

# The Gissing Journal

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“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”  
*Commonplace Book*

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## The Cotswold Connections of George and Algernon Gissing

ROBIN WOOLVEN  
Willersey

The *Diary* and the *Collected Letters of George Gissing* contain many references to the Cotswold villages of Broadway, in Worcestershire, and Willersey and Saintbury just over the county boundary in Gloucestershire. The Gissing family knew the area as they took holidays in Broadway at the home of their “Aunt” Emma Shailer<sup>1</sup> (1839-1909). Broadway and Willersey were also the main residence of the peripatetic and unsettled Algernon Gissing for the first 16 years (1887-1904) of his married life. Attempting to establish himself as an author, then to build his literary reputation, the struggling Algernon used identifiable Cotswold locations for many of his novels which this article attempts to identify.

### Broadway, Willersey and Saintbury

The Cotswolds are the line of limestone hills running from south of Bath, through Gloucestershire and Worcestershire thence northeast to Warwickshire and beyond. They have traditionally been sheep rearing country and it was the wool trade which was responsible for the prosperity of the towns and villages along, and bordering, the escarpment. Numerous small stone quarries on the hills were the source of the warm-looking, dark yellow limestone which, for centuries, has been used to build the houses and cottages in the towns and villages which continue to be a very attractive part of rural England. It was in this apparent rural idyll that Algernon set many of his early novels and he wrote two of his topographical books, *Broadway* (1904) and *The Footpath-Way in Gloucestershire* (1924), on the area. The latter work is perhaps the only one of his many books regularly seen in local second-hand bookshops, not least because Algernon’s novels did not warrant reprints or editions in large numbers.



Only 30 miles from Birmingham (always called Millington in Algernon's novels), the village of Broadway had a population of 1,400 in 1901. It was then, and remains, a picturesque village on the Oxford to Worcester road, just 6½ miles short of the market town of Evesham where the main road crosses the River Avon. With its abbey on the banks of the Avon and its weekly newspaper (the *Journal*), Evesham is very recognisable in Algernon's novels although, like the Cotswold villages that he came to know so well, it is often given different names. Broadway is situated below the western escarpment of the Cotswold hills where the main road descends to the Vale of Evesham via the steep Fish Hill. Just 1½ miles north of Broadway is the smaller village of Willersey (population 385 in 1901) on the Cheltenham to Stratford-upon-Avon road which runs along the base of the escarpment. The parish of only 1,200 acres extends up the escarpment to the road (the Roman 'Buckle Street') which runs along the top of the hills and which divides the ancient parish quarries of Willersey and Saintbury which, together with their overshadowing beech trees, frequently feature in Algernon's Cotswold based novels. The more remote and even smaller village of Saintbury (population 120 in 1901 and now many fewer) is one mile further east across the fields from Willersey. This is the third village in the area which figures in George's letters and in Algernon's novels. In the Gissings' time the main means of travel from London was the London to Worcester railway line with stations at Evesham, 6½ miles from Willersey, and Honeybourne Junction (3½ miles) to which villagers and their visitors either walked or took a trap.

### **Algernon's Cotswold Base**

When, on 8 September 1887, Algernon married outfitter's daughter Catherine Baseley, two years his senior, in her native Southampton, he gave his profession as "Solicitor" and his residence as "Broadway, Worcestershire," for he had been lodging for some weeks with Aunt Emma Shailer. He was familiarising himself with the area and using it in drafting his first novel *Joy Cometh in the Morning*, the British Library copy of which was stamped 26 April 1888. The newlyweds soon set up their first married home at "Smallbrook Cottage, Broadway," a two-storey cottage still standing on a sharp bend in the road from Broadway to Willersey (see photograph). Much extended to the rear, Smallbrook Cottage is now only 100 yards from the A44 trunk road, the Broadway bypass, opened in 1998 to preserve Broadway from the depredations of heavy freight traffic. When

George Gissing visited Algernon and Catherine in late January 1888 he recorded that he was “delighted with their cottage ; daintily furnished ... [with] an excellent young servant called Sarah.”<sup>2</sup> It was here, on 11 September 1888, that Catherine gave birth to their first child, Enid. At that time Algernon was shutting himself away from his family while writing his second novel, “A Lion of Cotswold,” published in 1889 as *Both of this Parish: A story of the byways*. George noted that, when Mrs Shailer and Mary came to tea, “Alg. kept at his desk and did not see them; the necessities of work compel him to this, which of course seems inexplicable to the relatives.”<sup>3</sup>

But in May 1889 George received “An astonishing letter from Alg, who says he is abandoning Smallbrook Cottage, giving up housekeeping, and will move in a week’s time to lodgings at Harbottle, Coquetdale. Selling furniture and books. This kind of thing fills me with gloomy forebodings. His inability to persevere in any course is remarkable. I fear that it will be the same throughout his life.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, after less than two years living in Smallbrook Cottage, but having had his first two novels published, Algernon and his family first visited Northumberland, then in January 1890 moved to the village of Wickwar, 5 miles from Chipping Sodbury, near Bristol and 50 miles southwest of Willersey. Unfortunately their landlady here proved to be a drunkard<sup>5</sup> ; so, two months later, Algernon, Catherine and Enid moved to the village of Bredon’s Norton, Gloucestershire, at the foot of Bredon Hill, some 7 miles northeast of Tewkesbury. From this new base, Algernon continued moving frequently around the country, presumably seeking further locations, plots and the muse for his novels as he spent time in Northumberland, Cumbria and Leeds. Catherine did occasionally travel with him but may have generally remained in Gloucestershire. At times Algernon was staying with brother George in Exeter, but Algernon and his family came together again, on returning from Jersey in May 1891, to temporarily reside with Aunt Shailer in Broadway whilst waiting, as George recorded, “until he can furnish his cottage in Willersey, whither he is going after all.”<sup>6</sup> They were settled in the cottage by June that year and, in November 1891, he took the cottage on a five-year lease. Algernon’s proofs for *A Village Hampden* were assessed by George as “an improvement but awkward lapses of style here and there” ; meanwhile Algernon was working hard to complete the novel whilst his wife had fallen ill, which caused his servant to fall “into hysterical mania.”<sup>7</sup>



**Smallbrook Cottage, Broadway in 2002**  
Algernon and Catherine Gissing's home from their marriage until 1890

We cannot be absolutely sure which cottage was Algernon's home but a logical interpretation of the recently released 1901 census, combined with clues in his writings, strongly suggests that they were living in Rose Cottage in Willersey (see photograph) on the night of 10 April 1901, Algernon then giving his occupation as "man of letters." Rose Cottage is in the centre of the photograph behind the large tree. These houses are on the eastern side of the broad village green, the "Long House" on the right being that of his friend, the florist and market gardener Mr. John H. Andrews.

