HILARY MANTEL'S LONDON


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When did you first visit London?

I was born in Derbyshire and first visited London when I was 12 with my family. We managed to fit a huge amount into that week – the royal parks, Hampton Court and the Tower, the National Gallery and the Tate. I found it all exhilarating and couldn't wait to get back. At 18, I came to London to study law at the London School of Economics, and lived in a hall of residence on Malet Street in Bloomsbury. My book, *An Experiment in Love*, is set there.

Does London feature a lot in your novels?

I tend to see another London, beneath the pavements: the one reality imposed on another, just in different time-frames. I've written about the 18th century in *The Giant, O'Brian*, and about Tudor London in my novel *Wolf Hall*. Thomas Cromwell, the central character of *Wolf Hall*, had a house at Austin Friars in the heart of the City. The site is now Draper's Hall, and it has a small, exquisite city garden. As Master of The Rolls, he had a house on Chancery Lane, a hunting lodge at Canonbury, and other houses at Stepney and Hackney – both were in the country then.

Are you writing at the moment?

I'm working on the sequel to *Wolf Hall*, taking my main character Thomas Cromwell through the next five years of his life. It will be called *The Mirror and the Light*. It features London's Whitehall and the Royal Palaces, Cromwell's city houses, and his house at Stepney.

Which is you favourite district?

I love legal London. Lincoln's Inn has one of London's undervalued museums, at the Royal College of Surgeons. It displays the skeleton of Charles Byrne, the real-life giant who is the subject of my novel *The Giant, O'Brian*.

ELTHAM PALACE: A location for Mantel's next book


© English Heritage

What's London's best-kept secret?

Sutton House, the National Trust house on Homerton High Street. It is a real Tudor house with a complex and absorbing history, first built in 1535 by the young politician Ralph Sadler to house his growing family. You can still see some fine linenfold panelling. It's atmospheric and a lively community resource.

Any other favourite haunts?

Somerset House, where the Royal Society of Literature is based, and the British Library (and its interesting shop). I am unable to pass a bookshop without going into it. My favourites are Hatchards, Daunts on Marylebone High Street, and the London Review Bookshop.

Do you have a favourite London restaurant or cafe?

With my husband, Gerald McEwen, I've been a member of ROSL for 20 years and we use the restaurant at Over-Seas House more than anywhere else. I often bring fellow writers for lunch, as it's quiet and private – even on busy days. There are good spaces between the tables, the staff are kind and friendly, and you are never rushed. Contacts from abroad in particular love seeing the house, and the serenity of the garden is always pleasant.

Where would you consider to be London's most romantic spot?

I've never associated London with romance, but when I was a student, I used to write a daily letter to my boyfriend sitting on a bench in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and read his daily letter back. (Weather permitting: being a northerner I was very hardy.) We've been married for a long time now, so I suppose it was romantic enough for us.

ROSL member, Hilary Mantel CBE, is a writer and critic. She won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, 2009, with Wolf Hall *(£18.99 hardback, Fourth Estate Ltd, ISBN: 978-0007230181). Interview by Samantha Whitaker*

LONDON

What's on...

Earth: Art of a Changing World

GSK Contemporary (Royal Academy)
3 December 2009-31 January 2010
The second annual contemporary art season at 6 Burlington Gardens presents work from more than 30 leading international contemporary artists on the theme of climate change.
Tickets: £5-£7. Contact: 0844 209 1919 or www.royalacademy.org.uk

Breakfast at Tiffany's

Haymarket Theatre Royal
Until 9 January 2010
Anna Friel stars as the cultural icon Holly Golightly in Samuel Adamson's adaptation of Truman Capote's flighty novella.
Tickets: £15-£49.50. Contact: 0845 481 1870 or www.breakfastattiffanys.co.uk


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The Royal Ballet – Les Patineurs/Tales of Beatrix Potter

Royal Opera House
14 December 2009-13 January 2010
Frederick Ashton's *Tales of Beatrix Potter* holds its audiences spellbound while *Les Patineurs* evokes the atmosphere of a winter's skating party. Charming fun for the whole family.
Tickets: £5-£70. Contact: 020 7304 4000 or www.roh.org.uk