

Bloomsbury in Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Some Quotations
compiled by Matt Ingleby and Deborah Colville

From Theodore Hook's *Sayings and Doings* (1824)

One day, some week perhaps after the dismissal of Rushbrook, Henry was dining with the Meadowses, who were going to Mrs. Saddington's assembly in Russell-square. It may be advantageously observed here, that this lady was the dashing wife of the eminent banker, whose acceptance to a bill due the next day my hero had in his pocket. To this party Mrs. Meadows pressed him to accompany them, never forgetting, as I hope my readers never will, that he, the said Henry Merton, Esq. held an appointment under Government of some four-and-twenty hundred pounds per annum, and was therefore a more suitable and agreeable companion for herself and daughter, than when he was "a single gentleman three months ago," with no estate save that, which lay under his hat, and no income except that derivable from property entirely at the disposal of his father.

Henry at first objected; but never having seen much of that part of the town in which this semi-fashionable lived, and desirous of ascertaining how people "make it out" in the recesses of Bloomsbury and the wilds of Guildford Street, and feeling that "all the world to him" would be there, at length agreed to go, and accordingly proceeded with the ladies in their carriage through Oxford-street, St. Giles's, Tottenham-court-road and so past Dyott-street, and the British Museum, to the remote scene of gaiety, which they, however, reached in perfect safety. Arrived there, if it had not been for the undisguisable distance at which it was placed from all the civilized part of the world, nobody would have discovered that they were amongst a different race of people from that which inhabit our part of the metropolis.

Such names as were announced "coming up," Mr. Fish and Mrs. Plush, and Miss Duggin and Mr. Coggin, and Lady Grubb and Sir George Pott, and Mrs. Hogg and Mrs. Moakes, and Miss Cowcross, and Mr. Crump, and Mrs. Grout, and Miss Gill;—it all sounded like Hebrew to the unaccustomed ear; but when they really were in the rooms, which to do them justice were hot enough, and disagreeable enough to be quite fashionable, these persons with the odd names looked just as well as their betters; and as it is not the custom to label ladies and gentlemen as one labels decanters, it all did mighty well.

They were a good deal finer, to be sure: gold and jewels, and greengage-coloured velvets, and crimson and fringe, and flounces and tassels, and tawdry necklaces and earrings, abounded; but the girls perked themselves up, and wriggled themselves about, and flirted their fans, and rapped their partners' arms (for they danced quadrilles after the manner of Almack's,) and gave themselves all the little coquettish airs of their superiors. But the rooms, somehow, smelt badly; they had no more idea of *Eau a bruler* than they had of nectar; and the people drank hot punch, which was handed about in little tumblers by under-sized livery servants in cotton stockings and without powder; in short, it was altogether vastly oppressive. However, there was a tremendous supper, and a Lord Mayor to partake of it; and the solemn gravity witty which his Lordship (who was in full dress, sword, chain, and all) was treated, was eminently ludicrous. (His Lordship was a shoemaker, or a linen-draper, or something of that sort.) However, the latter part of the night was "uncommon good fun" and the

whole affair would have been very diverting to my hero, had he not wound it up by the following brief, yet pithy dialogue with young Wilson...

From Benjamin Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (1826–1827)

‘And what was the card?’

‘Oh, you need not look so arch! The old lady was not even a faithless duenna. It was an invitation to an assembly, or something of the kind, at a *locale*, somewhere, as Theodore Hook, or John Wilson Croker, would say, “between Mesopotamia and Russell-square”’

‘Do you know Mr. Croker, Mr. Grey?’

‘Not in the least. I look upon Mr. Croker and myself as the two sublimest men in the United Kingdom. When we do meet, the interview will be interesting.’

‘Pray, Mr. Grey, is it true that all the houses in Russell-square are tenantless?’

‘Quite true; the Marquess of Tavistock has given up the county in consequence. A perfect shame – is it not? Let’s write it up.’

‘An admirable plan! but we’ll take the houses first; of course we can get them at a pepper-corn rent.’

From Charles Dickens's ‘A Bloomsbury Christening,’ *Sketches by Boz* (1837)

Mr. Dumps [a banker, and precursor of Ebenezer Scrooge, who lives unnecessarily cheaply in lodgings in Pentonville] had a nephew who had been married about a year, and who was somewhat of a favourite with his uncle, because he was an admirable subject to exercise his misery-creating powers upon. Mr. Charles Kitterbell was a small, sharp, spare man, with a very large head, and a broad, good-humoured countenance. [...] In addition to these characteristics, it may be added that Mr. Charles Kitterbell was one of the most credulous and matter-of-fact little personages that ever took to himself a wife, and for himself a house in Great Russell Street, Bedford Square. (Uncle Dumps always dropped the “Bedford Square,” and inserted, in lieu thereof, the dreadful words, “Tottenham Court Road.”)

From Charles Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1840–1841)

[In this historical novel, 1780s Bloomsbury features several times, including the scene in which Hugh is executed outside the ruins of Lord Mansfield's house in Bloomsbury Square. Earlier in the book, the No-Popery rioters retire to a lively, if rough, pub, The Boot, which serves as a kind of headquarters for their plottings:]

‘This Boot was a lone house of public entertainment, situated in the fields at the back of the Foundling Hospital; a very solitary spot at the period, and quite deserted after dark. The tavern stood at some distance from any high-road, and was approachable only by a dark and narrow lane; so that Hugh was much surprised to find several people drinking there, and great merriment going on. He was still more surprised to find them almost every face that had caught his attention in the crowd; but his companion having whispered him, outside the door that it was not good manners at The Boot to appear at all curious about the company, he kept his own counsel, and make no show of recognition.’

