



London's Blue Plaques in a Nutshell: Volume Three: Literary Plaques (Volume 3)

Bill McCann

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London's Blue plaques celebrate great figures of the past and the buildings that they inhabited. Originally proposed by William Ewart MP in the House of Commons in 1863, the scheme has been running for almost 150 years and is one of the oldest of its kind in the world. English Heritage was given control over the scheme in 1986 and between 10 and 15 new plaques are erected every year. There are currently more than 800 plaques spread throughout the metropolis except in the City of London and in Whitehall. The Blue Plaques have now not only become part of the tradition of London, but also a very special part. They are an adventure. They can be a planned adventure or a rollercoaster of discovery where the shades of London's past are waiting around practically every corner of the metropolis to delight and inform you. Part of the delight in walking the streets of London is the discovery of a Plaque on a house where someone famous once lived, and the sudden realisation that you are sharing a little bit of what was their daily view of the world. Less of a delight is the discovery of a plaque to someone whose name you are vaguely familiar with, but about whose life or achievements you can recall very little, or even nothing at all. Then there is the discovery of someone of whom you have never heard but who is tantalisingly and briefly described on the plaque itself. Many people, for example are brought up a little short to read "LOVELACE, Ada, Countess of (1815-1852) Pioneer of Computing, lived here" on a house on St. James' Square. A woman? A Countess? Computing? Yes indeed - the daughter of Lord Byron has the distinction of writing the world's first computer program! How many others learn that Sir Samuel Romilly, Law reformer, lived at 21 Russell Square without realising that he committed suicide in the library there a few days after the death of his wife? Experiences such as these provide stimuli to discover more, but very often, by the time we get home and have been distracted by other things, the stimulus has lost much of its power. Even if we make the effort to go to a library, or search the internet, there is no guarantee that we will find all the relevant information, even in a matter of days. This is where Blue Plaques in a Nutshell comes in. This series of books is aimed at both the habitué of London who walks the streets in fine weather or who sits on the top deck of a London bus on a rainy day, and the tourist who tries to cram as much of London as possible into a short visit. It is designed to provide the essential information about each blue plaque instantly. Indeed it does more than that. For the armchair traveller or historical explorer, it provides a handy and ready source of information on the doings and undoings of the residents of London who have made significant contributions to the history and culture of the world. The heart of London's Blue Plaques in a Nutshell lies in the aphorism – a short, pithy summing up of essential facts. The life and achievements of the subject of each plaque is summarised in a number of aphorisms, none of which contains more than 170 characters – including spaces! Crammed into this nutshell you will find the character, achievements, dreams realised and dreams dashed, peccadilloes and humanity of the great and good (and the not so great and not so good) that once lived and thrived in the great metropolis that is London. Now revised updated in a series of lavishly illustrated individual volumes, the new edition includes all map and GPS coordinates to allow the modern traveller to precisely locate each plaque. Volume 3 is right up to date and presents unique portraits of the 197 poets, novelists, essayists, writers and historians who have been honoured with a Blue Plaque between 1867 and 2015.

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