In October 1892, George spent a fortnight with Algernon and Catherine in Willersey and recorded that, on 30th of the month, he "Climbed the hill with Alg, and, amid clear sunshine, looked down upon the plain covered with mist, Bredon, the Malvern summits, standing out precisely like islands from a sea ... beeches, elms ... At 9 in the evening, when mist was thick, Alg and I again went up the hill to hear the owls crying."<sup>8</sup> On the day that George left to travel to Birmingham to see his mother, Algernon set off for Jersey. He returned to Willersey in late February 1893 and was soon seeking another £10 from George. A month later, he told his brother that he was trying to find some supplementary source of income. George continued his short visits to Willersey for some years and, on Christmas Eve 1894, he noted that Alg was thinking of "changing [his] abode in Edinboro" but, two months later, Alg "has given up his northern projects, and is again at Willersey."<sup>9</sup> One constant in Algernon's life over many years was his fre-

quent resort to loans and gifts from his family. In September 1895 George loaned his brother “£25 to pay debts at Willersey, and get away to the North for a change,”<sup>10</sup> but a month later Algernon had the author William Henry Hudson staying with him in the village. Whether Hudson, godfather to young Alwyn, was accommodated in the small Rose Cottage is not known but there were (and still are) two inns, the New Inn and The Bell (sometimes called by Algernon The Blue Bell), in the village. So, unlike George, Hudson may have been accommodated at one of those establishments. In January 1899 George was in Wakefield, recording that “Alg was here a week or two ago, in very bad health. Nelly guaranteed to him £150 for the next six months, to enable him to rest. I contributed £50 of this.”<sup>11</sup>

From an old postcard in the possession of Mr Maurice Andrews, a descendant of Algernon’s neighbour,  
John H. Andrews of the Long House.

**Rose Cottage, Willersey (centre, behind tree) c.1901**

Algernon and his family seem to have remained in Willersey (he using it as his base or primary residence in between travels) until some time in 1904, before they moved on to Northumberland and Edinburgh for varying periods. Enid’s birth in 1888 had been the only one of the five children that their father Algernon, describing himself as “Gentleman,” himself reported to the Registrar in Broadway. The task of reporting the birth of the four

subsequent children, all born in Willersey, fell to Catherine, and the table below gives Algernon's profession as recorded in the official records while, at least he thought, his literary reputation grew.

Child's Name	Date of Birth	Place of Birth	Algernon's Declared Occupation
Enid	11 Nov. 1888	Broadway, Worcs.	Gentleman
Roland	14 May 1895	Willersey, Glos.	Novelist
Alwyn	6 April 1897	Willersey, Glos.	Literary Work
Katherine	12 March 1900	Willersey, Glos.	Novelist
Margaret	13 Sept. 1901	Willersey, Glos.	Author
1901 CENSUS	10 April 1901	n/a	Man of Letters

**Details from the Birth Certificates of Algernon Gissing's Children and the 1901 Census Return**  
 [All five children were registered in Broadway]

Although based in the Willersey cottage, Algernon continued to travel, residing with brother George in London and Exeter, or visiting Jersey or the many parts of northern England that he frequented. He sometimes took Catherine and their growing family with him as he sought the muse and settings for further novels, but it was to the Cotswolds that the couple returned for Catherine to give birth to their five children over the 13 year period. By 1904, George Gissing had died in the South of France and Algernon was well into his own career as an author. That year's edition of *Who's Who*, presumably compiled early in the previous year, gave the brothers equal length entries but, interestingly, Algernon's list excluded his first two novels.

**GISSING, Algernon**, novelist; *b.* Wakefield, 25 Nov. 1860; 3rd s. of Thomas Waller Gissing, botanist. *Educ.*: Wakefield; private school near Manchester. Was a solicitor, and followed that profession for a few years; but has for some time lived mainly in the country. *Publications*: *A Village Hampden*, 1890; *A Moorland Idyll*, 1891; *Between Two Opinions*, 1893; *At Society's Expense*, 1894; *The Sport of Stars*, 1895; *The Scholar of Bygate*, 1897; *A Secret of the North Sea*, 1899; *The Wealth of Mallorstaug*, 1901; *The Keys of the House*, 1902; *Knitters in the Sun*, 1902. *Recreations*: walking, archaeology, natural history. *Address*: Willersey, near Broadway, Worcestershire.

**GISSING, George**, novelist; *b.* Wakefield, 22 Nov. 1857. *Publications*: *The Unclassed*, 1884; *Demos*, 1886; *Isabel Clarendon*, 1886; *Thyrza*, 1887; *A Life's Morning*, 1888; *The Nether World*, 1889; *The Emancipated*, 1890; *New Grub Street*, 1891; *Born in Exile*, 1892; *Denzil Quarrier*, 1892; *The Odd Women*, 1893; *In the Year of Jubilee*, 1894; *Eve's Ransom*, 1895; *The Whirlpool*, 1897; *Human Odds and Ends*, 1897; *The Town Traveller*, 1898; *Charles Dickens, a Critical Essay*, 1898; *The Crown of Life*, 1899; *Our Friend the Charlatan*; *By the Ionian Sea*, 1901; *Introductions to the Rochester edition of Dickens*; *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, 1903.

**Consecutive Entries from *Who's Who* (1904)**

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But by 1904, when Algernon and his family appear to have finally left Willersey, the area had made a considerable impression on him and continued to provide Algernon with locations for the majority of his later novels and for two of his topographic works published in 1904 and 1924. Of his 30 books, Algernon based some 16 of them in or around the

Cotswolds. Possibly as a result of the advice and tutoring George had given him during his formative years, Algernon had a wide range of intellectual interests, and whilst living in Willersey, he was a friend of the Rev. Charles O. Bartlett, Rector of Willersey from 1891-1907, their common interest being in antiquities and the local history of the village.<sup>12</sup> The photograph of Rose Cottage, circa 1901 and from a postcard, is probably one of many taken by Rev. Bartlett, who was a keen photographer.

Before turning to the many local Cotswold associations in Algernon's novels, particularly those of the three hillside villages of Broadway, Willersey and Saintbury, it is appropriate to highlight their distinctive characteristics which recur in the works. Broadway was, and remains, a charming tourist spot attracting many overseas visitors and artists with its ancient church (St Eadburgha's) and its houses of locally quarried soft yellow limestone backing the greens as the long main street climbs the escarpment up to the old Fish Inn. The distinctive features of Willersey were, and fortunately still are, its old church of St Peter's, its two inns, the wide village greens lined by the Cotswold stone houses and cottages and the annual 'Willersey Wake' traditionally held on the village greens around St Peter's Day (29 June). Originally a religious vigil held before a Holy Day, the wake developed into an excuse for villagers and visitors to drink and enjoy the sideshows which were set up on the village greens – Algernon later described these events, and the villages of Willersey and Saintbury, in several chapters of *The Footpath-Way in Gloucestershire*. The distinctive feature of the nearby, and much smaller, village of Saintbury was, and remains, its ancient church of St Nicholas, set high on a terrace on the hillside, which for 60 years had William Smith as its parish clerk, sexton, bell-ringer and local road-mender. At the lower end of Saintbury, on the road from Broadway to Stratford-on-Avon is the ancient Saintbury Cross,<sup>13</sup> a feature which makes several appearances in the novels. Along the top of the escarpment runs the Roman Buckle Street, here marking the parish boundary between Willersey and Saintbury. On either side of this road lie the two parish quarries which were the source, not only of building stone but also, when broken up by William Smith, of road-filling stone. Smith was going about his stone breaking at the quarry in late 1887 when Algernon first encountered him. Algernon recalled in one of his books<sup>14</sup> this first meeting whilst he was walking on the hills, and several of his Cotswold novels feature parish quarries and a parish road-mender or stone-breaker – a solitary task in a rural area but one which, usefully for a narrator, allows observation of the locality and its people whilst work continues. It would



be tempting to suggest that Algernon's use of "The Top Farm" as the title of a late novel was based on the farm of that name in Willersey; however, there was a Top Farm at the top of several local villages.