From William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848)

[This novel is set largely in Russell Square, at the time of the Napoleonic Wars and afterwards (1800–c. 1820)—which is looked down upon by the aristocracy, and up at, with envy, by many others. The Sedleys, a upper-middle-class central family in the novel, have to leave their house in this wealthy Bloomsbury square and move to a cottage in down-at-heel Fulham, after the banker father loses vast amounts of money in a bad speculation. Russell Square is portrayed as a space that on the surface looks like an oasis, away from the bustle and change of the city, but is actually one of constant social mobility]:

“You won’t find,” he would say to Miss Rhoda, “that splendour and rank to which you are accustomed at the West End, my dear Miss, at our humble mansion in Russell Square. My daughters are plain, disinterested girls, but their hearts are in the right place, and they’ve conceived an attachment for you which does them honour—I say, which does them honour. I’m a plain, simple, humble British merchant—an honest one, as my respected friends Hulker and Bullock will vouch, who were the correspondents of your late lamented father. You’ll find us a united, simple, happy, and I think I may say respected, family—a plain table, a plain people, but a warm welcome, my dear Miss Rhoda—Rhoda, let me say, for my heart warms to you, it does really. I’m a frank man, and I like you. A glass of Champagne! Hicks, Champagne to Miss Swartz.” ‘

From William Makepeace Thackeray’s ‘Some More Words About the Ladies,’ *Travels in London* (1853)

But let us hasten from the hall door to the drawing-room, where Fortune has cast your lot in life: I want to explain to you why I am so anxious that you should devote yourself to that amiable lady who sits in it. Sir, I do not mean to tell you that there are no women in the world vulgar and ill-humoured, rancorous and narrow-minded, mean schemers, son-in-law hunters, slaves of fashion, hypocrites; but I do respect, admire, and almost worship good women; and I think there is a fair number of them to be found in this world, and I have no doubt, in every educated Englishman’s circle of society, whether he finds that circle in palaces in Belgravia and Mayfair, in snug little suburban villas, in ancient comfortable old Bloomsbury, or in back parlours behind the shop.

From William Makepeace Thackeray’s ‘A Word about Dinners,’ *Travels in London* (1853)

A cab diner-out has commonly some cares, lest his sense of justice should be injured by the overcharge of the driver (these fellows are not uncommonly exorbitant in their demands upon gentlemen whom they set down at good houses); lest the smell of tobacco left by the last occupants of the vehicle (five medical students, let us say, who have chartered the vehicle, and smoked cheroots from the London University to the playhouse in the Haymarket) should infest the clothes of Tom Lavender who is going to Lady Rosemary’s; lest straws should stick unobserved to the glutinous lustre of his boots – his shiny ones, and he should appear in Dives’s drawing-room like a poet with a *tenui avenâ*, or like Mad Tom in the play.

From Edward Bulwer Lytton's *What Will He Do With It?* (1857–1859)

Darrell paused hesitating. He had now gained a spot in which improvements had altered the landmarks. The superb broad thoroughfare continued [New Oxford Street] where once it had vanished abrupt in a labyrinth of courts and alleys. He turned a little towards the left, recognising, with admiring interest, in the gay white would-be Grecian edifice, with its French grille, bronzed, gilded, the transformed Museum in the still libraries of which he had sometimes snatched a brief and ghostly respite from books of law. Onwards through lifeless Bloomsbury...[...]

There it is, a quiet street indeed! not a soul on its gloomy pavements, not even a policeman's soul.[...] How closed up, dumb, and blind, looked the small mean house, with its small mean door, its small mean rayless windows. Yet a FAME had been born there![...] 'He came into a quiet square – still Bloomsbury – and right before him was a large respectable mansion, almost as large as that one in courtlier quarters, to which he loiteringly delayed the lone return. There, too, had been for a time the dwelling which was called his home – there, when gold was rolling in like a tide, distinction won, position assured, there, not yet in Parliament, but foremost at the bar – already pressed by constituencies, already wooed by ministers – there, still young (O, luckiest of lawyers!) – there had he moved his household gods. Fit residence for a Prince of the Gown. Is it when living there that you would envy the prosperous man? Yes, the moment his step quits that door; but envy him when he enters its threshold? – nay, envy rather that roofless Savoyard who has crept under yonder portico, asleep with his ragged arm around the cage of his stupid dormice! There, in that great barren drawing-room, sits a "Pale and elegant Aspasia".

Well, but the wife's face is not querulous now. Look again – anxious, fearful, secret, sly. Oh! that fine lady, a Vipont Crooke, is not contented to be wife to the wealthy, great Mr. Darrell. What wants she? that he should be spouse to the fashionable fine Mrs. Darrell? Pride in him! not a jot of it; such pride were unchristian. Were he proud of her, as a Christian husband ought to be of so elegant a wife, would he still be in Bloomsbury?

Anthony Trollope, *Castle Richmond* (1859–1860)

[This novel is set in 1845–1847, at the time of the Irish potato famine]:

Mr Prendergast [a bachelor lawyer] was one of those old-fashioned people who think that a spacious substantial house in Bloomsbury square, at a rent of a hundred and twenty pounds a year, is better worth having than a narrow, lath and plaster, ill-built tenement at nearly double the price out westward of the parks. A quite new man is necessarily afraid of such a locality as Bloomsbury Square, for he has no chance of getting any one into his house if he do not live westward. Who would dine with Mr Jones in Woburn Terrace, unless he had known Mr Jones all his days, or unless Jones were known as a top sawyer in some walk of life? But Mr Prendergast was well enough known to his old friends to be allowed to live where he pleased, and he was not very anxious to add to their number by any new fashionable allurements.

From Augustus Mayhew's *The Finest Girl in Bloomsbury* (1861)

[The first person narrator of this tale, a medical student, does a dubiously good deed when he takes his diminutive friend Adolphus Ickle to the dentist after he complains of tooth-ache]:

My principle through life has always been to assist my friends. If I have it in my power to confer a benefit, I run my mind's eye over the list of my acquaintances, and select the one I think will most probably have it in his power to return the service. Now, I was very friendly with a young fellow at the Middlesex, called Bob De Cade; in fact, to this day I have three of his false collars among my linen. His father was in the dentist trade, driving a first-rate ready-money business in Bloomsbury Square—a magnificent house, with a great show of muslin curtains and varnished street-door. The old boy must have been worth a pretty penny merely judging from the establishment he kept up. There was a footman in florid livery—a kind of prismatic flunky, as if he had taken a rainbow to his tailor and had it made into a suit of clothes; whose business it was to escort the bad teeth into the waiting-room; and there was a valet got up in the bottle of port wine style—all black, with a dab of white near the neck—whose sole duty it was to tell the bad teeth when they might come and be drawn. I know, too, that old Raphael De Cade made hundreds by his metallic stopping, to say nothing of the Dentifrice de Jericho, his patent incorrodible soft gums, or his discounting. It would be ten shillings in the old boy's pocket, and he might ask me to his next evening party. So I told the cab to drive to Bloomsbury Square.

