

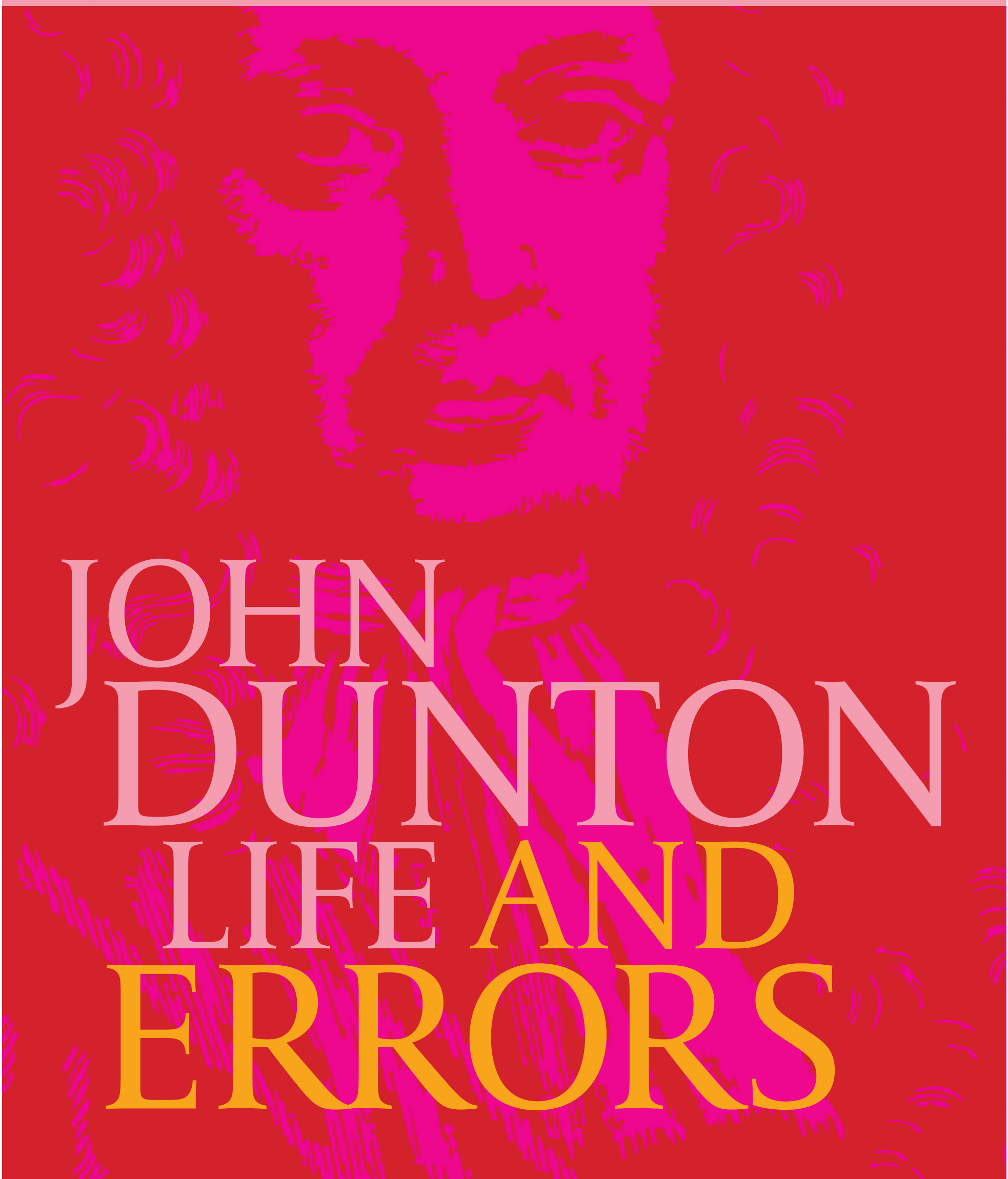
JOHN DUNTON (1659–1732)

was a man in need of the internet. Author, publisher and bookseller, he made the most of the new technology on offer in the seventeenth century – printing on paper.

He had a lot to say. Dunton has been called the man who invented trolling: he also anticipated user-generated content and tried to build an information superhighway.

Extremely self-obsessed, Dunton could ramble on and on. Witty but deep, judgemental but funny, he spread conspiracy theories and saw the value in salacious content of a sexual nature.

He lived in a London grappling with multiple disruptions. John Dunton was a man of his time who somehow strikes a chord in ours.



