

wedding night that he had married her solely out of spite – because she rejected his first proposal. They separated, but he then failed to pay her the allowance he had promised, and drank himself to death. Anna turned to writing to support herself and her sisters. In her best known work, *Characteristics of Women*, she praised Shakespeare for his portrayal of women as complex and individualised. In her essay ‘Women’s Mission and Women’s Position’, she argued that it was unfair to expect women to be ‘angels at home’ when they also had to work outside to support their families. Aware that people thought her garrulous, she styled herself Lady Blarney – but was known as ‘The Woman of Bright Foam’ by native Americans in Canada because of the daring and courage she displayed on a canoeing expedition in the 1830s.

She was visited in Mortimer Street by the poets ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING (1806-61), author of *Aurora Leigh* (1857), and ROBERT BROWNING (1812-89), author of *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69). Robert Browning learned Greek at University College in Gower Street, and often called in to see the artist Ford Madox Brown, at 37 Fitzroy Square.

Further along, at 25 Mortimer (24 Charles) Street, lived SAMUEL LOVER (1797-1868), the Irish novelist, songwriter and painter best known for his ballad *Rory O'More*, about the tragic events that occurred in Dublin, when he was a child. During the British reprisals for the Irish uprising of 1803, against the Act of Union two years earlier, he saw his own mother attacked by a British soldier with a bayonet. After his eyesight failed he stopped writing songs and began to sing for a living.

The 15th century Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, was practically unknown in Britain until his work was translated into English by EDWARD FITZGERALD (1809-83), an eccentric poet who had a ‘quirky but engaging’ personality. Born Edward Purcell, his name was changed at the age of nine when his mother, Mary, inherited her father’s fortune, and her husband took on her surname. His mother dined off gold plate and drove in a glittering yellow coach drawn by four black horses – a lifestyle hated by Edward, who chose to live alone in shabby lodging houses, existing on a diet of bread, fruit and tea. A homosexual, his two great loves were a young man he met on a steamship (William Browne) and a fisherman (Joseph ‘Posh’ Fletcher). But he married Lucy Barton, the daughter of his friend Bernard Barton, a poet who, just before he died, had asked him to take care of her. They separated within a year. In his childhood Fitzgerald lived at 39 Portland Place. Later he lived at several addresses in Fitzrovia: 19 (1841), and 18 (1843) Charlotte Street; ‘a dirty room’ at 60 Charlotte Street (1844-48); 39 Bolsover Street (1848-50); 31 (1855-57) and 88 Great Portland Street (from 1859). When he died a rosebush grown from a clipping of a bush on the tomb of Omar Khayyam was planted by his grave.

The novelist WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY (1811-63) lived in Fitzroy Street after he left Cambridge University with gambling debts and without a degree. He also lived at 35 Maple Street, which was said to be haunted by a ghost connected to a cottage that was on the site in the 16th century. Thackeray often illustrated his own work, including some satirical sketches for *Punch* magazine. Despite becoming mentally unstable in 1840, he continued to write.

The novelist CHARLES DICKENS (1812-70), was also an accomplished conjuror: he would pour raw ingredients into a bowler hat and pull out a plum pudding, or turn bran into a guinea pig. He lived at 22 Cleveland (10 Norfolk) Street from the age of two to four. As a lad he then lived at 70 Margaret Street, where he was often forced to hide from his father’s creditors. In 1823 the family moved to 4 North Gower (41 Upper Gower) Street. While there his father was

**Writing can be done [only with] the utmost application, the greatest patience, and the steadiest energy of which the writer is capable.**

Charles Dickens

imprisoned for bankruptcy. Aged 12 the young Dickens went to work in a blacking (shoe polish) factory, which he hated, apart from one daily consolation, he 'could not resist the stale pastry put out on half price trays at the confectioners' doors in Tottenham Court Road.' A solicitor, Edward Blackmore, who lodged with Dickens's aunt, Mrs Charlton, at 16 Berners Street, then gave him a job as a clerk. It was in Berners Street that Dickens first saw the original for his fictional Miss Havesham (*Great Expectations*) – an elderly woman still wearing the bridal dress for her cancelled wedding to a wealthy Quaker. She kept her face hidden behind her faded white bonnet, and had a cold and distant manner. Between 1829 and 1831 Dickens again lived at 22 Cleveland Street. Thereafter he lived also in Greenwell (*Buckingham*) Street, off Cleveland Street, and at 25 (15) Fitzroy Street (near his Aunt Janet, 7 Charlotte Street) until 1833. By 1844, when Dickens was finishing his novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (based on Richard Dadd's patricide), he had joined the Little Portland Street Unitarian Church, because the rationalist views espoused by the local minister, Edward Tagart, appealed to him.