From John Cordy Jeaffreson's *Olive Blake's Good Work: A Novel* (1862)

It is a summer evening at the end of July, and I am sitting at one of the many large windows on the first floor of the Hospital for Sick Children in Marchioness Street, Bloomsbury, W.C. (as it is described in the Post-Office Directory for 1861), and I am looking into the dusky street.

In the times of Queen Anne, and George I., and George II., Marchioness Street was in great favour with the aristocracy, whose capacious and conspicuously decorated coaches, drawn by four or six horses, and heavily weighted with tawdry menials, were constantly rumbling over its uneven ground. It is a street of deserted mansions, of marble halls that have no gay visitors, of wide staircases no longer climbed by haughty nobles and scheming ministers of state, of lofty dining-rooms that have seen no banquet for many a day, of magnificent drawing-rooms whose ceilings, rich in costly moulding and antique ornament, long since looked down on proud patrician girls as they danced chacones, and cybells, and sarabands, and minuets, and contredances, and flirted their fans, to the admiration of patch-bearing gallants and high-born mohoeks—wasting an hour in good, ere they enjoyed themselves in bad, society, and rushed wildly rioting through the town. The flash of lights and the brightness of burnished mirrors, the waving of white plumes and the rustling of choicest silks, the dazzle of diamonds and the joyous sweep or merry jig of dance-music, brilliant uniforms and ringing laughter—they've all left Marchioness Street for the far West! On the wettest and most miserable of winter nights, when no one but the night policeman is beating the pavements, Marchioness Street, however, is brighter now than it was in its days of splendour, after the aristocracy had put out their lights, and shut their street doors, and gone to rest. On either side of the street a row of gas-lamps runs from one end to the other, and as the way is straight as an arrow, all the lamps

shed light on the belated wanderer's course. What a contrast to old times! Projecting from the rusty railings, or attached to iron-work, curving down from the door-posts, the awkward extinguishers yet remain, in which the link-boys, who followed the then great folks' equipages, were accustomed to put out their torches.

Dingy and deserted as it is, garnished with cobwebs instead of muslin blinds as it is, and covered as to its wood-work with smuts of ages instead of paint as it is, Marchioness Street is still picturesque—indeed very much so by lamplight, when the once-white facings to the redbrick mansions look white as ever, and the cobwebs and smuts are less depressing than they are by daylight. The door-ways are many of them very imposing, their posts being elaborately carved, and at least half a dozen of them having porches, the roofs of which are supported on curved pillars, and are decorated with an excess of sculptured wood or stone—fat cherubs, smiling Cupids, exuberant clusters of grapes, lyres, flutes, music-books, and such other devices as great people used, once on a time, to pile upon their door-ways.

When the nobility gave up Marchioness Street it fared worse, and fell into the hands of the lawyers. Indeed, it stands in a district even yet called by old-fashioned people “the law neighborhood,” in which the last of judges (to reside there) only the other day sold his mansion. It was a convenient locality for rich barristers and solicitors, for Gray's Inn is hard by, and Chancery Lane is near to Gray's Inn, and Lincoln's Inn and the Temples are near Chancery Lane. The lawyers lived in Marchioness Street, drinking their port and playing whist, till the houses got so perfectly out of repair that they needed re-roofing, and, in some cases, rebuilding; and then the gentlemen of the long robe left, as Julian Gower protests, without effecting the requisite restorations, or even paying their taxes: and Marchioness Street, all cracked, and dilapidated, and draughty, and unpainted, fell down another grade in social dignity.

It was seized on by Charitable Objects.

It is the peculiar home of Charitable Objects at the present moment.

The Hospital for Sick Children occupies two of the largest mansions, containing some seventy beds, each bed containing a child suffering much, though it can have only sinned a little. Next door, standing on ground once occupied by a mighty earl's house, stands another asylum for the afflicted of our species. Then there are “homes,” and “retreats,” and “refuges” for ill sorts of Charitable Objects.

It is Sunday evening, and the humbler folk going to and fro for devotion or pleasuring make the pavements lively. I count at least twelve persons in the street at one time. Usually there is almost no traffic in Marchioness Street; the carriages of a dozen physicians and those of the lady patronesses of the benevolent institutions being the only vehicle accustomed to the ways of good society that enter it. For the most part the friends of the Charitable Objects come to see them on foot. The square at the end of Marchioness Street (also full of deserted mansions, which, instead of being inhabited by Charitable Objects, has a population of lodgers and lodginghouse keepers of the mouldiest description) is a cul-de-sac, and when a young cabman, ignorant of his profession, drives down the street, hoping to make a short cut, he has to go back without effecting his object. It is therefore very quiet in Marchioness Street.

From Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Lady's Mile* (1866)

The slow days, the long weeks, the interminable months dragged themselves out, and Cecil lived alone with her husband in the stately solitude of the northern side of Brunswick Square.

The celebrated pea-green Hayne was wont to declare that his horses grew restive when he attempted to take them eastward of Temple Bar; and there are many people nowadays inferior in status to the elegant West-Indian millionaire, who shudder at the mention of Bloomsbury, and affect a serio-comic horror of the unknown latitudes on the northern side of Holborn.

Mr. O'Boyneville had no fashionable aversion to an unfashionable locality. He liked his house in Brunswick Square, because it was big and stoutly built, like himself; and, as the belief that any thing appertaining to himself must necessarily be the very best thing of its kind in existence was deeply implanted in his tranquil breast, he was serenely unconscious of any brighter region than the comfortable square in which he had taken up his abode when he first found himself able to support a household of his own.

If he had known that there were fairer places than Bloomsbury within reach of the courts of law; if he had fancied that there was any spot in or near London which would have been more pleasant for Cecil, he would have been quick to move his goods and chattels. He loved his wife honestly and truly, and would have made a heavier sacrifice to give her pleasure; but he knew about as much of a woman's tastes and prejudices as he knew of the habitudes and requirements of a white elephant; and he took Lady Cecil calmly home to the dreary, scantily-furnished Bloomsbury mansion, and left her to be happy after her own fashion in the spacious empty rooms while he went back to his work.

From Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Birds of Prey* (1867)

[The following opens the novel by introducing us to the house in which a murder will take place, a deed that the murderer will spend the rest of the book and its sequel, *Charlotte's Inheritance*, plotting to conceal:]

THE HOUSE IN BLOOMSBURY. "What about?" There are some houses whereof the outward aspect is sealed with the seal of respectability—houses which inspire confidence in the minds of the most sceptical of butchers and bakers—houses at whose area-gates the tradesman delivers his goods undoubtingly, and from whose spotless door-steps the vagabond children of the neighbourhood recoil as from a shrine too sacred for their gambols.

Such a house made its presence obvious, some years ago, in one of the smaller streets of that west-central region which lies between Holborn and St. Pancras Church. It is perhaps the nature of ultra-respectability to be disagreeably conspicuous. The unsullied brightness of No. 14 Fitzgeorge-street [an invented name] was a standing reproach to every other house in the dingy thorough-fare. That one spot of cleanliness made the surrounding dirt cruelly palpable.[...]

Not satisfied with being the very pink and pattern of respectability, the objectionable house even aspired to a kind of prettiness. It was as bright, and pleasant, and rural of

aspect as any house within earshot of the roar and rattle of Holborn can be. There were flowers in the windows; gaudy scarlet geraniums, which seemed to enjoy an immunity from all the ills to which geraniums are subject, so impossible was it to discover a faded leaf amongst their greenness, or the presence of blight amidst their wealth of blossom. There were birdcages within the shadow of the muslin curtains, and the colouring of the newly-pointed brickwork was agreeably relieved by the vivid green of Venetian blinds. The freshly-varnished street-door bore a brass-plate, on which to look was to be dazzled; and the effect produced by this combination of white door-step, scarlet geranium, green blind, and brass-plate was obtrusively brilliant.[...]

A householder with such a door-step and such muslin curtains could not be other than the most correct of mankind; for, if there is any external evidence by which a dissolute life or an ill-regulated mind will infallibly betray itself, that evidence is to be found in the yellowness and limpness of muslin window-curtains. The eyes are the windows of the soul, says the poet; but if a man's eyes are not open to your inspection, the windows of his house will help you to discover his character as an individual, and his solidity as a citizen. At least such was the opinion cherished in Fitzgeorge-street, Russell-square.

From Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* (1869)

[The rich and privileged Louis Trevelyan increasingly and wrongly suspects his wife of infidelity, and eventually goes mad. In a pivotal moment in the novel, he arranges for their baby son to be snatched from his mother in the dark streets of Bloomsbury]:

None of the party in the cab knew anything of the region through which they passed. The cabman took the line by the back of the Bank, and Finsbury Square and the City Road, thinking it best, probably, to avoid the crush at Holborn Hill, though at the expense of something of a circuit. But of this Mrs. Trevelyan and Nora knew nothing. Had their way taken them along Piccadilly, or through Mayfair, or across Grosvenor Square, they would have known where they were; but at present they were not thinking of those once much-loved localities. The cab passed the Angel, and up and down the hill at Pentonville, and by the King's Cross stations, and through Euston Square, – and then it turned up Gower Street. Surely the man should have gone on along the New Road, now that he had come so far out of his way. But of this the two ladies knew nothing, – nor did the nurse. It was a dark, windy night, but the lamps in the streets had given them light, so that they had not noticed the night. Nor did they notice it now as the streets became narrower and darker. They were hardly thinking that their journey was yet at an end, and the mother was in the act of covering her boy's face as he lay asleep on the nurse's lap, when the cab was stopped. Nora looking out through the window, saw the word 'Hotel' over a doorway, and was satisfied. 'Shall I take the child, ma'am?' said a man in black, and the child was handed out. Nora was the first to follow; and she then perceived that the door of the hotel was not open. Mrs. Trevelyan followed; and then they looked round them – and the child was gone. They heard the rattle of another cab as it was carried away at a gallop round a distant corner; – and then some inkling of what had happened came upon them. The father had succeeded in getting possession of his child.

From Thomas Hardy's *Desperate Remedies* (1871)

[n this sensation novel, a romantic attachment which burgeons in Bloomsbury is strangely and painfully cut off before coming to fruition, providing the back-story for all subsequent episodes of the plot:]

In the long and intricately inwrought chain of circumstance which renders worthy of record some experiences of Cytherea Graye, Edward Springrove, and others, the first event directly influencing the issue was a Christmas visit.

In the above-mentioned year, 1835, Ambrose Graye, a young architect who had just begun the practice of his profession in the midland town of Hocbridge, to the north of Christminster, went to London to spend the Christmas holidays with a friend who lived in Bloomsbury...

While in London he became acquainted with a retired officer in the Navy named Bradleigh, who with his wife and their daughter, like in Dukery Street, not far from Russell Square. Though they were in no more than comfortable circumstances, the captain's wife came of an ancient family whose genealogical tree was interlaced with some of the most illustrious and well-known of the kingdom.

From William Besant and James Rice's *My Little Girl* (1873)

[About 'mulattoes' living in 'Palmiste Island', an English colony in the Pacific:]

Are they worse off than we in Europe? Are there not houses where we, who grace the district of W.C., enter only on a kind of sufferance? Does not the Faubourg St. Germain still exist after the Revolution? Would the Duke of St. Smithfield, whose grandfather began life as a journeyman baker, and ended as an earl, sully his blue blood by letting his fair daughter marry me – me, the author? And are we, therefore, dear inhabitants of Bloomsbury, to eat out our hearts in malice?

