

A Tour of Aphra Behn's London

Information for the tour is based upon two biographies of Behn: Maureen Duffy's *The Passionate Shepherdess* (London: Methuen, 1977; rpt. 1989) and Janet Todd's *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1996). Site information was gleaned from *Tour Guide: Michelin: London* (Paris: Michelin et Cie, 1988).

1. Begin at the corner of Cornhill and Threadneedle Street (Bank Tube Station) with **The Royal Exchange**, founded in 1565 by Sir Thomas Gresham to serve as a center of commerce. The original building opened by Queen Elizabeth I burned in the Great Fire of London (1666), and its replacement was finished in 1669. The current building, opened in 1844, is now a shopping center. The Royal Exchange and the surrounding area figure strongly in various Behn city comedies, including *The Debauchee* (1677), *The Revenge* (1680), and *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678). Near The Royal Exchange stood the Sun Tavern, frequented by Samuel Pepys and mentioned in *The Revenge*.
2. Proceed north on Prince Street, then left on Gresham to **The Guildhall**, the center of city government in Behn's time. The original Guildhall, which was completed in 1440, was another victim of the Great Fire, which nonetheless left the outer walls and the crypt extant. The new Guildhall was completed in 1669. In *The Luckey Chance* (1686), Bredwell tricks Sir Feeble into believing that his fellow Aldermen are gathering there in the middle of the night to fend off a threat to the King.
3. Go south on King Street to **Cheapside**, mentioned in both *The Revenge* and *The Younger Brother* (1684), then right and west to **St. Paul's**. Wren's great cathedral would have been under construction in Behn's

time since the medieval building has been destroyed in the Great Fire. Booksellers and publishers clustered around Paternoster Row; one of Behn's several publishers, James Knapton, had his publishing house in St. Paul's Churchyard.

4. Continue up Ludgate Hill to a right on Old Bailey Street, then north to Newgate, site of the **Criminal Courts: The Old Bailey**. This area, the judicial center of London in Behn's day, was the place where John Hoyle, Behn's reputed lover, was tried for homosexuality in 1687. The charges were dismissed. **Newgate Prison** also stood here, and Behn stages a scene both inside and outside the prison in *The Revenge*. Though the medieval prison was also burned in the Great Fire, it was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren and opened in 1672.
5. Return south down the Old Bailey, turn west on Ludgate through Ludgate Circus, and go south on Bride Lane (on the south side of Fleet Street) to **St. Bride's Church**. Burned in the Great Fire, the current structure was built by Sir Christopher Wren and opened for services in 1674. Its architecture is reputed to be the model for traditional wedding cakes. St. Bride's may have been Behn's neighborhood parish. Some biographers suggest that a candidate for her husband, one Richard Ben, a merchant of Dutch extraction and victim of the 1665 Great Plague, is buried there. St. Bride's Churchyard is mentioned in both *The Roundheads* (1681-2) and *The Luckey Chance*, and one of Behn's publishers for *The Roundheads* is colorfully described on the frontispiece as "next door to the Bear Tavern neer Bride's Lane in Fleet Street." In Behn's time, Easter at St. Bride's was marked by a "Spittle Sermon," so-called because the parish was originally endowed by the Priory of St. Mary Spittle. The Lord Mayor and the city aldermen attended, a fact mentioned by Sir Cautious, himself an alderman, in *The Luckey Chance*.

6. Return north on Bride's Lane to Fleet Street, and go east. To the north is Shoe Lane/St. Andrew's Street. Behn's lover, John Hoyle, killed a man here in 1665, but was acquitted of the murder charge. Turn south on Salisbury Square/Dorset Rise. In this area was located Dorset Gardens Theatre on the property of Dorset House, which had been destroyed in the Great Fire. In Behn's time, this area was on the riverbank, and patrons could arrive by boat. Behn herself lived on **Dorset Street**, while fellow poet and playwright John Dryden lived in Salisbury Square. Most of Behn's plays premiered at the **Dorset Gardens Theatre**, resident home of the acting company for which she wrote, The Duke's Players. Initially helmed by Sir William Davenant, it was led in later years by the great actor manager Thomas Betterton, for whom Behn created several roles. The playhouse was torn down in 1707.
7. From Dorset Rise, go west on Hutton Street, then north on **Whitefriars St.** Whitefriars was home to a notorious, crime ridden slum called Alsatia. Once the location of a palace, Alsatia boasted of certain streets that retained the privilege of sanctuary and became a favorite haunt of debtors. In *The Debauchee*, Careless avoids debtor's prison by hiding out in Alsatia, and in *The Luckey Chance*, Gayman, who has impoverished himself with his lavish gifts to his mistress, lives in Alsatia, leasing a garret from a libidinous blacksmith's wife.
8. At Fleet Street, head west. The **Fleet Prison** was located in this area, and Behn was imprisoned here for debt in 1668. Before turning south on Middle Temple Lane, notice **Temple Bar**, which marks the westernmost boundary of the City of London. Supposedly, in 1686, Behn's coach broke down near **Temple Bar**, and Behn was thrown out into the slush. Behn refers to the Temple Bar in *The Roundheads*.