In 1858 Dickens left his wife for Ellen Ternan, an 18-year-old actress (the age of his eldest daughter). Ellen wore geraniums in her hair and lived at 31 Berners Street. Their relationship lasted for the rest of Dickens' life.

The first editor of *Punch* magazine, HENRY MAYHEW (1812-87), a novelist better known as the author of the massive, meticulous social document, *London Labour and the London Poor* (1850), lived with his 15 brothers and sisters at 16 Fitzroy Square. He wanted to see for himself the conditions of the poor, and made a point of experiencing everything he described, even the prisoners' treadmill.

GERALDINE JEWsbury (1812-80), author of six melodramatic novels including *Zoe* (1845), lived in Charlotte Street in 1830. Reviewers were shocked by her lack of feminine delicacy; one wrote that she had a 'right daring and in some aspects a masculine spirit'. She was kind, humorous, and one of the first to be described as a 'new woman'. She dressed in enormous plumed hats, wore parrot-shaped earrings, and delighted guests at 'genteel' parties by loudly discussing 'diverse intimate matters'. She loved Jane Carlyle (married to writer Thomas Carlyle) with whom she had a stormy relationship for 25 years. She visited Paris during the 1848 uprising that led to the Second Republic, because she wanted to experience the excitement and upheaval of revolution.

WILKIE COLLINS (1824-89) pioneered the detective novel with *The Moonstone* (1868), described by T.S. Eliot as 'the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels'. His first major success was *The Woman in White* (1860), based on his encounter with Caroline Graves, 'a young and very beautiful woman dressed in flowing white robes that shone in the moonlight'. Collins had been walking with the painter, John Millais, when they heard a scream from the garden of a villa near Regent's Park. Its iron gate crashed open and the terrified Caroline appeared, escaping from the house where she had been held captive. With her daughter Harriet, Caroline moved in with Collins, who had lodgings at Howland Street. Collins described their life there as tough and morose, 'dirty work, small wages, hard words, no holidays, no social status, no future.' In 1858 they moved away from the area but by the end of the decade they were living nearby, at 2a Cavendish Square, where Wilkie, afflicted by a boil between his legs, wrote *The Woman in White*.

Collins then began a second relationship. He met Martha Rudd in 1864, and he lived with her at 33 Bolsover Street, where the couple used the names of Mr and Mrs William Dawson for the benefit of Mrs Wells, their landlady. Wilkie and Martha had two daughters, Martha (b.1869) and Constance ('Hettie', b.1871), and a son William, born 1873, after they had moved to 55



HENRY MAYHEW, writer and founder of *Punch*. Engraving after a daguerreotype by Beard.

*Mayhew's classic study London Labour and the London Poor documented the voices and conditions of the people with vivid realism.*

CHARLES DICKENS

*Charles Dickens lived in Fitzrovia at different times of his life.*

*In Barnaby Rudge he drew a fictional portrait of northern Green Lanes (now Cleveland Street) when it was still rural, occupied by the poor in a crazy tangle of huts, with stagnant pools overgrown with grass and duckweed.*



Marylebone Road. Martha and Constance were educated at the Maria Grey College, Fitzroy Square, (probably No.10) and enjoyed the company of Collins' four grandchildren (born to his stepdaughter, Harriet).

He suffered what he diagnosed as rheumatic gout in his eyes, 'enormous bags of blood', while he was writing *The Moonstone*, for which he took opium and large amounts of laudanum. The male secretaries to whom he dictated his novels were so disturbed by his cries of pain that they all left. Collins then engaged the services of a young woman, (probably his stepdaughter Harriet); he commanded her to take no notice of his woes and concentrate on his dictation, 'utterly disregard my sufferings and attend solely to my words.'

Collins was always fond of children and had agreed to be godfather to Alice Ward, having been the best man at her parents' secret, under-age wedding in All Souls, Langham Place, in 1848. At the christening, he drank too much, and accused the baby of swaying drunkenly. He continued his relationships with both Caroline and with Martha. The women kept apart from each other, but he made them equal beneficiaries in his will. Caroline died five years after Wilkie, from a heart attack brought on by acute bronchitis, while she was lodging above a cabinet-maker's in Newman Street.

The writer CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830-94), and her brother Dante Gabriel were born at 110 Hallam (38 *Charlotte*) Street, and christened at All Souls, Langham Place. Christina was a spirited child, who later denied her own desires and prioritised the spiritual life and the virtues of self-sacrifice. She

**They jerked, zigzagged, advanced, retreated, he and his shadow posturing in ungainly indissoluble harmony. He seemed exasperated, fascinated, desperately endeavouring and utterly hopeless.**

Christina Rossetti on watching a spider and its shadow