

Miscellaneous Box

16.05

John Buchan's London

by Michael Redley

The walk set out in these notes, even with tube journeys and without the suggested optional detours, is certainly 4 miles more - a long way on city streets. You may do better to concentrate on specific locations which look interesting. A sketch map is appended. But it will certainly help to have with you the standard London A-Z. The points of interest I have suggested may not be to everyone's taste. I would welcome hearing of errors or omissions.

A few general remarks may be helpful. Buchan owed a great deal to the metropolis. Almost the whole of his working life, from 1900 until he left to be Governor-General of Canada in late 1935, was centred on London. For about seventeen years he also lived in the city.

His engagement with London went through three distinct stages. In the first, when he was a barrister, the eighteenth century character of the Inns of Court, the Strand, Fleet Street and parts of the West End where he lived and worked was a particular source of fascination to him. The massive and brutal Edwardian redevelopment of what became the Aldwych and Kingsway completely changed the character of that part of London. This may have contributed to Buchan's belief that the soul of the British Empire was being destroyed by a ruthless commercialism.

An entirely new chapter opened with his marriage in 1907. His wife's father, Norman Grosvenor, was a son of Lord Ebury, cousin of the Duke of Westminster. The Westminster estate included much of Mayfair, Belgravia and Pimlico. Buchan's novels with London settings, *The Power House*, *The Thirty Nine Steps* and *The Three Hostages*, are based largely in this territory, with occasional forays into the older eighteenth century city with which he had first fallen in love. The gradual decay of this social milieu (the city palace of the Westminsters on Park Lane was demolished to make way for the Grosvenor House Hotel early in the 1920s) was part of the background to the Buchan family's move from London to Elsfield near Oxford in 1920.

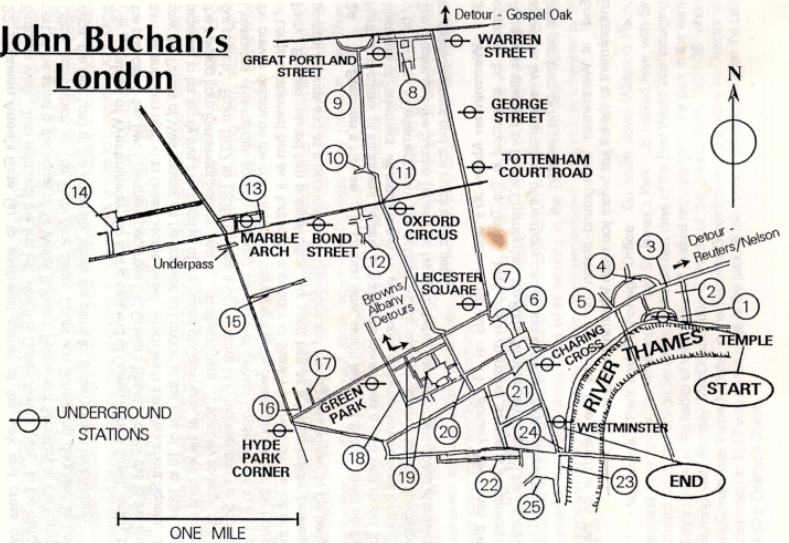
In the third phase, Buchan commuted to a busy life of business, journalism and politics, living during the week in clubs and often dining out. He moved through London as never before, but the city now meant far less.

In *Sick Heart River*, written in Canada at the end of his life, Buchan depicts Sir Edward Leithen remembering the London of his youth: "It was a different London then, quieter, cosier, dirtier perhaps, but sweeter smelling... the scents would have been a compound of wood paving, horse dung, flowers and fresh paint, not the deadly monotony of petrol. The old landmarks, too, were disappearing".

After walking its streets for an hour or two in search of John Buchan, you too may well sympathise with Leithen's point of view.