<b>1 – Novels</b>			
<b>Year of Publication</b>	<b>Novels with Cotswold locations or significant Cotswold association</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Other Locations</b>
1888	Joy cometh in the morning: a country tale	Hurst & Blackett	2 vols
1889	Both of this Parish: A Story of the Byways	Hurst & Blackett	2 vols
1890	A Village Hampden	Hurst & Blackett	3 vols
1892		Hurst & Blackett	3 vols <i>A Moorland Idyl</i>
1892		Hurst & Blackett	3 vols <i>A Masquerader</i>
1893	Between Two Opinions	Hurst & Blackett	3 vols
1893		Hurst & Blackett	3 vols <i>At Society's Expense</i>
1894		Hurst & Blackett	3 vols <i>A Vagabond in Arts</i>
1896	The Sport of Stars	Hurst & Blackett	2 vols
1897		Hutchinson	<i>The Scholar of Bygate</i>
1900		Chatto & Windus	<i>A Secret of the North Sea</i>
1901		Chatto & Windus	<i>The Wealth of Mallerstang</i>
1902		Methuen	<i>The Keys of the House</i>
1903		Chatto & Windus	<i>An Angel's Portion</i>
1903	Knitters in the Sun: a Pastoral	Chatto & Windus	
1904		Arrowsmith	<i>Arrows of Fortune: a tale</i>
1905		Chatto & Windus	<i>Baliol Garth</i>
1906	The Master of Pinsmead	John Long	
1907		Chatto and Windus	<i>The Dreams of Simon Usher</i>
1908	Second Selves	John Long	
1909	The Unlit Lamp	F.V. White	
1910	Love in the Byways: Some last-night stories	F.V. White	
1910		F.V. White	<i>The Herdsman</i>
1911	Rosanne	F.V. White	
1911	One Ash: A barn-door story	F.V. White	
1912	The Top Farm	F.V. White	
1913	A Dinner of Herbs	F.V. White	
<b>2 - Non-Fiction</b>			
1904	Broadway: a village in Middle England	J.M. Dent	
1905		J.M. Dent	<i>Ludlow and Stokesay</i>
1924	The Footpath-Way in Gloucestershire	J.M. Dent	
1927	(with Ellen Gissing)	Constable & Co	<i>Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family</i>

Source: British Library Catalogue

### Algernon Gissing's Works

As can be seen from the table listing Algernon's works, he started to locate his novels in areas other than the Cotswolds from 1892 but, when he moved away from the area in around 1904, he again used Cotswold locations for the majority of his novels, these at a rate of almost one a year through to 1913. The choice of Broadway for the first of his topographical books for J. M. Dent in 1904, in their Temple Topographies series, was natural for Algernon as he knew the area so well. With illustrations by Edmund H. New, this attractive little book on Broadway was dedicated by Algernon to W. H. Hudson. We can also reasonably assume that Algernon was familiar with the Ludlow and Stokesay area in Shropshire, the location of his second work for Dent in the series in 1905. Algernon's Aunt Elizabeth, his mother's sister, lived in Ludlow and was visited by Mrs. Gissing and her daughters, as well as, presumably, by that frequent traveller Algernon. He and Catherine returned to Gloucestershire in 1914, initially going back to the Bredon area before moving a short distance to Winchcombe, again at the foot of the Cotswold escarpment and just 9 miles south of Broadway. In 1927, the year in which he and Ellen published their *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, Algernon and Catherine made their final move, to the village of Bloxham, near Banbury, Oxfordshire.

### **George Gissing's Cotswolds**

When George's mother and her daughters Ellen and Margaret visited "Aunt" Emma Shailer, they often stayed for weeks at a time. But George took much shorter breaks in the area, staying with Algernon and Catherine and making a point of visiting Emma as well as cousin Mary and her brother Tom, whilst that young man remained in the area. George obviously enjoyed taking the fresh air of Broadway and Willersey as he visited at least once a year and often more frequently, even arranging for his son Walter to stay longer with Algernon and his family. George appreciated the break from his urban or suburban writing routine that such visits involved, even walking on occasions the seven miles from Evesham to Willersey, more frequently walking the 3½ miles across the fields from Honeybourne Junction. He records in his diary that he and Algernon used to walk up the hillside to Saintbury church, from where they could view the Malvern Hills across the Vale of Evesham.<sup>15</sup> George Gissing certainly valued his stays in the Cotswolds and, writing from France in his final years, he admitted that he could no longer manage to climb the hills that he had so enjoyed in earlier years. 28 December 1901 "... I am constantly dreaming over my old

walks ; I could not now go from Willersey to Broadway and back without exhaustion and fever – a dolorous state of things.”<sup>16</sup>

### Algernon’s Cotswold Novels

It has been shown that Algernon was familiarising himself with the Cotswolds whilst writing his first novel *Joy Cometh in the Morning: A Country Tale* (1888) before he married. It displays all the marks of an early work and the rural romance has some real place names, whilst many lesser characters, including Messrs Snodbury and Bredon, Dr. Buckland and Mrs Blockley, are named after neighbouring villages. Broadway is here called Nether Faintree and the story opens with a description of the London to Worcester mail coach being involved in a fatal catastrophe at:

... the lone ‘Fish Inn,’ on the brow of Faintree Hill ... the steep and dangerous descent of Faintree Hill [to Nether Faintree which] consisted of one wide straggling street, stretching for upwards of a mile from end to end in as nearly as possible a straight line. It was in itself extremely picturesque, with its few quaint shops and thatched gabled cottages, amongst which were interspersed the few better houses which the place afforded. Immediately behind it arose the well-wooded ridge of the Cotswold Hills, and in front lay the beautiful Vale of Evesham with its gardens and its orchards stretching away for miles to the hills of Bredon and Malvern.

This description of Nether Faintree is virtually that which Algernon later used in his topographical book *Broadway* for J. M. Dent. Whilst convalescing in Nether Faintree Roland, the hero of the first novel, takes “numerous walks ... [one of ] which took him round by Cotswold Manor up the hill to the Kiftsgate stone ... [the path to] the desolate residence of Cotswold Manor ... From here [Kiftsgate Stone] he walked along the top of the ridge until he joined the high road at the ‘Fish Inn’ and so descended into the village of Nether Faintree.” The Kiftsgate Stone still exists and once marked the site of local meetings of the people of the ancient “Kiftsgate Hundred” which included Willersey and Saintbury. The “Cotswold Manor” is undoubtedly Farncombe Manor, which is set on the hill above Broadway. Other obvious local connections are that Roland rides into Avonford (i.e. Evesham) and heavy rain causes him to stop off at the “Sandys Arms, the half-way house.” The inn of that name still stands half way between Broadway and Evesham. Finally, the local church which is restored at Roland’s expense is named St. Eadburgha’s, which is the name of the “old” church in Broadway in whose graveyard lie Aunt Emma Shailer and her husband Frederick. Written as “A Lion of Cotswold,” Algernon’s next novel *Both of this Parish: a Story of the Byways* (1889) was set in the

village of Wancote, which is obviously Saintbury, with its “old stone cross of Wancote [which] lies on the cross road from Cheltenham to Stratford on Avon.” Scenes are set in the church bell tower with its four stone steps to the little door in the wall, just like St Nicholas’ in Saintbury, and the hero eventually marries the young heroine, taking a farm and becoming a pioneer in agricultural improvements.