JOHN DUNTON LIFE AND ERRORS



© The Trustees of the British Museum

WORDS

JOHN DUNTON was good at titles

The Spiritual Hedgehog: a Project (or Thought) wholly new and surprizing

Bumography: or a Touch at the Lady's Tails.

The Double Life: or a new Project to redeem the Time, by living over to-morrow before it comes.

The Informer's Doom: or an Amazing and Seasonable Letter from Utopia, directed to the Man in the Moon.

JOHN DUNTON liked a paradox

The Funeral of Mankind. A Paradox, proving we are all dead and buried.

The Queendom, or a Paradox proving none but Women are fit to govern.

That no Colours are Real; but what we call Green, Red, Yellow, Blue, etc. only appear such to us.

The best Perfume, or a Paradox in praise of Farting.

The Brutal Amour: or a Paradox proving that Birds and Fishes have been (passionately) in love.

'PARADOXOLOGY is a speaking by paradoxes', he explained. 'Paradoxes are things which seem strange, absurd, and contrary to the Common Opinion... and this I do on purpose to rouze and awaken the Reason of Men asleep, into a Thinking and Philosophical Temper... They may startle at Paradoxes, and wind up their Reason a little higher.'

LOOKS

JOHN DUNTON liked his ruffles ...

[on a ship under attack] 'Upon this second alarm, every man was set to his gun in an instant; but as for myself, I kept out of sight as well as I could, till I heard them asking "Where is Mr. Dunton, that was so valiant over night?" This, I confess, put me into a cold sweat, and I cried, " Coming! coming! I am only seeking my ruffles." A bad excuse, you know, is better than none.'

... and his embroidered waistcoat

[in a debtors' prison] 'The surest Friend I have found in my confinement, and since I have abdicated the World and Business, is an embroidered Waistcoat, presented me by Mrs. Anne Godfrey; it has stuck to me in all weathers, and I could almost grow superstitious over the very ruins of it.'

BIRDS

JOHN DUNTON had a pet owl

'It was not long, after I had left my Raven [bookshop], and come from behind the counter, but I purchased an Owl for my garden ... I cannot forbear to tell the Reader that I have an Essay in manuscript, in which I have taken up twenty sheets in describing the virtues of poor Madge. When I was over in Ireland, I received the unhappy news of the death of my Owl, on whose memory I bestowed an Elegy. And if Erasmus could write in praise of Folly, and a Reverend Divine in the Established Church in praise of a Cow's-tail, I do not see why my Essay and Elegy, on his Gravity the Owl, may not be made public.'

JOHN DUNTON's business logo was a black raven



Early English Books Online / British Library

VALUES

JOHN DUNTON was a man of faith

Dunton was the son of an Anglican clergyman and had married into a prominent Dissenting family. Sermons and moralising texts made up most of his bookselling business. His religious loyalties were sincere but they tussled with his 'itches'. It made him very self-critical.

'... as I made advances both in strength and age: all the signs of disobedience and revenge, of impatience and immoderate desire, were seen in me.'

'I am very rash in my actions; and scarce ever did anything (save taking two women for better for worse) but I repented of, one time or other. I have a great deal of mercury in my natural temper.'

'So soon as I entered upon Business, I was all over infected with a new itch of Printing; and, I confess, I have indulged this humour something to excess.'

'There's nothing the Nature of Man is more desirous of, than Knowledge; he pursues it to a Fault, and will fly even to Hell itself to advance it.'

He titled his autobiography, *Life and Errors of John Dunton*, urging readers not to follow his louche example: 'come, read my *Errors*, and reform your own.'

TRAVEL

JOHN DUNTON liked to escape

'... being born to travel, I am ever pursuing my destiny; so that you may call me a Citizen of London and of the World:" yet, wherever I come, I love to be guessed at, not known, and to see the World unseen; and for this reason I am now learning "The Art of living Incognito". '

His travels took him to North America where he visited a Native American village ('*I kissed an Indian Queen*'); Dublin, where he made some enemies ('*The Dublin Scuffle*'). In Holland he caught up with his political hero, the exiled Whig radical Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury ('*I had the happiness, Noble Sir, to see you at Amsterdam...*').

GENDER

JOHN DUNTON had an eye for the ladies

Dunton was fascinated by women. One of the first publishers to target women readers, his *Ladies Dictionary* urged women to break free from patriarchal bonds:

‘Therefore as many of your Sex have bravely done, so it is your part to imitate them in breaking through this tender Cobweb, of Ignorance in which Men like subtle Spiders, would detain you to gain the advantage to themselves of Triumphant over your better Parts and Abilities.’