From Anthony Trollope's *Lady Anna* (1874)

[This novel is set largely in Bedford Square, Keppel Street, and Great Russell Street, and concerned with legal matters. Lady Anna is virtually imprisoned in a lawyer's house in Bedford Square while her mother (unsuccessfully) conspires to persuade her to break off her original engagement to the working-class radical Daniel Thwaite, and marry instead her cousin, Lord Lovel, an aristocrat:]

"You trifle with me, Lady Lovel," he answered. "As you will not allow Lady Anna to come to me here, I will go to her elsewhere. I do not doubt but that I shall find her in the house." Then he turned to the door, intending to leave the room. He had been very near to her while they were talking, so that he had some paces to traverse before he could put his hand upon the lock – but in doing so his back was turned on her. In one respect it was better for her purpose that it should be so. She could open the door of the compartment and put her hand upon the pistol without having his eye upon her. But, as it seemed to her at the moment, the chance of bringing her purpose to its intended conclusion was less than it would have been had she been able to fire at his face. She had let the moment go by – the first moment – when he was close to her, and now there would be half the room between them. But she was very quick. She seized the pistol, and, transferring it to her right hand, she rushed after him, and when

the door was already half open she pulled the trigger. In the agony of that moment she heard no sound, though she saw the flash. She saw him shrink and pass the door, which he left unclosed, and then she heard a scuffle in the passage, as though he had fallen against the wall. She had provided herself especially with a second barrel – but that was now absolutely useless to her. There was no power left to her wherewith to follow him and complete the work which she had begun. She did not think that she had killed him, though she was sure that he was struck. She did not believe that she had accomplished anything of her wishes – but had she held in her hand a six-barrelled revolver, as of the present day, she could have done no more with it. She was overwhelmed with so great a tremor at her own violence that she was almost incapable of moving. She stood glaring at the door, listening for what should come, and the moments seemed to be hours. But she heard no sound whatever. A minute passed away perhaps, and the man did not move. She looked around as if seeking some way of escape – as though, were it possible, she would get to the street through the window. There was no mode of escape, unless she would pass out through the door to the man who, as she knew, must still be there. Then she heard him move. She heard him rise – from what posture she knew not, and step towards the stairs. She was still standing with the pistol in her hand, but was almost unconscious that she held it. At last her eye glanced upon it, and she was aware that she was still armed. Should she rush after him, and try what she could do with that other bullet? The thought crossed her mind, but she knew that she could do nothing. Had all the Lovels depended upon it, she could not have drawn that other trigger. She took the pistol, put it back into its former hiding-place, mechanically locked the little door, and then seated herself in her chair.

From Wilkie Collins's *Heart and Science* (1882–1883)

[The protagonist, Ovid Vere, a doctor, indulges in a spot of aimless wandering, having gone to visit a patient in Bloomsbury:]

Where, in all London, could he have found a solitude more congenial to a dreamer in daylight?

The broad district, stretching northward and eastward from the British Museum, is like the quiet quarter of a country town set in the midst of the roaring activities of the largest city in the world. Here, you can cross the road, without putting limb or life in peril. Here, when you are idle, you can saunter and look about, safe from collision with merciless straight-walkers whose time is money, and whose destiny is business. Here, you may meet undisturbed cats on the pavement, in the full glare of noontide, and may watch, through the railings of the squares, children at play on the grass that almost grows with the lustre of the Sussex Downs. This haven of rest is alike out of the way of fashion and business; and is yet within easy reach of the one and the other.

From Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* (1885)

Mr. Harry Desborough [a bachelor] lodged in the fine and grave old quarter of Bloomsbury, roared about on every side by the high tides of London, but itself rejoicing in romantic silences and city peace. It was in Queen Square that he had pitched his tent, next door to the Children's Hospital, on your left hand you go north: Queen Square, sacred to the humane and liberal arts, whence homes were made

beautiful, where the poor were taught, where the sparrows were plentiful and loud, and where groups of patient little ones would hover all day long before the hospital; if by chance they might kiss their hand or speak a word to their sick brother at the window. Desborough's room was on the first floor and fronted to the square; and he enjoyed besides, a right by which he often profited, to sit and smoke upon a terrace at the back, which looked down upon a fine forest of back gardens, and was in turn commanded by the windows of an empty room.

From Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886)

[In this novel, the protagonist Hyacinth Robinson is attending a radical political meeting, held in the backrooms of the 'Sun and Moon', a pub which this fictional narrative locates in Bloomsbury:]

He felt hot and nervous; he got up suddenly, and, through the dark, tortuous, greasy passage which communicated with the outer world, he went forth into the street. The air was foul and sleety, but it refreshed him, and he stood in front of the public-house and smoked another pipe. Bedraggled figures passed in and out, and a damp, tattered, wretched man, with a spongy, purple face, who had been thrust suddenly across the threshold, stood and whimpered in the brutal blaze of the row of lamps. The puddles glittered roundabout, and the silent vista of the street, bordered with low black houses, stretched away, in the wintry drizzle, to right and left, losing itself in the huge tragic city, where unmeasured misery lurked beneath the dirty night, ominously, monstrously, still, only howling, in its pain, in the heated human cockpit behind him. Ah, what could he do? What opportunity could rise? The blundering, divided counsels he had been listening to only made the helplessness of every one concerned more abject. If he had a definite wish while he stood there it was that that exalted, deluded company should pour itself forth, with Muniment at its head, and surge through the sleeping city, gathering the myriad miserable out of their slums and burrows, and roll into the selfish squares, and lift a tremendous hungry voice, and awaken the gorged indifferent to a terror that would bring them down.

From George Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889)

[The novel is set in the 1870s:]

One morning towards the end of November, as [Bob Hewitt] strolled along High Holborn, a hand checked his progress; he gave almost a leap, and turned his face in terror upon the person who stopped him. It was Clem – Mrs. Snowdon.[...]

“Why ain't you at work?” she [asked]. “Does Mrs. Pennyloaf know how you spend your time?”

“Hasn't your husband taught you to mind your own business?”

Clem took the retort good-humouredly, and they walked on conversing. Not altogether at his ease thus companioned, Bob turned out of the main street, and presently they came within sight of the British Museum.

“Ever been in that place?” Clem asked.

“Of course I have,” he replied, with his air of superiority.

“I haven’t. Is there anything to pay? Let’s go in for half an hour.”

It was an odd freak, but Bob began to have pleasure in this renewal of intimacy; he wished he had been wearing his best suit. Years ago his father had brought him on a public holiday to the Museum, and his interest was chiefly excited by the collection of Royal Seals. To that quarter he first led his companion, and thence directed her towards objects more likely to supply her with amusement; he talked freely, and was surprised at the show of information his memory allowed him to make – desperately vague and often ludicrously wide of the mark, but still something of a knowledge, retained from all sorts of chance encounters by his capable mind. Had the British Museum been open to visitors in the hours of the evening, or on Sundays, Bob Hewitt would possibly have been employing his leisure nowadays in more profitable pursuits. Possibly; one cannot say more than that; for the world to which he belonged is above all a world of frustration, and only the one man in half a million has fate for his friend.