*A Village Hampden* (1890) features one Giles Radway, “the byway roadman of the rural parish of Shipcombe [Willersey], situated in a remote part of the county of Gloucestershire,” who is found breaking up his last heap of stones in October and looking forward to spending the next six months spreading them on the roads. The hero is Gabriel Bewglass, the son of the late vicar and whose mother lives in Rose Cottage in the village of Shipcombe. Rose Cottage is “a picturesque cottage which stood at the foot of the village of Shipcombe, by the green, ... an unpretentious but inviting abode, such as are common enough in the villages of Gloucestershire. It faced the village green, being separated from the road by a garden enclosed by a low stone wall.” The nearby market town is Dormantley (Evesham) with its Abbey and pasture sloping down to the river.

It is Saintbury that is specifically named two years later in the next novel, *A Masquerader* (1892), which is not really Cotswold inspired or located but it does have some direct Cotswold references including making a special excursion to Bredon Hill in Worcestershire and, on a public seat by St James’ Park, London, a woman with no money and large debts who has her small daughter with her. When she is approached by a kindly nurse who asks her to name a wish, her answer is “‘that my child and I were buried under the elm-trees in Saintbury churchyard.’ – ‘Where is that?’ – ‘On the side of the green hills in Gloucestershire.’”<sup>17</sup> The nurse had just been given a large payment of back wages which she donates to the woman. In the 1893 novel *Between Two Opinions*, the hero “had Cotswold ancestry,” and it is set at Pool Farm in the village of Murcott – Murcot with one “t” is a village two miles from Broadway. The story has a disabled girl, one Eulalia, who “was compelled to make some contribution towards the domestic outlay, had fallen into the work of glover, that being a form of labour still open to cottagers of this district.” Glovemakers were regularly listed in the census returns, while Willersey’s central farm was Pool Farm, still next to the duck pond.

Algernon set *The Sport of Stars* (1896) on the wooded slopes that surround the remote village of Winwold (Willersey), in “a cottage ... at the extreme verge of the village, just where the road began its wooded ascent

of the hill beyond.” Workers seeking “a bit of land ... to raise our bread and ’tatoes” meet “by the gate of the Upper Marbrook” – the name of the field next to Willersey churchyard. There is, of course, an annual wake and the hero meets his future wife in the overgrown parish quarry. Later she buys from the artist “a picture of the landscape kind which the artist had named ‘The Parish Boundary.’” This picture “embraced merely a portion of an upland road, passing as by natural portal through a dense row of full-grown beech-trees” the Willersey/Saintbury quarries where she first met her husband.

It was another seven years before Algernon’s next Cotswold novel appeared. *Knitters in the Sun: a Pastoral* (1903) is set in “a remote village in the Wolds ... Windean [Willersey] is some 6 miles from Woolbourne [Evesham]” with its weekly newspaper *The Journal*. In Windean is Sawpit Green, which is still the name of the part of the village green in Willersey opposite The Bell Inn, and mention is made of the church bell-ringers drinking at The Blue Bell. In these later Cotswold novels and short stories, some of the locations recur, e.g. in “The Master of Pinsmead,” collected in the volume thus entitled (1906), the heroine drove to see her lawyer at Woolbourne, then has to meet the local aristocrat Lord Kiftsgate (see Algernon’s first novel), and the village of Elmsey (Willersey or Saintbury) has an annual wake. Similarly *Second Selves* (1908) is set in Norbury (Saintbury), which is “three miles from its wayside station ... [and en route to which] All the way he [the hero, Geoffrey Merton] could see Norbury church spire, on the green hillside.” In this novel again Elmsey has a wake, with “swing-boats” and “roundabouts, vans, and stalls.” Similar settings are used in *The Unlit Lamp* (1909). In *Love in the Byways: Some Last-Night Stories* (1910) Algernon presented twelve short stories which *Punch*, using words that now have a somewhat different meaning, stated that “Mr Algernon Gissing has a very enjoyable way of making love in the byway.” *The Times* critic welcomed these “Twelve short stories of good quality, mostly of the countryside,” in which Wancote, Woolbourne and Elmsey recur ; several of the stories, however, are not set in the Cotswolds but move to Newcastle and East Anglia. An unusual situation is encountered in *Rosanne* (1911) when the heroine, Lady Lillian St Cloe, vanishes from the local Cotswold villages (Marcote, Harbury and Winwood) to become an Anglican Sister with the name Rosanne. The village of Harbury is presumably Willersey as it has an annual wake, and mention is made of a place “where the hill road passed under a natural archway of beech leaves ... [there] began the parish of Harbury, lying on the undulating wolds.” Also pub-

lished in 1911 was *One Ash: A Barn-Door Story*, subtitled *A Cotswold Tale*, which is an unusually dark tale involving the killing of a blind horse and a peasant who hangs himself. The village of Elmsey is again featured and the lesser characters include a Master Driscoll of Hayway (still a farm near Willersey) and one “Sawpit Sarah.”

*The Top Farm* (1912) returns to rural romance set in Elmsey (Willersey) which, like the real Willersey, has a village pond. Also featured is the village of Stanbury (Saintbury), whose “few cottages were scattered amongst the trees, with the old church standing apart on the green terrace.’ Woolbourne (Evesham) is where the lawyers advise on complicated wills and one elderly character is “Old Jezz Gunn,” who is of interest, as William Smith, the Saintbury road-mender, lived for many years at Gunn’s Cottages, a pair of semi-detached cottages that still stand on the boundary of Willersey and Saintbury, a short distance from the parish quarries. In the novel, a young woman, Prisca, sets up a rural theatre club, the Barn Door Club, for theatrical performances in the country, but this late novel darkens when one of the male characters, Prisca’s friend Howard, borrows money and Prisca takes up horse riding, getting killed whilst riding with Howard, who then kills himself. Howard is found dead by the pool at Upton Wold, which is (still) a farm on the top of the Cotswold escarpment on the road to Moreton-in-Marsh.



William Smith - the long serving parish clerk and sexton of Saintbury and its road-mender  
Drawing by John Garside from page 1 of *The Footpath-Way in Gloucestershire*

Algernon’s final novel, *A Dinner of Herbs* (1913) is set where “all roads led to Shipcombe [Willersey] as well as every footpath and byway through the meadows.” The local town is again Woolbourne (Evesham) and the nar-

rator is even more forceful about the nuisance caused by the Shipcombe village wake in mid-June whose entertainments include a roundabout, blatant music, and a shooting gallery. Exploring the many footpaths in the area formed the subject of, and provided the title for, his next book, the topographical *Footpath-Way in Gloucestershire* (1924). In this now dated but interesting work, Algernon devoted two chapters to Saintbury and three to Willersey, and extended his investigation south along the Cotswold escarpment to the Winchcombe area, where he was then living. The illustrations by John Garside include two drawings of Algernon's old friend, the long-serving Saintbury sexton, parish clerk and road-mender, William Smith, showing him both breaking stones at the quarry and digging a grave in the Saintbury churchyard in which Smith and his wife were eventually laid to rest. Algernon's final book, *The Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family* (1927), was co-edited with his sister Ellen and published ten years before Algernon's death, which occurred at Bloxham, near Banbury, Oxfordshire, on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1937.

