

Locations in *The Importance of Being Earnest*

For a map, a “Tour of Earnest’s London,” see link:

<http://www.centerstage.org/earnest/Digital-Dramaturgy/A-Tour-of-Ernest-London.aspx>

The Albany

Well-known apartment housing for bachelors in London, located near Piccadilly and next to the Royal Academy. Bachelor housing was not uncommon among the wealthier set, for many took furnished bed-sitting rooms as they were called (one-bedroom flats)—even married men would have them on occasion as an alternative to gentlemen’s clubs, getting away from women, home, responsibility, or whatever (perhaps just as a pied-à-terre in the city if they had country homes). The Albany was historically somewhat notorious as an address for the more rambunctious set of single men, and for homosexuals. Wilde frequently “took rooms” himself, or for other men, as a convenient rendezvous away from home. In his case, it was partly for work and partly for pleasure, obviously. [see map]

“...I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes.” (Jack, 8)

Belgrave Square

This fashionable square was located at the heart of the increasingly exclusive and elegant Belgravia area of London’s West End—an area that was being populated with large, fashionable townhouses like New York’s Park Avenue.

“Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham.” (Jack, 19)

Club

Clubs were all the rage during the 19th century; the classes did not, of course, mix within clubs (nor did genders, though as the century moved on, women were at last able to secure clubs of their own). Among the upper classes, clubs such as Algernon’s were highly selective private facilities, often based on a set of common interests or experiences (military branch, university affiliation, professional occupation, etc.) providing men with a place to socialize and dine, or even a place to live. They were particularly popular with young bachelors seeking amusement or company; for married men, clubs also offered a refuge from home life. *“Well, let us go the Club.” (Algernon, 25)*

Empire

The comment almost certainly refers the venue known simply as the Empire, which was one of London's most prominent variety halls. Located in Leicester Square, it was unique in that its patrons were mostly of the upper class (most halls, havens of lowbrow diversion that they were, catered to the working or middle class), who lent to the hall the atmosphere of a club. The Empire offered a focus on spectacle, with performances ranging from burlesques to ballets to dumb shows. Along with upper class men of a rowdier and more adventurous bent, the Empire attracted such questionable patrons as prostitutes. An evening at the Empire was, then, definitely not to be shared with proper ladies.

"Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?" (Algernon, 25)

Grosvenor Square

Located in the fashionable Mayfair quarter in London's West End, Grosvenor Square was populated by wealthy upper class families, many of which came to town only during the social season and dwelt in the country for the rest of the year.

"If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square." (Lady Bracknell, 18)

Hertfordshire

A few counties removed from Shropshire (where Algy has tried to find Jack's country house), Hertfordshire is located in southeastern England, somewhat to the north of London. Hertfordshire is a predominantly rural area.

"The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire." (Jack, 26)

Willis's

That is, Willis's Rooms, a restaurant located in London. Wilde was himself a frequenter, dining often with his young lover, Lord Alfred Douglas ("Bosie"), and other acquaintances fashionable or not (he was fond of picking up young guardsmen or working class boys and taking them out for fancy meals). Willis's also had an element of the music hall/vaudeville palace, though until 1890, it had catered somewhat more to the upper class, offering balls as well as lectures. After 1890, it was not a place for respectable and domestic types, though was not unsuitable for lively bachelors, whose behavior might be excused for their youth and status. Effectively, Algy is skipping the family banquet to go clubbing.

“If it wasn’t for Bunbury’s extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn’t be able to dine with you at Willis’s tonight...” (Algernon, 9)

“Glossary.” Digital Dramaturgy. Centerstage.org. Updated October 4, 2009. Web. 12.29.2011.