From William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890)

[Set in the post-revolutionary utopian London of the 2100s, as witnessed by a socialist dreamer from the late nineteenth century]:

We crossed the roads into a short narrow lane between the gardens, and came out again into a wide road, on one side of which was a great and long building, turning its gables away from the highway, which I saw at once was another public group. Opposite to it was a wide space of greenery, without any wall or fence of any kind. I looked through the trees and saw beyond them a pillared portico quite familiar to me – no less a friend, in fact, than the British Museum. It rather took my breath away, amidst all the strange things I had seen.[...]We walked straight into the forecourt of the Museum, where, except that the railings were gone, and the whispering boughs of the trees were all about, nothing seemed changed; the very pigeons were wheeling about the building and clinging to the ornaments of the pediment as I had seen them of old.

Dick [his guide/companion] seemed grown a little absent, but he could not forbear giving me an architectural note, and said:

“It is rather an ugly old building, isn’t it? Many people have wanted to pull it down and rebuild it: and perhaps if work does really get scarce we may yet do so. But, as my great-grandfather will tell you, it would not be quite a straightforward job; for there are wonderful collections in there of all kinds of antiquities, besides an enormous library with many exceedingly beautiful books in it, and many most useful ones as genuine records, texts of ancient works and the like; and the worry and anxiety, and even risk, there would be in moving all this has saved the buildings themselves. Besides, as we said before, it is not a bad thing to have some record of what our forefathers thought a handsome building. For there is plenty of labour and material in it.”

From Adeline Sergeant's *Caspar Brooke's Daughter* (1891)

[In this novel several characters live in Bloomsbury. In the following passages, Caspar Brooke, a radical journalist, walks over to Russell Square to visit his intimate friend Mrs. Romaine, and then returns by foot to his own house, a short distance away:]

Mrs. Romaine was a woman who knew that she was as well able to hold her own in the fashionable world, if once she obtained an entrance to it, as any Lady Alice or Lady Anybody of her acquaintance. But then the difficulty of entering it was very great. She had not sufficient fortune to vie with women who every year spent hundreds on their dress and on their dinner. She was handsome, but middle-aged. She had few friends of sufficient distinction to push her forward. And she was a wise woman. She thought it better to live where she enjoyed a good deal of popularity and consideration; where she could entertain in a modest way; where her husband had been well known, and she could glow with the reflected light that came to her from his shining abilities. These reasons were patent to the world; she really made no secret of them. But there was another reason, not quite so patent to the world, for her quietly living in Russell Square, and this reason she kept strictly to herself.

Mrs. Romaine had been a widow for three years. Her husband had been a very learned man – professor of numerous Oriental languages at University College for some years, afterwards a judge in Calcutta; and as he had always lived in the west-central district, during his professorate, Mrs. Romaine declared that she loved it and could live nowhere else. The house in Russell Square was only partly hers. Her brother rented some of the rooms (shared the house with her, as Mrs. Romaine vaguely phrased it), and lightened the expense. But the two drawing-rooms, opening out of one another, were entirely at Mrs. Romaine's disposal, and she was generally to be found there between four or five o'clock in an afternoon – a fact of which it is to be presumed that Mr. Brooke was aware...

Caspar Brooke continued his walk along the eastern side of Russell Square, thence to Woburn Place. His observant eyes took notice of every incident in his way, of every man, woman, and child within their range of vision. He stopped once to rate a cabman, not too mildly, for beating an over-worked horse – took down his number, and threatened to prosecute him for cruelty to animals. A ragged boy who asked him for money was brought to a standstill by some keenly-worded questions respecting his home, his name, his father's occupation, and the school which he attended. Of these Mr. Brooke also made a note, much to the boy's dismay; but consolation followed in the shape of a shilling, although the donor muttered a malediction on his own folly as he turned away. His last actions, before reaching his own house in Upper Woburn Place, were – first to ring the area-bell for a dog that was waiting at another man's gate (an office which the charitable are often called upon to perform in the streets of London for dogs and cats alike), and then to pick up a bony black kitten and take it on his arm to his own door, where he delivered it to a servant, with injunctions to feed and comfort the starveling. From which facts it may be seen that Mr. Caspar Brooke, in spite of his faults, was a lover of dumb animals and of children, and must therefore have possessed a certain amount of kindness of disposition.

From Mrs Humphry Ward's *Marcella* (1894)

[In this novel, the protagonist goes to live in a dingy part of Bloomsbury to work as a nurse. Here she attends to one of her local patients, a poor Jewish immigrant young lady, in a passage that demonstrates aptly the uneasy ethical-aesthetic contradictoriness in what we might describe as Ward's 'compassionate conservatism':]

Marcella groped her way downstairs. The house was one of a type familiar all over the poorer parts of West Central London – the eighteenth-century house inhabited by law or fashion in the days of Dr Johnson, now parcelled out into insanitary tenements, miserably provided with air, water, and all the necessaries of life, but still showing in its chimney-piece or its decaying staircase signs of the graceful domestic art which had ruled at the building and fitting of it.

Marcella, however, had no eye whatever at the moment for the panelling on the staircase, or the delicate ironwork of the broken balustrade. Rather it seemed to her, as she looked into some of the half-open doors of the swarming rooms she passed, or noticed with disgust the dirt and dilapidation of the stairs, and the evil smells of the basement, that the house added one more to the standing shames of the district - an opinion doubly strong in her when at last she emerged from her gropings among the dens of the lower regions, and began to toil upstairs again with her filled kettle and coal-scuttle.

The load was heavy, even for her young strength, and she had just passed a sleepless night. The evening before she had been sent for in haste to a woman in desperate illness. She came, and found a young Jewess, with a ten days old child beside her, struggling with her husband and two women friends in a state of raging delirium. The room, was full to suffocation of loud-tongued, large-eyed Jewesses, all taking turns at holding the patient, and chattering or quarrelling between their turns. It had been Marcella's first and arduous duty to get the place cleared, and she had done it without ever raising her voice or losing her temper for an instant. The noisy pack had been turned out; the most competent woman among them chosen to guard the door and fetch and carry for the nurse; while Marcella set to work to wash her patient and remake the bed as best she could, in the midst of the poor thing's wild shrieks and wrestlings.

