll see what Cricklewood is about. Here Kurdish butchers sit cow's-cheek-by-carp's-jowl beside Russian fishmongers, the Somali street-vendors sell Rolex Oysters outside the bagel bakery, and sallow-faced girls peddle freshly stolen hocks of ham at the bus stop by the Turkish pizzeria. This is not a picture Monet would ever have chosen to paint: but Hogarth would have, and Turner might have if he had ever been lost enough. It is essentially Londonish, metropolitan to the core, dirty and fabulous – as T.S. Eliot recognized when he came here in 1911, and wrote in his diary, *But Cricklewood is mine. I discovered it. No one will go there again. It is like the sunken town in the fairy story that rose just every May Day eve and lived for an hour and only one man saw it.*”*

**Tobias Hill**

# Web directory

## Books and reading

**Booktrust** [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk). Book reviews, recommendations and information about forthcoming titles, prizes and publishers.

**Booktrused** [www.booktrused.com](http://www.booktrused.com). All about children's books.

**Encompass** [www.encompassculture.com](http://www.encompassculture.com). British Council website offering reading recommendations.

**First Choice Books** [www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk](http://www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk). An interactive database for adults who are just getting into reading and choosing books.

**Poetry Book Society** [www.poetrybooks.co.uk](http://www.poetrybooks.co.uk)

**Poetry Society** [www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk)

**The Reading Agency** [www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk)

**SALIDAA** (South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive) [www.salidaa.org.uk](http://www.salidaa.org.uk)

**Story** [www.theshortstory.org.uk](http://www.theshortstory.org.uk)

**World Book Day** [www.worldbookday.com](http://www.worldbookday.com)

## Reading skills

**BBC RAW Campaign** [www.bbc.co.uk/raw](http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw). The BBC's adult literacy campaign.

**Literacy Trust** [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

**Quick Reads** [www.worldbookday.com](http://www.worldbookday.com).

A choice of new books for people wishing to regain the reading habit, or for those who experience difficulty reading.

