

Octavo (190 by 128 mm), pictorial map endpapers and illustrated title-page by Philip Gough, bound in publisher’s green cloth over boards.

A VERBAL AND VISUAL MAP OF LONDON’S “COTTAGES”

For Your Convenience A learned dialogue instructive to all Londoners & London visitors, overheard in the Thélème Club and taken down verbatim.

Author
PRY, Paul [pseud. of Thomas BURKE] with illustrations by Philip GOUGH

Publication date
1937.

Publisher
George Routledge & Sons Ltd, Broadway House, 68-74 Carter Lane E. C.,

Publication place
London,

Physical description
Octavo (190 by 128 mm), pictorial map endpapers and illustrated title-page by Philip Gough, bound in publisher’s green cloth over boards.

Dimensions
1900 by 1280mm (74.75 by 50.5 inches).

Notes
The first gay guide to London, with the earliest printed map of the city’s “cottages”, with the extremely rare dust jacket.

‘For Your Convenience’ ostensibly takes the form of a dialogue between two gentlemen about where to find a public toilet in London if one were to be, say, “walking through Wigmore street after three cups of tea”. However, this Wodehousian chat disguises the book’s true subject matter – a guide to public loos throughout the city where gay men could go “cottaging” (or “cruising” in the USA). This subtext is conveyed chiefly through innuendo. For example, the two men are discussing London’s facilities and mention that, “places of that kind which have no attendants afford excellent rendezvous to people who wish to meet out of doors and yet escape the eye of the Busy [Policeman]”. He goes on to specify that these types of bathrooms could be used by criminals for things like bookmaking, but he entirely omits the crime that is actually being referenced. Burke’s book is unprecedented not only because of its startlingly early date of publication, in 1937, when homosexuality was still illegal in the UK both in public and private, but also because of its publisher. Routledge was a long-established and well-respected press that specialised in academic titles, and is thus the farthest thing away from the clandestine printer whom one would expect to publish this subversive guidebook. Sadly, we’ll never know if the publishers were in on the joke, or if they really thought that this was a worthwhile guidebook to London’s restrooms.

Philip Gough’s map of central London on the endpapers resembles other pictorial maps from the same era. For example, Buckingham palace is shown with a crown, the zoo is an elephant and the Wallace Collection is a painter’s palette. However, the map also shows the approximate locations of 50 different public restrooms, which are represented with pavilions. The map’s lower corners are decorated with reclining muscular men, whose pose hearkens back to antique statuary despite their being dressed as lavatory janitors.

Thomas Burke (1886-1945) was a British novelist, journalist, and poet who is best known for his writings about London’s gritty underbelly, such as his 1916 collection of short stories about Chinatown, ‘Limehouse Nights’. His pseudonym, Paul Pry, may be a reference to to John Poole’s popular 1825 farce of the same name, where the titular character constantly leaves his umbrella behind, giving him a reason to return to the scene and eavesdrop – this use of plausible pretext may be the key connection between these two Paul Prys.

Worldcat lists only nine examples in institutional collections.

Bibliography

Provenance

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