It was a task to test both muscular strength and moral force to their utmost. After her year's training Marcella took it simply in the day's work. Some hours of intense effort and strain; then she and the husband looked down upon the patient, a woman of about six-and-twenty, plunged suddenly in narcotic sleep, her matted black hair, which Marcella had not dared to touch, lying in wild waves on the clean bed-clothes and night-gear that her nurse had extracted from this neighbour and that--she could hardly have told how.

“Ach, mein Gott, mein Gott!” said the husband, rising and shaking himself. He was a Jew from German Poland, and, unlike most of his race, a huge man, with the make and the muscles of a prize-fighter. Yet, after the struggle of the last two hours he was in a bath of perspiration.

“You will have to send her to the infirmary if this comes on again,” said Marcella.

[While Marcella is performing this role as nurse-cum-secular saint (following her early Christian martyr namesake) she lives in 'Brown's Buildings', whose real-life model is clearly the model-dwellings known as the Peabody Buildings in Little Coram Street – now to be found on Herbrand Street. This other Bloomsbury site features a lot in this section of the novel, Book III, and its first appearance is this:]

Marcella on her way home turned into a little street leading to a great block of model dwellings, which rose on the right hand side and made everything else, the mews entrance opposite, the lines of squalid shops on either side, look particularly small and dirty. The sun was beating fiercely down, and she was sick and tired.

As she entered the iron gate of the dwellings, and saw before her the large asphalted court round which they ran--blazing heat on one side of it, and on the other some children playing cricket against the wall with chalk marks for wickets--she was seized with depression. The tall yet mean buildings, the smell of dust and heat, the general impression of packed and crowded humanity--these things, instead of offering her rest, only continued and accented the sense of strain, called for more endurance, more making the best of it.

But she found a tired smile for some of the children who ran up to her, and then she climbed the stairs of the E. block, and opened the door of her own tenement, number 10. In number 9 lived Minta Hurd and her children, who had joined Marcella in London some two months before. In sets 7 and 8, on either side of Marcella and the Hurds, lived two widows, each with a family, who were mostly out charing during the day.

Marcella's Association allowed its District Nurses to live outside the "home" of the district on certain conditions, which had been fulfilled in Marcella's case by her settlement next door to her old friends in these buildings which were inhabited by a very respectable though poor class. Meanwhile the trustees of the buildings had allowed her to make a temporary communication between her room and the Hurds, so that she could either live her own solitary and independent life, or call for their companionship, as she pleased.

As she shut her door behind her she found herself in a little passage or entry. To the left was her bedroom. Straight in front of her was the living room with a small close range in it, and behind it a little back kitchen.

The living room was cheerful and even pretty. Her art-student's training showed itself. The cheap blue and white paper, the couple of oak flap tables from a broker's shop in Marchmont Street, the two or three cane chairs with their bright chintz cushions, the Indian rug or two on the varnished boards, the photographs and etchings on the walls, the books on the tables--there was not one of these things that was not in its degree a pleasure to her young senses, that did not help her to live her life. This afternoon as she opened the door and looked in, the pretty colours and forms in the tiny room were as water to the thirsty. Her mother had sent her some flowers the day before. There they were on the tables, great bunches of honey-suckles, of blue-bells, and Banksia roses. And over the mantelpiece was a photograph of the place where

such flowers as Mellor possessed mostly grew--the unkempt lawn, the old fountain and grey walls of the Cedar Garden.

The green blind over the one window which looked into the court, had been drawn down against the glare of the sun, as though by a careful hand. Beside a light wooden rocking chair, which was Marcella's favourite seat, a tray of tea things had been put out. Marcella drew a long breath of comfort as she put down her bag.

[The depiction of another Bloomsbury address within the text demonstrates how acute and accurate was Mrs. Humphry Ward's knowledge of this multi-faceted part of London, in which she spent significant periods of her life. Here, the more genteel, respectable face of Bloomsbury is shown - though the area is still clearly in decline. Marcella visits the lodgings of Edward Hallin, a moderate reformist, who lectures to the working man about a brighter future, but seems to be most impassioned when in warning them not to act rashly in the cause of socialism or democracy:]

After a brisk walk through the June evening she stopped - still within the same district - at the door of a house in a long, old-fashioned street, wherein the builder was busy on either hand, since most of the long leases had just fallen in. But the house she entered was still untouched. She climbed a last-century staircase, adorned with panels of stucco work - slender Italianate reliefs of wreaths, ribbons, and medallions on a pale green ground. The decoration was clean and cared for, the house in good order. Eighty years ago it was the home of a famous judge, who entertained in its rooms the legal and literary celebrities of his day. Now it was let out to professional people in lodgings or unfurnished rooms. Edward Hallin and his sister occupied the top floor.

Miss Hallin, a pleasant-looking, plain woman of about thirty-five, came at once in answer to Marcella's knock, and greeted her affectionately. Edward Hallin sprang up from a table at the further end of the room.

"You are so late! Alice and I had made up our minds you had forgotten us!"

"I didn't get home till four, and then I had to have a sleep," she explained, half shyly.

"What! you haven't been night-nursing?"

"Yes, for once."

"Alice, tell them to bring up supper, and let's look after her."

He wheeled round a comfortable chair to the open window - the charming circular bow of last-century design, which filled up the end of the room and gave it character. The window looked out on a quiet line of back gardens, such as may still be seen in Bloomsbury, with fine plane trees here and there just coming into full leaf; and beyond them the backs of another line of houses in a distant square, with pleasant irregularities of old brickwork and tiled roof. The mottled trunks of the planes, their blackened twigs and branches, their thin, beautiful leaves, the forms of the houses beyond, rose in a charming medley of line against the blue and peaceful sky. No near sound was to be heard, only the distant murmur that no Londoner escapes; and some of the British Museum pigeons were sunning themselves on the garden-wall below.

From H. G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1898)

[In this novel, the protagonist is memorably chased through the streets of Bloomsbury and past some of its notable landmarks:]

I ran round and got into the cab. And so, shivering, scared, and sniffing with the first intimations of a cold, and with the bruises in the small of my back growing upon my attention, I drove slowly along Oxford Street and past Tottenham Court Road. My mood was as different from that in which I had sallied forth ten minutes ago as it is possible to imagine. This invisibility indeed! The one thought that possessed me was—how was I to get out of the scrape I was in.