This article has not attempted any original literary criticism of Algernon's work, but has merely mentioned brother George's occasional references to Algernon's career and, more particularly, the propensity to borrow money from his family to support his literary career. It is tempting to suggest that Algernon himself recognised his own shortcomings and was perhaps just a little autobiographical when, in describing Prisca's father in *The Top Farm* (1912), he wrote, replacing literature with the stage, that the man was "Of respectable parentage, he had begun life as a full-fledged lawyer himself but strong theatrical proclivities had hindered his giving the necessary attention to his profession ... but he had failed of distinction and success."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Aunt" Emma Shailer was, in fact, the cousin of George and Algernon's mother Margaret Gissing, née Bedford. Emma's late husband Frederick (1830-1874) was a "house appraiser, estate agent and agent for Burton Ales etc." in Broadway. See *Letters*, Vol. I, p. xlv and the *Worcestershire Directory* (1873). Also living in Broadway were Emma's nephew and niece, Thomas and Mary Bedford (later Mrs. Williams). Tom and Mary were cousins of George and Algernon.

<sup>2</sup>*Diary*, 28 January 1888.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 September 1888.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 May 1889.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 April 1890.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 May 1891.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 26 November 1891.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 October 1892.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 24 December 1894 and 27 February 1895.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 11 September 1895.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 23 January 1899.

<sup>12</sup>A letter from Algernon at Aysgarth, Yorkshire, dated 21 October 1927, is filed in the Willersey Parish Minutes at the Gloucester Record Office. The Willersey Parish Council were seeking the original copy of the map accompanying the 1767 Inclosure Act for the parish but, although Algernon remembered Rev. Bartlett and he using it, the copy was left with the Vicar.

<sup>13</sup>George was consulted on whether the ancient Cross should be made the subject of an article or included in a short story or a novel. George advised using it in a novel. *Letters*, Vol. IV, p. 61, 21 April 1889.

<sup>14</sup>*The Footpath-Way in Gloucestershire*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>15</sup>It may be pure coincidence that a large tablet beside the altar in Saintbury church commemorates a former rector, one William Warburton. This need not be taken as the source for the name of Gissing's character in the eponymous novel, for Pierre Coustillas confirms that there were Warburtons in other places in which George had previously resided.

<sup>16</sup>*Letters*, Vol. VIII, p. 302, 28 December 1901.

<sup>17</sup>*A Masquerader*, Vol. 3, pp. 113-14.

<sup>18</sup>*The Top Farm*, p. 81.

## Second Announcement

### The Centenary Conference University of London, 24-25 July 2003

#### GISSING AND THE CITY

#### Call for Papers

The organisers invite papers that will explore such topics as the New Woman, and women in the city ; art in Gissing's London ; the continental context of Gissing's work ; and Victorian ideas about the East End.

There will also be opportunities in workshops to consider the specifics of Gissing's novels of slum life and of working-class life (most notably *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *Thyrza*, and *The Nether World*), of the development of "mass society," of literary life and its rewards, and of education (*New Grub Street*) and Gissing's views of women's rights (*The Odd Women* ; *In the Year of Jubilee* ; *The Whirlpool*).

**Proposals should be sent to** Professor John Spiers  
(Conference Organiser) at the following e-mail address:

[106247-2151@compuserve.com](mailto:106247-2151@compuserve.com)

**Conference Venue and Enquiries:** Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, Senate House (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor), Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU.

Tel.: 020 7862 8675

Fax: 020 7862 8672

e-mail: [ies@sas.ac.uk](mailto:ies@sas.ac.uk)

web:

[www.sas.ac.uk/ies](http://www.sas.ac.uk/ies)

(see also *Gissing Journal*, January 2002, pp. 24-25)



## A Dedicated Cyclist: Algernon Gissing's Rural Rides

BOUWE POSTMUS  
University of Amsterdam

When in 1995 Pierre Coustillas published Algernon Gissing's correspondence<sup>1</sup> over the years 1899 to 1908 with the literary agent James Pinker, one of the perhaps more realistic ambitions expressed in the letters by George Gissing's impecunious brother was his proposal to write a weekly column on country and rural affairs. He claimed to have made a "specialty" of these matters and was keen for Pinker to try and place such pieces on his behalf. Algernon was clearly hoping to bring in some regular additional income, in order to devote himself undisturbed by financial worries to developing his talents as novelist, which so far had barely served to keep the wolf from the door.

In his letter to Pinker of 3rd November 1899 Algernon gives the most detailed description of his plans for a country column:

I enclose a couple of the articles I formerly referred to & shall be glad of your opinion upon them. I feel convinced that the idea of a purely rustic commentary from week to week upon prominent general & not only rural topics has some originality & is a good & workable one. You will be able to judge better than I as to whether I have hit upon a suitable mode of expressing it & one likely to recommend itself to newspaper editors. I have not set myself to write Magazine articles but a picturesque weekly column, say for one of the Illustrated weeklies, the Daily News weekly, or even one of the papers of a large provincial centre. [...] I shall by way of background embrace a survey of the actual employments, grave & gay, of the fields & village life, keeping all this of course appropriate to the particular week of its publication [...] Although I begin round the stove in a barn I shall vary the scene from time to time, often conducting the conversation *in situ* so to speak, whilst the rustics are engaged in their daily employment – shearing, threshing, or the like. Topic & character will [...] be varied each week, gradually presenting every conceivable member of the rural community.

The enclosed are about 2000 words. Ought they to be longer? If we could sell or get more for 3000 I could as easily make it that.<sup>2</sup>

Despite Pinker's professional efforts, Algernon's hopes for supplementing the negligible income from his novels failed to materialize and by the end of February 1900 he is forced to the conclusion that he "shall have to give up all thought of the country articles." However, if he failed in getting his country notes published in the form of a weekly column, Algernon did not altogether abandon his topographical, botanical, and historical interests associated with country towns and villages. In 1904 he published *Broad-*

way,<sup>3</sup> a little volume in “The Temple Topographies” series by Dent, with attractive illustrations by Edmund H. New, followed in the next year by *Ludlow & Stokesay*<sup>4</sup> in the same series, whose Miltonic motto “Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new” neatly reflects Algernon’s love of rural scenes and settings. After these experimental ventures into the realm of rural topography the author returned to novel writing and produced eight more novels<sup>5</sup> between 1906 and 1913, when he finally realized that after twenty-five years he had written himself out as a novelist. When his last (his 25th) novel, *A Dinner of Herbs*,<sup>6</sup> came out, he was 52 years old, having dutifully churned out his book a year, yet having sadly failed to acquire enough capital to retire on. In the twenty-four years that remained to him before he died in early 1937, he came to rely increasingly for his income on the sale of manuscript material left to him by his brother, filled out by occasional contributions to the *Cornhill Magazine*<sup>7</sup> and the publication of *The Footpath-Way in Gloucestershire*.<sup>8</sup>

