

# The Blue Plaque

## Oscar Wilde

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Oscar Wilde's spectacular fall from grace is one of the best-known and most tragic stories in the history of literature. Born in Dublin in 1854, the son of an eye surgeon and a well-known poet, Wilde graduated from Oxford in 1878 and moved to London where he rapidly became a celebrity and the most prominent figure in the Aesthetic movement.

A lecture tour to the United States and Gilbert and Sullivan's mockery of him in their comic operetta *Patience* only increased his fame. He published poetry, fairy tales and a scandalously successful novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, about a golden youth who retained his beauty while the marks of his sins showed only on his painted portrait.

In 1884 Wilde married Constance Lloyd and moved into the house in Tite Street, Chelsea which is now marked by a blue plaque. By the mid-1890s he was the feted author of epigrammatic comedies like *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

But in 1895, the Marquess of Queensberry, disapproving of Wilde's friendship with his son Lord Alfred Douglas, sent a note addressed to Wilde, "posing as a Sodomite." Unwisely Wilde decided to sue for libel and set in motion a sequence of events that ended with him prosecuted and imprisoned for homosexuality. After his release from prison Wilde was a broken man and he died in exile in Paris in 1900.

Stories of his last words emphasise that he retained his wit to the end. Seriously ill in a cheap Paris hotel room he is reputed to have said, "This wall-paper will be the death of me - one of us will have to go".



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