But he was a man of his time. Patronising innuendo was never far away:

‘We have given you in this Work divers Examples of those that have set Patterns for you to imitate and copy out, which may Excite and Stir up a generous Flame in your Breasts, to Learning, Arts, Sciences, etc. And since God has made you so Lovely and Charming, that no Creature in the Universe is comparable to you for the Beauty of your Bodies: Let your Souls be also Beautiful, which will render you far more Lovely and Amiable in the Eyes of God and Man.’

JOHN DUNTON was horrified by ‘He-Strumpets’

‘... such excess of Unnatural Villany’

‘... a New Society prevails Called S__d__ites; Men worse than Goats Who dress themselves in petticoats’.

JOHN DUNTON once cross-dressed

‘I got myself shaved, and put on as effeminate a look as my countenance would let me; and being well fitted out with a large scarf, I set forward; but every step I took, the fear was upon me ... As I was returning through Bishopsgate-street, with all the circumspection and the care imaginable (and I then thought I had done it pretty well), there was an unlucky rogue cried out, “I’ll be hang’d if that bain’t a man in woman’s clothes.” This put me into my preternaturals indeed, and I began to scour off as fast as my legs would carry me.’

JOHN DUNTON believed sex could change

‘It is no lie or fable that Females may be turned into Males.’

‘An Italian Woman having been married 12 Years to a Husband, by a strange Metamorphosis, at the end of that time, found herself changed into a Man, and turning off her Husband, married a Wife.’

PUBLISHING

JOHN DUNTON didn’t like bookshops

‘Were I to begin the Trade of Bookselling once again, I would never give myself the trouble to keep open Shop. Unless a man can haggle half an hour for a farthing, be dishonest, and tell lies, he may starve behind his Shop-board, for want of subsistence... Driving on the Trade by Wholesale, Subscription etc. would give me leisure to project [publish] and write, for which I have always had a peculiar inclination’.

JOHN DUNTON had a big idea

‘... a compendious view of Universal Learning. I confess it is a bold promise.’

The Athenian Gazette was a periodical inviting readers to send in their questions about absolutely anything. These would be answered by ‘The Athenian Society’ (Dunton and his pals at Smith’s Coffee House). The question and answer format was completely new and proved sensationally popular. Readers’ queries included:

- ❖ *How does a spider poison a fly?*
- ❖ *What are we to think of a vacuum?*
- ❖ *Which is the greatest sin – to be a Night Walker or to rebel against one’s parents?*
- ❖ *Are not the Highlanders of Scotland saucy rebels?*
- ❖ *How far is it consistent with wisdom to banter?*
- ❖ *Why do some people love oil but hate olives?*
- ❖ *What’s the reason of hating cheese and other antipathies?*
- ❖ *How do we call to mind those things we have forgotten?*
- ❖ *Is there thinking in dreaming?*
- ❖ *If in a dream a deceased parent appears to me and tells me I am to marry such a person, am I therefore obliged to do it?*
- ❖ *Why are angels painted in petticoats?*

Conspiracy theories also sold well

- ❖ *King Abigail, or the secret reign of the she-favourite, detected and applied*
- ❖ *Neck or Nothing, or the secret history of Queen Robin, detecting the secret reign of the four last years*
- ❖ *A brief discovery of the true mother of the pretended Prince of Wales*

THE
INFORMER'S DOOM:
OR, AN
Amazing and Seafonable Letter
FROM
UTOPIA,
Directed to the Man in the
MOON.

Giving a full and pleasant Account of the
Arraignment, Tryal, and Condemnation, of all those grand
and bitter Enemies, that disturb and molest all Kingdoms and
States, throughout the *Christian World*.

*To which is added (as a caution to honest Coun-
try-men) the Arraignment, Tryal, and Condemnation, of the Kna-
very and Cheats, that are used in every particular Trade in the
City of L O N D O N.*

Presented to the consideration of all the
Tantivy-Lads and Lassies in U R O P E, by a true Son of the
Church of E N G L A N D.

Curiously Illustrated with about Threescore Cuts.

Entred according to Order.

L O N D O N, Printed for John Dunton, at the Black-Raven,
in the Poultry, over-against Stocks-Market. 1683.

Early English Books Online / British Library





Sources: all quotes, Dunton's own words.
Many of his publications are online, including the 1818 edition of his *Life and Errors*.

Images are not from Dunton's publications, apart from the frontispiece of *The Informer's Doom* and the black raven.

QUICKFRY ZINES

- #1: A psychogeographic stroll round the Barbican (2025)
- #2: John Dunton (2025)

Forthcoming:

- #3: Kibbo Kift in the City
- #4: A psychogeographic stroll round Golden Lane

PDFs downloadable from www.quickfrybooks.com.