We crawled past Mudie's, and there a tall woman with five or six yellow-labelled books hailed my cab, and I sprang out just in time to escape her, shaving a railway van narrowly in my flight. I made off up the roadway to Bloomsbury Square, intending to strike north past the Museum and so get into the quiet district. I was now cruelly chilled, and the strangeness of my situation so unnerved me that I whimpered as I ran. At the northward corner of the Square a little white dog ran out of the Pharmaceutical Society's offices, and incontinently made for me, nose down.

I had never realised it before, but the nose is to the mind of a dog what the eye is to the mind of a seeing man. Dogs perceive the scent of a man moving as men perceive his vision. This brute began barking and leaping, showing, as it seemed to me, only too plainly that he was aware of me. I crossed Great Russell Street, glancing over my shoulder as I did so, and went some way along Montague Street before I realised what I was running towards.

Then I became aware of a blare of music, and looking along the street saw a number of people advancing out of Russell Square, red shirts, and the banner of the Salvation Army to the fore. Such a crowd, chanting in the roadway and scoffing on the pavement, I could not hope to penetrate, and dreading to go back and farther from home again, and deciding on the spur of the moment, I ran up the white steps of a house facing the museum railings, and stood there until the crowd should have passed. Happily the dog stopped at the noise of the band too, hesitated, and turned tail, running back to Bloomsbury Square again.

On came the band, bawling with unconscious irony some hymn about 'When shall we see His face?' and it seemed an interminable time to me before the tide of the crowd washed along the pavement by me. Thud, thud, thud, came the drum with a vibrating resonance, and for the moment I did not notice two urchins stopping at the railings by me. 'See 'em,' said one. 'See what?' said the other. 'Why—they footmarks—bare. Like what you makes in mud.'

I looked down and saw the youngsters had stopped and were gaping at the muddy footmarks I had left behind me up the newly whitened steps. The passing people elbowed and jostled them, but their confounded intelligence was arrested. 'Thud, thud, thud, when, thud, shall we see, thud, his face, thud, thud.' 'There's a barefoot man gone up them steps, or I don't know nothing,' said one. 'And he ain't never come down again. And his foot was a-bleeding.'

The thick of the crowd had already passed. 'Looky there, Ted,' quoth the younger of the detectives, with the sharpness of surprise in his voice, and pointed straight to my feet. I looked down and saw at once the dim suggestion of their outline sketched in splashes of mud. For a moment I was paralysed.

'Why, that's rum,' said the elder. 'Dashed rum! It's just like the ghost of a foot, ain't it?' He hesitated and advanced with outstretched hand. A man pulled up short to see what he was catching, and then a girl. In another moment he would have touched me. Then I saw what to do. I made a step, the boy started back with an exclamation, and with a rapid movement I swung myself over into the portico of the next house. But the smaller boy was sharp-eyed enough to follow the movement, and before I was well down the steps and upon the pavement, he had recovered from his momentary astonishment and was shouting out that the feet had gone over the wall.

They rushed round and saw my new footmarks flash into being on the lower step and upon the pavement. 'What's up?' asked someone. 'Feet! Look! Feet running!'

Everybody in the road, except my three pursuers, was pouring along after the Salvation Army, and this blow not only impeded me but them. There was an eddy of surprise and interrogation. At the cost of bowling over one young fellow I got through, and in another moment I was rushing headlong round the circuit of Russell Square, with six or seven astonished people following my footmarks. There was no time for explanation, or else the whole host would have been after me.

Twice I doubled round corners, thrice I crossed the road and came back upon my tracks, and then, as my feet grew hot and dry, the damp impressions began to fade. At last I had a breathing space and rubbed my feet clean with my hands, and so got away altogether. The last I saw of the chase was a little group of a dozen people perhaps, studying with infinite perplexity a slowly drying footprint that had resulted from a puddle in Tavistock Square, a footprint as isolated and incomprehensible to them as Crusoe's solitary discovery.

From J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (original stage version) (1904)

'The night nursery of the Darling family, which is the scene of our opening Act, is at the top of a rather depressed street in Bloomsbury. We have a right to place it where we will, and the reason Bloomsbury is chosen is that Mr Roget once lived there. So did we in days when his Thesaurus was our only companion in London; and we whom he has helped to wend our way through life have always wanted to pay him a little compliment. The Darlings therefore lived in Bloomsbury.'

From E. V. Lucas's *A Wanderer in London* (1906)

Bloomsbury, which is the adopted home of the economical American visitor and the Hindoo student; Bloomsbury, whose myriad boarding-houses give the lie to the poet's statement that East and West can never meet...[...] It has few shops and many residents, and it is a stronghold of middle class respectability and learning. The British Museum is its heart: its lungs are Bedford Square and Russell Square, Gordon Square and Woburn Square: and its aorta is Gower Street, which goes on for ever.

Lawyers and law students live here, to be near the Inns of Court; bookish men live here, to be near the Museum; and Jews live here, to be near the University College School, which is non-sectarian. Bloomsbury is discreet and handy: it is near everything, and although not fashionable, any one, I understand, may live there without losing caste. It belongs to the Ducal House of Bedford, which has given its names very freely to its streets and squares.[...]

Bloomsbury, as I have said, gives harbourage to all colours, and the Baboo law student is one of the commonest incidents of its streets. But the oddest alien I ever saw there was in the area of the house of a medical friend in Woburn Square. While waiting on the steps for the bell to be answered I heard the sound of brushing, and looking down, I saw a small negro boy busily polishing a boot. He glanced up with a friendly smile, his eyes and teeth gleaming, and I noticed that on his right wrist was a broad ivory ring. "So you're no longer an Abolitionist!" I said to the doctor when I at last gained his room. "No" he answered: "at least, my sister isn't. That's a boy my brother-in-law has just brought from West Africa. He didn't exactly want him, but the boy was wild to see England, and at the last minute jumped on board." "And what does the ring on his arm mean?" I asked. "O, he's a king's son out there. That's a symbol of authority. At home he has the power of life and death over fifty slaves."

'When I came away the boy was still busily at work, but he had changed the boots for knife-cleaning. He cast another merry smile up to me as I descended the steps – the king's son with the power of life and death over fifty slaves.