**A leaflet which offers John Buchan enthusiasts
information and and a map based on JB's
life and work in London**

John Buchan's London



Start on The Embankment outside Temple Underground Station. (Closed on Sundays)

1. **3, Temple Gardens** Go east along The Embankment 50 yards beyond the end of Temple Place, and turn left in to Middle Temple Lane. JB paced The Embankment for hours one night early in 1900 considering whether it was his duty to abandon the law and join up for the South African war. Doorway on left immediately through the gateway into The Temple is where Buchan lodged for much of his time as a barrister. He said: "I had a view of the river, and at night in winter could hear overhead the calling of wild birds in their flight up stream". Susan Grosvenor used to visit him there chaperoned by her mother.

2. **4, Brick Court** Go up Middle Temple Lane, past Fountain Court and Middle Temple Hall to upper side of an open courtyard - now car park - on left. This was JB's first lodging when he came to London. He shared rooms at the top of the staircase with another trainee barrister. "They were small and new", he wrote later, "reached by a staircase of lavatory bricks, with no prospect but chimney pots". See for yourself. Further up the Lane at street level, are windows of the sort of "semi underground" chambers from which JB was glad to escape when he abandoned the law for publishing in 1907.

Detour: Reuters and Thomas Nelson Turn right at top of Middle Temple Lane on to Fleet Street. Two hundred yards east on the right is Whitefriars Street which leads to Carmelite Street. Reuters, the news agency of which Buchan was a director from 1917 and later deputy chairman, moved its head office to 9, Carmelite Street from 24, Old Jewry in the City in 1923. Buchan divided his working day in London for the rest of the 1920s between his office in Carmelite Street and at the publisher, Thomas Nelson, half a mile further east at 35-36, Paternoster Row, north of St Paul's churchyard in the City.

3. **Holywell Street** From Temple Bar at top of Middle Temple Lane, go west into the Strand to St Clement Dane Church. You have to imagine Holywell Street which ran north west from the church. It was the heart of that older eighteenth century London of yards, alleyways and bow fronted shops with the Johnsonian flavour which greatly attracted JB when he first lived in London. He said: "In the daytime, with my fellow solicitor's-clerk, I penetrated into queer alleys and offices which in appearance were unchanged since Mr. Pickwick's day. On foggy evenings I would dine beside a tavern fire on the kind of fare which Mr. Weller affected. Behind all the dirt and gloom there was a wonderful cosiness, and every street corner was peopled by ghosts from literature and history". The street was obliterated with much of the surrounding area by the Aldwych and Kingsway redevelopment of 1906.

4. **Norfolk Street** Go west on the south side of The Strand past Arundel Street. You also have to imagine Norfolk Street, which used to be the next left before Surrey Street. In a requisitioned hotel there was the Ministry of Information where Buchan worked as Director of Intelligence in 1918.

5. **1, Wellington Street** Carry on west along The Strand past Kings College, turning left into Lancaster Place which leads on to Waterloo Bridge. This used to be the start of Wellington Street, the upper part of which still exists on the other side of The Strand leading to Covent Garden. The last premises on the right before the bridge, somewhere near the entrance to Nos. 5-6 Brettenton House, now the head office of Time Magazine in Britain, housed The Spectator magazine when JB worked there. Editorial work for the magazine did much to form his political outlook. His first editorial appeared on 20 January 1900, and there were hundreds more, as well as book reviews, over the following ten years.

6. **National Portrait Gallery** Opposite Charing Cross Station, turn right into Duncannon Street and St Martin's Lane. Going north, the NPG is behind the National Gallery on the left. In Gallery 28 on level 2 devoted to "Early Twentieth Century Arts" is Thomas Clapperton's bust of JB done in 1936. He is surrounded by portraits of other twentieth century writers, such as Lytton Strachey and T.S. Eliot, of whose work he did not altogether approve. Literary friends, Henry James and Henry Newbolt, keep him company.