Dennis Butts who was attempting to put in a few kind words for him in 1968, was undoubtedly right in claiming that Algernon, “a naturalist and botanist all his life, [...] had always been a great walker of the countryside till within the last few years of his life,”<sup>9</sup> but he might have pointed out that until well into his sixties the bicycle remained Algernon’s favourite means of transportation. As a 60-year-old he cycled all the way from Willersey in Gloucestershire to Edinburgh, a distance of some 350 miles. One imagines him “speeding along against a light wind that breathed nothing but an exhilarating freshness” in search of the antiquarian, architectural, historical and natural features of the county of his choice. Most of the pieces he wrote for the *Cornhill* between 1915 and 1929 are still quite readable and some of them would certainly find favour with the cyclist, bird-watcher and environmentalist of today. An early and keen enthusiast for conserving and preserving the habitats of man and bird alike, a staunch defender of the spirit of the English landscape and its more concrete features like ancient milestones, feudal mansions, crumbling old stocks, and little, grey village schools. Never missing an opportunity to protest (sometimes a little pedantically) against people who throw old boots, pots and pans into the stream outside their door or against a graveyard turned into a wilderness of rank and weedy grass, Algernon Gissing must be given credit for being among the first to have raised his voice against the rapidly growing neglect of the countryside and its values. Sprinkled with apt quotations and occasional personal asides, these articles may be considered to be the closest thing he ever did to the kind of rural column he had proposed

to Pinker in 1899. Most of the “Rural Rides” pieces range from 6,500 to 7,500 words, thus giving the author scope for the leisured pace, the variety and telling detail characteristic of these articles.

One passage from his article on Durham and the North Riding may be worth quoting, particularly to those interested in the life and work of George Gissing, Algernon’s brother, as it confirms the very special relationship between Thomas Waller Gissing and his sons. George Gissing’s deep and abiding love of his father, who died in December 1870 when he was only thirteen years old, was first brought to the attention of the wider world of Gissing scholarship in 1989, when Pierre Coustillas published “Gissing’s Reminiscences of His Father: An Unpublished Manuscript.”<sup>10</sup> In it he documented George’s lasting affection for his gifted father, whose paternal support and wide-ranging interests (chemistry, botany, poetry, liberal politics) remained an inspiration to him for life.

The following paragraph, written in 1924 when Algernon was 63, demonstrates quite conclusively that T. W. Gissing left an equally indelible imprint on his own mind as on that of his brother George:

In threading that tract of wild moorland which hid the county of Durham from my view, I must be rid of the machine [his bike]. Far-off associations, too, urged me to the decision, not to say (if I may be pardoned so very personal a matter here) pious gratitude of the devoutest kind. Only on foot could I approach that spot to which I had been brought so long ago as a boy not ten years old, to see the blue spring gentian in virtually its only English home. I had tramped in the district since, more than once, but it was to that first guiding pilgrimage that my memory went as I gazed at the wonderful afterglow irradiating the landscape around me. All the glory and the sadness of the retrospect inevitably lay in that cloudless summer sky. For although not ten years old, it was to be my last opportunity under that magnetic guidance. Before the gentian could bloom again the guiding spirit had fled, and deep snow had covered the grave of a father whom these flash memories of childhood inevitably throw into so solemn and mysterious a light.<sup>11</sup>

The visit of Thomas Gissing and his sons to Upper Teesdale, the English home of the blue spring gentian, a region unsurpassed for the loneliness of its great fells, must be dated to the summer of 1870, when Algernon was nine and George twelve. The depth of emotion revealed in the moving and lyrical passage above illustrates Algernon’s great gratitude and lasting love for his father’s “magnetic guidance.”

Thanks to the editors of *The Collected Letters of George Gissing* it has been possible to establish for some years where the Gissing family spent its summer holidays. In July 1863 we find them at Swansea, in July 1868 on the coast at Monkshouse (Northumberland), and in January 1870 at Sea-

scale. To this list of holiday destinations we can now add Upper Teesdale in the summer of 1870.

That George and Algernon never forgot the shared experience of that memorable last summer spent with their father in glorious Teesdale, is proved by the opening paragraph of a letter George sent to Algernon from his holiday address in Wensleydale in the summer of 1897:

There is a glory of the hills beyond anything enjoyable in lowlands; one remembers it from of old [my italics, BP], & wonders why a holiday is ever taken anywhere else.<sup>12</sup>

On reading Algernon's reports of his various rural rides around England one feels very strongly that it was not just lack of funds that made him take his holidays (on the saddle of a bicycle, if he could afford them at all) among the beauty of English scenes, it was a genuine and deep-seated passion for the English landscape of his youth and the domestic happiness associated with it.

<sup>14</sup>"An Uphill, Unrewarding Struggle: The Letters of Algernon Gissing to James B. Pinker," *Gissing Journal*, vol. XXXI, no. 2, April 1995, pp. 15-34.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>3</sup>London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1904.

<sup>4</sup>London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1905.

<sup>5</sup>*The Dreams of Simon Usher* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1907); *Second Selves* (London: John Long, 1908); *The Unlit Lamp* (F.V. White & Co., 1909); *The Herdsman* (London: F.V. White & Co., 1910); *One Ash: A Barn-door Story* (London: F.V. White & Co., 1911); *Rosanne* (London: F.V. White & Co., 1911); *The Top Farm* (F.V. White & Co., 1912).

<sup>6</sup>London: F.V. White & Co., 1913.

<sup>7</sup>"New Rural Rides," vol. 39 (1915), pp. 516-23.

"New Rural Rides: Cumberland and Westmorland," vol. 52 (1922), pp. 302-12.

"Samuel Johnson's Academy," vol. 54 (1923), pp. 50-60.

"New Rural Rides: Durham and the North Riding," vol. 56 (1924), pp. 326-41.

"On Foot to Market Bosworth," vol. 57 (1924), pp. 7-16.

"Appleby School: An Extra-Illustration to Boswell," vol. 60 (1926), pp. 404-14.

"New Rural Rides: East and West Ridings," vol. 64 (1928), pp. 730-44.

"New Rural Rides: Lancashire," vol. 67 (1929), pp. 323-40.

<sup>8</sup>London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1924; with head and tail pieces by John Garside.

<sup>9</sup>"A Word for Algernon Gissing," *Gissing Newsletter*, vol. IV, no. 2, October 1968, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>*English Literature in Transition*, vol. 32, no. 4 (1989), pp. 407-17.

<sup>11</sup>"New Rural Rides: Durham and the North Riding," *Cornhill Magazine*, vol. 56 (1924), pp. 326-41.

<sup>12</sup>*Collected Letters of George Gissing*, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), vol. VI, 12 August 1897, p. 324.