## Literature and spoken word events

**Apples & Snakes** [www.applesandsnakes.org](http://www.applesandsnakes.org)

**Book Now! Festival** [www.richmond.gov.uk](http://www.richmond.gov.uk)

**Booktrust** [www.booktrust.org.uk/events](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/events)

**British Council** <http://literaryfestivals.britishcouncil.org>

**British Library** [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

**Institute of ideas** [www.instituteofideas.com](http://www.instituteofideas.com)

**Redbridge Literature Festival** [www.redbridge.gov.uk/leisure](http://www.redbridge.gov.uk/leisure)

**Royal Over-Seas League** [www.rosl.org.uk](http://www.rosl.org.uk)

**Royal Society of Literature** [www.rslit.org](http://www.rslit.org)

**South Bank Centre** [www.rfh.org.uk](http://www.rfh.org.uk)

**Spit-Lit Festival** [www.alternativearts.co.uk](http://www.alternativearts.co.uk)

**Spread the Word** [www.spreadtheword.org.uk](http://www.spreadtheword.org.uk)

## Things to do

**Visit London** [www.visitlondon.co.uk](http://www.visitlondon.co.uk). Literary trails around the capital.

## Places to read for free

**Barbican Library** [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

**British Library** [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

**London Libraries** [www.londonlibraries.org](http://www.londonlibraries.org)

**Poetry Library** [www.poetrylibrary.org.uk](http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk)

## Reading about writing

**3am Magazine** [www.3ammagazine.com](http://www.3ammagazine.com)

**Ambit Magazine** [www.ambitmagazine.co.uk](http://www.ambitmagazine.co.uk)

**The Literary Review** [www.literaryreview.co.uk](http://www.literaryreview.co.uk)

**The London Magazine** [www.thelondonmagazine.net](http://www.thelondonmagazine.net)

**London Review of Books** [www.lrb.co.uk](http://www.lrb.co.uk)

**Londonist** [www.londonist.com](http://www.londonist.com)

**Poetry London** [www.poetrylondon.co.uk](http://www.poetrylondon.co.uk)

**smoke: a london peculiar** [www.shink.dircon.co.uk/smoke.htm](http://www.shink.dircon.co.uk/smoke.htm)

**Times Literary Supplement** [www.the-tls.co.uk](http://www.the-tls.co.uk)

**Zembla** [www.zemblamagazine.com](http://www.zemblamagazine.com)

## Buying books

For details of London's bookshops, visit [www.getlondonreading.com](http://www.getlondonreading.com). Check out ABE Books ([www.abebooks.co.uk](http://www.abebooks.co.uk)) for second-hand titles, or visit the Provincial Booksellers Fairs Association ([www.pbfa.org](http://www.pbfa.org)) to find out when antiquarian and secondhand book fairs will be taking place in London.

## Working with books

**Antiquarian Booksellers Association**

[www.aba.org.uk](http://www.aba.org.uk)

**Association of Authors Agents** [www.agentsassoc.co.uk](http://www.agentsassoc.co.uk)

**The Bookseller** [www.thebookseller.com](http://www.thebookseller.com)

**Booksellers Association** [www.booksellers.org.uk](http://www.booksellers.org.uk)

**Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)** [www.cilip.org.uk](http://www.cilip.org.uk)

**London International Book Fair** [www.lbf-virtual.com](http://www.lbf-virtual.com)

**Publishers Association** [www.publishers.org.uk](http://www.publishers.org.uk)

**Publishing News** [www.publishingnews.co.uk](http://www.publishingnews.co.uk)

**Society of Authors** [www.societyofauthors.net](http://www.societyofauthors.net)

**Society of Young Publishers** [www.thesyp.org.uk](http://www.thesyp.org.uk)

**Writers Guild of Great Britain** [www.writersguild.org.uk](http://www.writersguild.org.uk)

## Supporting the creative industries

**Arts & Business** [www.aandb.org.uk](http://www.aandb.org.uk)

**Arts Council England** [www.artscouncil.org.uk/literature](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/literature)

**British Council** [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

**Creative London** [www.creativelondon.org.uk](http://www.creativelondon.org.uk)

**London Libraries Development Agency**

[www.llda.org.uk](http://www.llda.org.uk)

## Writing and writers

**Arvon Foundation** [www.arvonfoundation.org](http://www.arvonfoundation.org). Writing courses across the UK.

**Contemporary Writers** [www.contemporarywriters.com](http://www.contemporarywriters.com).

**English PEN** [www.englishpen.org](http://www.englishpen.org)

**NAWE National Association of Writers in Education** [www.nawe.co.uk](http://www.nawe.co.uk)

**Spread the Word** [www.spreadtheword.org.uk](http://www.spreadtheword.org.uk)

## Rough Guides – broaden your horizons

In search of literary London? **THE ROUGH GUIDE TO LONDON BY THE BOOK** describes the capital's influence on writers past and present, as well as telling you how to get involved in the city's book scene. It features:

- Evocative accounts of the city, from Martin Millar's Brixton to Zadie Smith's Willesden, Wilde's Chelsea to Blake's Soho.
- Writers including Peter Ackroyd, Joanna Briscoe, Romesh Gunsekera, Maggie O'Farrell, Will Self, Iain Sinclair, Sarah Waters and Benjamin Zephaniah name their favourite London reads and explain how the city inspires them.
- Information on Get London Reading events, places to visit and a directory of book-related web links.

This guide is distributed free as part of the **GET LONDON READING** campaign, which runs from 17 February to 7 March 2006. The campaign aims to encourage Londoners to make more time for reading, and to promote London as an international centre for books.

See [www.getlondonreading.com](http://www.getlondonreading.com) for details of activities and promotions associated with the campaign, as well as recommended London reads.

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