7. **Leicester Square Underground Station** 100 yards north up Charing Cross Road. Caught in the street during an air raid in Chapter 10 of *Mr. Standfast*, Richard Hannay takes refuge in one of the entrances to the underground station. "People in the street were either staring at the heavens or running wildly for shelter. A motor bus in front of me emptied its contents in a twinkling; a taxi pulled up with a jar and the driver and fare dived into a second-hand book shop". Also hiding is Moton Ivery of Biggleswick, who in his fear reveals himself to Hannay as the German agent, von Schwabing.

Detour to Gospel Oak Take tube on Northern Line from Leicester Square eight stops on the Edgware branch to Belsize Park Station. Susan Buchan said that the clue, "the sacred tree", referring to Gospel Oak in *The Three Hostages* was inspired by JB's visits to a street called Gospel Oak Grove where she helped to run a clinic for children during the war. The street has disappeared under a modern council housing development on the south side of the railway cutting in the angle between Mansfield Road and Southampton Road. But the mood of the fictitious and forlorn Palmyra Square where one of the hostages was hidden can still be recaptured there.

8. **Fitzroy Square** Take tube on Northern Line from Leicester Square three stops to Warren Street Station. Turn left out of station down Warren Street, and left into Fitzroy Street which leads to the square. South of the square, now dominated by the Post-office Tower, is the restaurant in Antioch street, Rapaccini's, to which Leithen is lured in chapter 6 of *The Power House*. Leithen says: "The street, when I found it, turned out to be a respectable little place - boarding houses and architects offices, with a few antiquity shops and a picture cleaner's". The dance hall adjacent to The Fields of Eden, the area described in chapter 13 of *The Three Hostages* and another clue to the whereabouts of the hostages in the story, is in the same area.

9. **76, Great Portland Street** Walk north from Fitzroy square to the Euston Road and go west past Great Portland Street Station and left down Park Crescent into Great Portland Street. 50 yards down the street on the left on the site now occupied by the City and Guilds of London Institute was the Buchans' third and last family home in London. They moved there in 1913. Susan Buchan said: "It had all the openness and grace of an eighteenth century house . . . a charming hall paved with black and white squares of marble, and John's library (the room we used the most), lined with bookshelves, was a pleasant room". Bridford mews, at the back from Devonshire Street, leads into what was the courtyard where Susan, much tormented by sparrows, tried her hand at gardening. Their third son was born in the house. At least parts of *A Salute to Adventurers*, *The Power House*, *Nelson's History of the War*, *Greenmantle* and *Mr. Standfast* were written there. They left the house in 1919. It was damaged by a bomb in the Second World War and rebuilt in the early 1950s.

10. **Richard Hannay's flat in Portland Place** Walk south down Portland Place to the point where it does a sharp right by Broadcasting House. Opposite the Langham Hotel is a block of flats, No 1 Portland Place, which Buchan may have had in mind for Hannay's pied-à-terre where Scudder is murdered at the start of *The Thirty Nine Steps*. It is now the BBC's education department. On the site of Broadcasting House in Langham Place was a mansion in the window of which Alice Buchan remembered as a child seeing a grey parrot.

11. **Oxford Circus** South down Upper Regent's Street. In chapter 1 of *The Thirty Nine Steps*, bored by life in "the old country", Hannay gives half a crown to a yawning beggar near here because he is clearly a fellow sufferer. In Oxford Circus, Hannay vowed to return to Africa unless something happens within the next day.

12. **St George's, Hanover Square** Turn right and go west on Oxford Street to first left, Harewood Street leading to Hanover Square. At the church across the square, St George's, JB was married to Susan Grosvenor on 15 July 1907. The service, something of a society event and recorded in the guide-book to the church, was conducted by the then Bishop of Stepney, later Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang. It was the start of a new interest in London for JB. He wrote "I had no longer any craving for a solitary life at some extremity of the Empire, for England was once more for me an enchanted land, and London a magical city".