## Gissing on the Air

PIERRE COUSTILLAS

The recent dramatization of *New Grub Street* on BBC Radio 4 offers an opportunity to look back on the appearance of Gissing on the air in the twentieth century. As no systematic enquiry into the subject before the 1950s has ever been made, no reliable starting-point can be given, but the earliest radio programmes about his life and works date back to the inter-war years, when Frank Swinnerton, to whom research work in the modern sense was a meaningless phrase, was supposed to be an authority on Gissing. Only hours of patient leafing through the *Radio Times* and the *Listener* in their infancy could enlighten us. References to some postwar broadcasting to which the names of William Plomer and V. S. Pritchett are attached continue to appear in bibliographies. In America Edwin Francis Edgett gave a Radio Talk on the Dutton editions of Gissing's novels as long ago as July 1929. But it was only at mid-century that the works, as distinguished from comment upon them, apparently became eligible for readings and dramatizations. About two years after the publication of *In the Year of Jubilee* by Sidgwick and Jackson, a dramatized version in two episodes entitled "Miss Lord of Camberwell" was serialized on the North of England Home Service of the BBC on 16 and 23 November 1950. In 1972 *New Grub Street* was dramatized in three episodes on Radio 4 on 13, 20 and 27 August, while three short stories, "Miss Rodney's Leisure," "Our Learned Fellow-Townsmen" and "A Poor Gentleman" were read successively from 27 June to 1 July 1994 in one or two instalments each on Radio 4. Less than a year later, from 7 February to 6 March 1995, an abridged version of *The Odd Women* was read in "Woman's Hour," once more on Radio 4, in twenty parts.

Now the turn of *New Grub Street* has come again, thirty years after the first dramatization, and the reputation of the novel has increased in the interval. It has been revived as a Classic Serial in three one-hour episodes with Harold Pinter as narrator and all the listeners we have been in touch with have sent highly appreciative comments. Details were as follows:

The serial was broadcast on Radio 4 (both FM and LW) on Sundays 8, 15 and 22 September at 3 p.m. and there were repeats on Saturday evenings at 9 p.m. The *Radio Times* for 8 September introduced *New Grub Street* as "a salutary tale, dramatised by Tony Ramsay, of the struggle between art and Mammon in the soul of the writer," predicting that "in Pinter's hands, it is bound to provide plenty of pauses for thought." In another column,

where the programme was the leading choice, the subject was briefly described as telling “the rise of a literary jack-of-all-trades set against the decline of a talented novelist in a garret of Victorian London” ; then at greater length: “‘Literature nowadays is a trade. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by mere cosmic force, your successful man of letters is your successful tradesman.’ So wrote George Gissing in his Victorian novel *New Grub Street*, the highlight of a second-rate literary career marked by relentless industry, much of which centred around his own, frequently miserable, private life. Harold Pinter, a man of genius rather than a skilful tradesman by Gissing’s definition, I believe, narrates this story about men ‘forced to make their living by writing.’ This serial gives a vivid insight into a sorry waste of artistic talent, made all the more entertaining by Gissing flashes of dark, mordant humour and lively dialogue—who’d have guessed the Reading Room of the British Museum could house such outbursts of invective?” (Jane Anderson).

The *Guardian*, in its Guide section, commented on 14 September, p. 20: “The new classic serial on radio 4 is *New Grub Street* by George Gissing, with Harold Pinter, no less, as narrator. It spins along most engagingly, is played with suitable spirit, and deserves to make more converts to this neglected writer. The book juxtaposes two men attempting to make their livelihoods in the precarious world of novel-writing and journalism. Edwin Reardon sees himself as a true artist whose talent must not be compromised, even if this means his wife and child live in poverty. Jasper Milvain is a man on the make. The world of the writer, he says, is a market like any other. Success depends on your contacts and how you exploit them. He is what we would now call a networker. Anyone who works in the media today knows scores of Jasper Milvains.

A third memorable character is a man called Biffen, so deep into poverty that he wears his overcoat at all times, his jacket having gone to the pawnshop. He is writing a realist novel which no one will ever publish, called *Mr Bailey, Grocer*.”

The unexpected four-column *TLS* review (“Grub Street renewed,” 11 October, p. 20) of the serial by Paul Bailey, who once paid homage to Gissing in an anthology, is easily the most subjective that has appeared. The few biographical details given by way of introduction are fundamentally correct: Gissing did serve a prison sentence in his late teens, he did live in America for a time and travelled fairly widely in Italy. It is also true that Gissing did not have a closed English mind by the time he came to write *New Grub Street* (“this painful and prophetic book”). Paul Bailey is

absolutely correct about his predecessor and he has nothing but praise for Tony Ramsay’s exemplary adaptation and Janet Walker’s production. “The casting of Harold Pinter as the narrator,” he writes, “was in itself inspired. Pinter’s sonorous tones—it might have been Charon speaking on occasions, matter-of-factly—set the scenes with precisely the right gravitas.” Jonathan Firth as Reardon, Amelia Fox as Amy and Ian Masters as Biffen are all given well-weighed and fully deserved praise. The reviewer even manages to have a richly earned swipe at those popular critics—*vide* the latest catalogue of Oxford World’s Classics for a salient example—who offer you pastiche Victorian novels, novels which put in “the sexy bits that Dickens and Wilkie Collins left out.” Like D. J. Taylor and many others, Paul Bailey is convinced of the present-day relevance of *New Grub Street*. We venture to predict that no one will be tempted to contradict him.

The Wakefield *Express* did not overlook the event either, publishing two short pieces just before the first instalment and just after the third. Samuel Johnson was appropriately quoted on Grub Street, a place “much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries and temporary poems, whence any mean production is called grubstreet.” The *Express*, however, would be well advised to consult Gissing’s novel once more: Reardon’s first name is certainly not Edward. See the *Express*, “Gissing book on air,” 6 September, p. 3, and *Express*, Midweek Extra, “Praise for Gissing,” 26 September, p. 39.

The actors and actresses who lent their voices were:

Narrator	Harold Pinter
Edwin Reardon	Jonathan Firth
Amy Reardon	Emilia Fox
Jasper Milvain	Jonathan Cake
Biffen	Ian Masters
Mr Yule	Kenneth Cranham
Mrs Yule	Ann Beach
Marian Yule	Tracy Ann Oberman
Dora Milvain	Helen Longworth
Quarmby	David Timson
Carter and Doctor	Martin Hyder
Amy’s mother	Jemma Churchill
Amy’s brother	Carl Prekopp
Music by Mia Soteriou.	Director, Janet Whitaker.

After the successful and timely serialization of Gissing’s masterpiece on the air, the inevitable question after this is: what next? The year 2003 will offer an ideal opportunity to commemorate much more than *New Grub Street*.

Grateful thanks are due to the dozen friends who drew our attention to this programme and sent recordings and press-cuttings.

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## Gissing and Calabria

PIERRE COUSTILLAS

### I

#### In Turn Crotona Commemorates Gissing

It was the genial Calabrian journalist Virgilio Squillace who set the ball rolling. In 1997 he published in *La Gazzetta del Sud*, the daily newspaper of which he is the representative for Crotona, two articles in which he deplored that the local authorities had not yet bethought themselves of the desirability of commemorating in some appropriate manner the English novelist who in late 1897 had for days been within an ace of death at the Albergo Concordia. Shortly afterwards, when the present writer and his wife, together with Francesco Badolato, first visited the renamed Albergo Italia (see the *Gissing Journal Supplement* for October 1999), they were astounded to see in the hotel hall on the first floor enlarged photocopies of the articles about Gissing on both right and left. The worthy idea of honouring his name, which had been dormant since the publication of *By the Ionian Sea*, was revived by that of Margherita Guidacci's translation, and Virgilio Squillace cleverly put forward the case again for the centenary of Gissing's journey. Professor Teresa Liguori, of the cultural association Italia Nostra, pleaded the same cause in the local and regional press with much energy and talent, and the Crotona Rotary Club ultimately took the matter in hand.