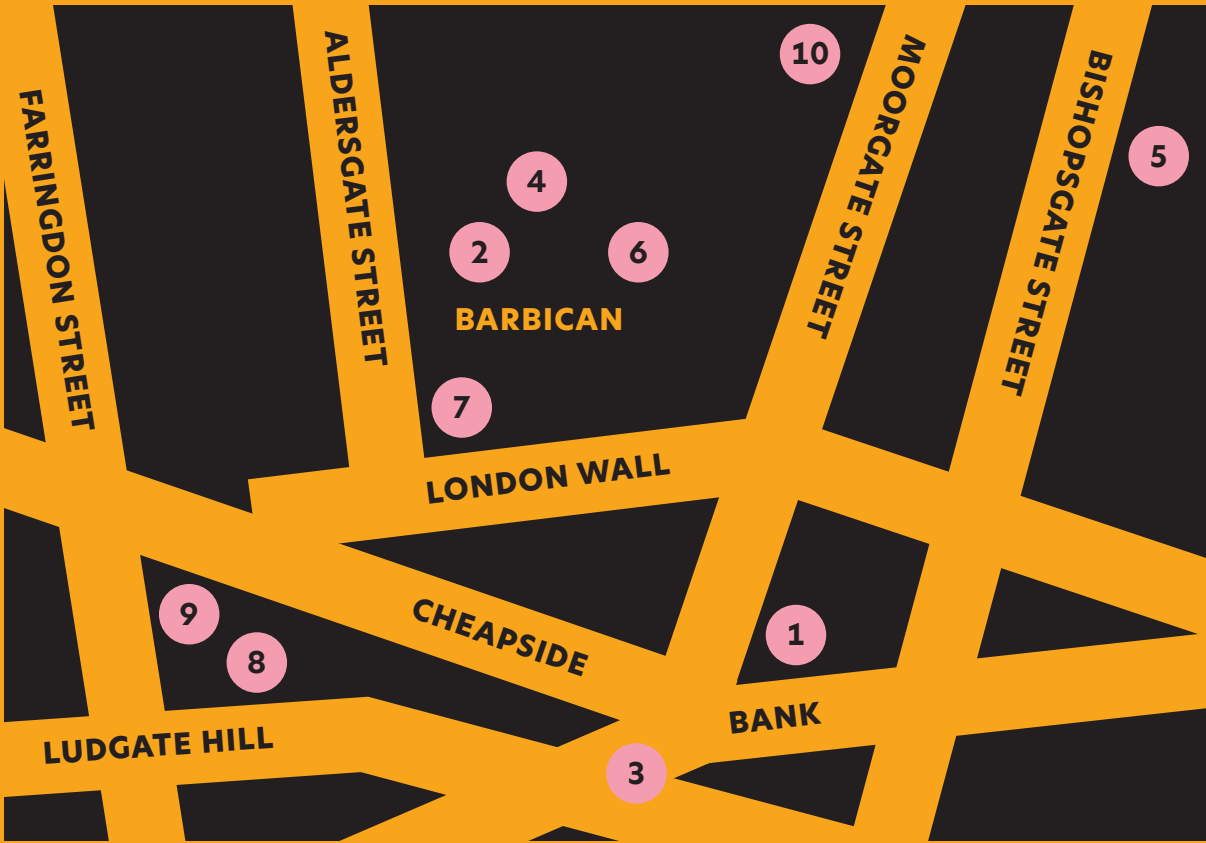
Printed copies, tabloid-newspaper style, can occasionally be picked up (free) from friendly places in the City of London.

© Quickfry Books, 2025
(www.quickfrybooks.com).
All rights reserved.

Text: @squaremilestroller
Design: @joe_ewart

RECYCLE AFTER READING

JOHN DUNTON'S LONDON



TOP TIP FOR COFFEE DRINKERS

'Mr. Bury, my old neighbour in Redcross-street. He is a plain honest man; sells the best coffee in all the neighbourhood.'

- 1 Black Raven bookshop, Princes Street
- 2 Black Raven book warehouse, Jewin Street
- 3 Smith's Coffee House, Poultry: meeting place of the Athenian Society
- 4 Bulls Head Court: Dunton's lodgings
- 5 Spital Yard: where he met his first wife, Elizabeth Annesley
- 6 Grub Street: notorious centre of hack writing
- 7 Thanet House: home of his hero, the Earl of Shaftesbury
- 8 Stationers' Hall: Dunton was a liveryman of the Stationers' Company
- 9 Fleet Prison: where he was imprisoned for debt
- 10 Bunhill Fields: buried here in an unmarked grave