9. Proceed south on Middle Temple Lane, and enter the Middle Temple Gardens. Behn's lover, John Hoyle, who received his legal training at Gray's Inn (north of Holborn), had his law offices in the Middle Temple and lived nearby. The publisher of *The Luckey Chance* was also located in this area.
10. Return north on Middle Temple Lane and cross Fleet Street. Proceed north on Chancery Lane, west on Carey Street, then north on Serle to **Lincoln's Inn Fields**. This site was the first home of the Duke's Company, resident here from 1662 to 1671 in a converted tennis court. Behn's first play, *The Amorous Prince*, premiered here in 1671. In Behn's day, Lincoln's Inn Fields was a somewhat disreputable area. In *The Luckey Chance*, Gayman is sent to there to meet up with a "spirit" who will lead him to the bed of his mistress. She also refers to Lincoln's Inn Fields in *The Younger Brother* and *Sir Patient Fancy*, and in *The Luckey Chance*, Sir Credulous Easy visits his lawyer there.
11. Proceed west to Remnant Street, cross Kingsway, continue on Queen Street to Drury Lane and turn right. Go right on Kemble, then left on Catherine to the front of the **Theatre Royal, Drury Lane**. The rival company to the Duke's, the King's Company, was resident here and was headed by Sir Thomas Killigrew. The first playhouse on the site opened in 1663, but it burned down nine years later, and it was replaced in 1674 by one designed by Sir Christopher Wren. The Duke and King's Company merged in 1683, and Behn produced *The Luckey Chance* at Drury Lane in 1686.
12. Return to Kemble/Russell Street and turn left. Russell Street itself figures in several Behn plays and the **Rose Tavern** on Russell Street, another favorite watering hole of Samuel Pepys, is mentioned in *The Debauchee* and *The Luckey Chance*. *The Town-Fop* (1676) is set in Covent Garden, and the play opens on an unnamed street in the area. At Bow, turn right. No. 1, Bow Street was the site of **Will's Coffeehouse**, the heart of literary Restoration London; it merits a mention in *The Luckey Chance*. This area is also

thought to have been where Behn's widowed mother, Elizabeth Johnson, lived after she joined her daughter in London.

At the top of Bow Street, turn left on Long Acre, and then left on Rose Street to **The Lamb and the Flag**, one of London's oldest pubs. Extant during Behn's lifetime, this tavern is well-known because John Dryden was attacked and beaten outside of it in Rose Alley, possibly by literary enemies. Although usually very crowded, The Lamb and the Flag is a good place to stop for refreshments.

- 13.** Proceed south on Rose to Bedford Street and cross the Strand. Continue west and left on Buckingham Street. At #12 lived Restoration diarist **Samuel Pepys** from 1679-1688. At the end of Buckingham is **York Water Gate**, which marked the river's edge in Behn's time.
- 14.** Return to The Strand. In Behn's day, many famous physicians lived along The Strand. In *The Luckey Chance*, Behn refers to Dr. Vanderbergen, a famous Dutch doctor, who lived in The Strand, and Sir Cautious pretends to be a doctor who resides at "Red Colour Lanthorne in the Strand." Proceed west, then turn south on Whitehall to **The Royal Banqueting House**. One of the few surviving bits of Whitehall Palace, home to both Charles II (1660-1685) and James II (1685-1688), the Banqueting House was designed by Inigo Jones and features ceiling frescoes by Peter Paul Rubens, which were commissioned by James I. Charles I walked through one of the windows onto a specially built platform for his execution in 1649. In the main room, Charles II regularly performed a ceremony called "the King's touch," which was thought to cure scrofula, a tuberculous infection of the skin. There is a fee to enter the building.

15. Continue down Whitehall to Parliament Square; turn right on Great George St. to **St. James Park** and **Birdcage Walk**. By day, St. James Park was a favorite spot for Charles II to walk his beloved spaniels. Birdcage Walk receives its name from the many aviaries that Charles installed on this road. By night, St. James Park was a notorious gathering place for prostitutes and their clients, a feature sensationalized by **John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester**, in his infamous poem "A Ramble in St. James' Park." Rochester was a friend of Behn's. Behn describes various characters visiting St. James Park by day in *The Debauchee* and *The Town-Fop*.

Across the park is The Mall. At No. 79 lived **Nell Gwynn**, leading actress, mistress to Charles II, and another friend of Behn's. The area known as Pall Mall had become a very fashionable place to live. In *The Debauchee*, a rake promises his mistress that he will take her away from Pater Noster Row and install her in a house in Pall Mall.

16. Return to Parliament Square and cross it to enter **Westminster Abbey**. Behn is buried in the east cloister, just outside a door leading into the cathedral. Hoyle is believed to be the composer of her epitaph: "Here lies a proof that wit can never be/Defense enough against mortality." Worth visiting as well is the crypt museum, where Charles II's funereal wax effigy is on display. There is a fee to gain access to the cloister and the crypt.

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