13. **13, Bryanston Street** To Marble Arch (tube from either Oxford Circus or Bond Street on the Central Line will save walking). Right out of tube and immediately right into Great Cumberland Street. End of first block, turn right into Bryanston street. No. 13, on the site towards the end on the right now occupied by a multi-storey car park, was the Buchans' second London home, from 1909 to 1913. Their eldest son was born there. Susan wrote: "It was of the period of the Adams Brothers. The dining room and drawing room floors had sets of three little rooms (which opened out of each other) with garlanded mantelpieces and pretty comices". JB may have finished *Prester John* in the house and worked on his first biography of the Marquis of Montrose.

14. **40, Hyde Park Square** Go west to the end of Bryanston Street, cross over the Edgware Road and turn right going north. 50 yards up, turn left into Connaught Street. While being driven north up the Edgware Road, Leithen discovers in *The Power House* that another driver has been substituted for his own. He jumps from the car in a traffic jam - some things don't change - and doubles back southward through the back streets to the Bayswater Road. His route must have crossed Connaught Street, which goes in to Hyde Park Square. No. 40 in the south-east quadrant of the square, now a row of modern town houses, was the Buchans' first family home. They lived there from 1907 to 1909, and their first child, Alice, was born there. Susan described the house as "... tall and slightly gaunt, with a steep staircase. Like so many houses of its date, it seemed to have been designed to give the maximum amount of work for the minimum of comfort; but it was a pleasant house when in the summer the front drawing-room was full of a green light cast by the big trees in the square".

15. **30, Upper Grosvenor Street** Take Clarendon Place from the middle of the south side of the square and follow it to the Bayswater Road. Cross into the Park and turn left going parallel with the Bayswater Road to the subway to upper Park Lane by Speakers Corner. On a park bench near there, Leithen meets the president of a South American country, Ramon Pelem, disguised as a tramp in the short story, "Sing a Song of Sixpence", in *The Runagates Club*. Go through subway and turn right down Park Lane to fourth turn left, which is Upper Grosvenor Street. On the left (north) side of the street was a screen and gateway into Grosvenor House. No. 30, a "grace and favour" family house on the other side of the street now occupied by the London Trust Bank, was Susan's mother's house. JB first met Susan there when, according to the fashion of the day, he paid a call after attending a dinner party there. The Buchans lived in the house intermittently during the First World War. Their second son, William, was born there, and JB began *Greenmantle* there in February 1916.

16. **Bachelors Club** Continue down Park Lane to Hyde Park Corner and left in to Piccadilly. Immediately to the left after the Hotel Intercontinental is Hamilton Place. At its bottom end, probably on the site of the hotel, was the Bachelors club, which JB joined to give him a foothold in the West End soon after coming to London. He described it as "... a pleasant resort for idle youth, from whose bay-windows one could watch the tide of fashion flowing between Hyde Park and Piccadilly". A reference to the club appears in chapter 7 of *The Power House*.

17. **Edward Leithen's flat** Continue eastward down Piccadilly to next left, Down Street. The mansion block on the right going up the street was where JB apparently envisaged Leithen living. The journey to work in *The Temple* by tube or on foot, which is described in *The Power House*, is almost exactly the reverse of the journey JB would have taken from his lodgings in *The Temple* to the Bachelors Club.

Detour: Browns Hotel and the Albany Continue along Piccadilly to Albemarle Street, left at cross-road with St James Street. At Browns Hotel at the far end of Albemarle Street, JB introduced Susan, daughter of one of the most eminent Whig families in the land, to his fiercely Presbyterian mother and his sister from Glasgow. A quarter of a mile further down Piccadilly, just past the Royal Academy, is the entrance to The Albany, where Buchan was entertained as an undergraduate at Oxford on one of his first visits to London by John Lane of the Bodley Head. Andrew Lurnley, villain of *The Power House*, has rooms on the first floor in The Albany in which the final showdown in the story takes place.

18. **The Cocoa Tree Club** Along Piccadilly past Green Park Station, take St James's Street which is second right. Half way down on the right, at No. 64, was a club which Buchan used as a place for meeting his Oxford contemporaries, "... a place with a long and dubious history, of which the bronze cocoa tree in the smoking room, stuffed with ancient packs of cards, was a reminder". The site was redeveloped in 1937 and is now the headquarters of Global Asset Management.

19. **Jermyn Street and the London Library** Cross St James's Street and go up it to the last exit on the right, which is Jermyn Street. JB may have envisaged in this street as the location for the restaurant above which the Thursday Club meets in *The Three Hostages*. The crossing with Duke Street, the first you come to along Jermyn Street, is the site of the affray in chapter 8 of *The Thirty Nine Steps* when Marmaduke Jopley tries to get Hannay arrested as "the man who did the Portland Place murder". Hannay's escape route is down Duke Street. At the second street on the left, King's Street, go left into St James's Square. In the left hand corner of the square is the London Library. JB used the library extensively, as many authors still do who need books on extended loan, to write historical biographies such as *Oliver Cromwell*.

20. **The Athenaeum** Leave St James's Square at its south-east corner into Pall Mall. Cross Pall Mall and turn left towards Trafalgar Square. The building on the right in Waterloo Place, the first turning right, is The Athenaeum, to which JB was elected in 1916. He often lunched in the club's dining room while working in the Department (later Ministry) of Information during the First World War. He is remembered in the club as a benefactor of its library.

21. **St. James's Park and the Foreign Office** Go south down Waterloo Place, descend steps, cross The Mall and go into St James's Park. JB walked here with Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, in the darkest days of the First World War indulging Grey's interest in the habits of wild ducks. JB walked regularly round the park in the early morning with Ramsay MacDonald during much of the period from 1931-35 when MacDonald was Prime Minister in the National Government. JB's office as Director of Information in 1917 was on the edge of the park, in the Foreign Office Building on the Left of King Charles's Street.

22. **Queen Anne's Gate** Go to south-east corner of the park and cross over Birdcage Walk. Turn right until the first left, which is Queen Anne's Gate. In the narrow part of the street is the house of Sir Walter Bullivant, Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, from which, in *The Thirty Nine Steps*, Count von Schwabing disguised as Lord Alloa, the First Lord of the Admiralty, steals the plans for Britain's naval mobilisation.

23. **Palace of Westminster** Go to the east end of Queen Anne's Street, which, by the pub called the Two Chairmen, becomes Old Queen's Street. Follow this to the end, turn left and then right in to Great George Street, which leads into Parliament Square. JB saw the Palace of Westminster on his first visit to London at the age of 19 in 1894, and reported to his family that the chamber of the House of Commons, at the left hand end of the building from Parliament Square, was "... small and bare ... scarcely so large as half our church". From 1927 to 1935, he was a Conservative M.P. representing the Scottish Universities. His maiden speech attacking the plans of diehard Conservatives to reopen the prewar debate on the constitution by strengthening the delaying powers of the House of Lords established him as a forth-right supporter of Stanley Baldwin on the left of the Party. Baldwin refused him political office, but used him as a bridge builder between political factions and as a personal, public relations and propaganda adviser to the party.

24. **St. Stephen's House** In Cannon Row, which leads off Bridge Street on the North-east corner of Parliament Square, St Stephen's House was a club with rooms for Members of Parliament. JB lived there in the week during Parliamentary sessions for much of his time as a Parliamentarian. He dictated weekly political columns for *The Spectator*, *The Graphic* and *The Sunday Times* from his room there. Cannon Row is closed at present for redevelopment and the building has gone.

25. **Westminster Abbey** JB's death in Canada on 11 February 1940 was the occasion for an editorial in *The Times*. His London memorial service in Westminster Abbey was attended by Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister, and most of the Cabinet, as well as by representatives of the many causes and interests he had supported and by large numbers of his readers.

End at Westminster Underground Station, on the Circle Line, which is on the Embankment to the left just before you reach Westminster Bridge.