Preceded by a trip of the party concerned to Camigliatello Silano, where Mirella Stampa Barracco founded the Parco letterario Old Calabria recently, the unveiling of a plaque commemorating Gissing, his predecessor François Lenormant and his successor Norman Douglas as well as Dr. Riccardo Sculco, who did his best to save Gissing's life, took place on 22 June at 6 p.m. After a short explanatory address by the President of the Rotary Club, Dr. Antonino Anili, the plaque was unveiled among a small crowd of Crotonians and journalists interested in the cultural past of their city. Following which, the old albergo, including Gissing's small room, was duly visited.





There followed a well-attended colloquium at the Bastione Toledo, chaired by President Anili, during which Pierre Coustillas, translated by Teresa Liguori, spoke of Lenormant, Gissing and later famous visitors. He was followed by Giuseppe Merlino of the University of Naples, who analyzed Norman Douglas's impressions and emotions, by Francesco Badolato, who threw new light on Gissing's doctor Riccardo Sculco, and by the archæologist Domenico Marino, whose great-grandfather Giulio so conspicuously earned Gissing's esteem. It was left to Virgilio Squillace to conclude this busy evening with recollections, treasured by the present owners of the Albergo, of a visit paid years ago by some mysterious member of the Gissing family.

The sumptuous dinner offered by the Rotary Club was an opportunity to plan a private meeting with Dr. Marino and his wife Tatiana the next day. A former student of the University of Rome "La Sapienza," he is a very active young researcher with an impressive list of learned publications in specialist journals. He has a clear vision of his family's past, as far back as the decades that his ancestor Giulio evoked in his long conversation with Gissing. Domenico Marino is the happy owner of family memorabilia which include a photograph of his own grandfather (another Domenico, a son of the genial gardener) as a naval officer, and a number of books which once belonged to his great-grandfather and testify to the latter's culture and cultural aspirations—information which has emerged since the publication in this journal of a biographical article about him. Among the books are a leatherbound edition of *Gli Amori degli angeli*, a translation of Thomas Moore's *Loves of the Angels* (1823), published in Milan in 1886, a little known novel by Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Giovanni Episcopo* (Naples, 1892), which the author dedicated to Matilde Serao, a translation of a volume by Darwin about the expression of feelings in man and animals (Turin, UTET, 1882), and a *Filosofia elementare*, 586 pages long (Florence, 1884), which had once belonged to Luigi Berlingieri, the son of his one-time employer Baron Luigi Berlingieri, whom Giulio accompanied to Naples when he became a student of jurisprudence at the University there. The book was probably given him by the younger Berlingieri's family in memory of him (he predeceased his father). It would seem that Giulio died of a heart disease and that, in those days when the temporal power of the successive popes was still a vivid recollection, he was anticlerical—confirmation of which appears in his admiration for the unconventional Toscan poet and patriot Giuseppe Giusti (1809-1850), a volume of whose works he also owned (*Poesie*, Milano, 1886). These bookish details are undoubtedly more

than Gissing was told or could surmise, but it is gratifying to reconstruct even minor aspects of a personality with which only a chance meeting in a cemetery by the Ionian Sea enabled Gissing to sympathise. In the person of Giulio Marino and the present attempt to save him from total oblivion a hundred years after his death, he would probably have seen what he once called the revenge of time. As one thinks of this unassuming, intelligent man whom Norman Douglas after Gissing made it a point to mention feelingly in *Old Calabria*, one wonders whether his name, like that of Sculco, should not have been carved on the plaque at the entrance of the former Albergo Concordia.

[Anon., “Cronaca di Crotona: Una targa all’Italia’ per Gissing, Douglas e Lenormant. In ricordo di tre amici illustre,” *Gazzetta del Sud*, 23 June 2002, p. 30, with photo ; Giovanni Guarascio, “Cronaca di Crotona: Un convegno del Rotary Club sul soggiorno crotonese di François Lenormant, George Gissing e Norman Douglas,” *Gazzetta del Sud*, 25 June, p. 27, with photo ; Antonella Cosentino, “Quando Gissing si ammalò di malaria,” *Il Crotonese*, 25-27 June, p. 10, with a photograph of the new plaque, of the President of the Rotary Club and of the panel of speakers ; Teresa Liguori, “Un convegno e una targa commemorativa per l’albergo crotonese che ha ospitato Lenormant, Gissing e Norman Douglas,” *Calabria* (the review of the Regional Council), August 2002, pp. 64-65, with illustrations. In the same number, p. 10, Teresa Liguori explains the hostile response of Italia Nostra to the projected Bridge over the Straits of Messina.]

## II

### Gissing also remembered in Reggio

Reggio was the last Calabrian town that Gissing visited in 1897, and the last lines of *By the Ionian Sea*, which express his moving farewell to the city and to the ancient world, with which his mind had been so fraught for weeks since his landing at Paola, are the most frequently quoted of the book: “As I looked my last towards the Ionian Sea, I wished it were mine to wander endlessly amid the silence of the ancient world, to-day and all its sounds forgotten.”

The town that Gissing saw is no longer extant ; it was reduced to a heap of ruins by the earthquake which occurred on 28 December 1908. The 1912 edition of Baedeker’s *Guidebook* gives valuable details on the disaster: “The destructive shock took place at 5.20 a.m., and lasted for 32 seconds. The disturbance of the ocean-bed was followed by a tidal wave, which added to the disaster in the lower-lying portions of the coast ; it reached the height of 6-10 ft at Messina and 11½ at Reggio... The damage to life and

property was greatest at Messina and Reggio, both of which were simply wiped out... About 96,000 lives were lost" (p. 394). Baedeker adds in another place: "Not a building escaped without injury and those that remained standing had to be pulled down" (p. 280). In spite of this, not all that Gissing mentions in his ultimate chapter was lost for ever. It has been known since the 1970s that the museum visitors' book in which he was so delighted to read Lenormant's name and in which he entered his own escaped destruction. An enquiry conducted by this writer in 1998 revealed that the two paintings described by Gissing, the work of a local artist, who turned out to be Giuseppe Benassai, were still extant and undamaged.

On 25 June in that same city of Reggio di Calabria, the editor of the *Journal* had an opportunity to give a lecture on Gissing in Italy with special stress on his Calabrian journey. The lecture, entitled "La Terra sel sole," took place at the invitation and in the rooms of the Circolo Rhegium Julii, one of the leading members of which is Dr. Vincenzo Misiani, whose assistance in identifying the young soldier Emilio Cuzzocrea, a victim of Bourbon tyranny, has been previously acknowledged. The lecturer's words were translated by Dr. Francesco Badolato, who was succeeded at question time by Professor Luisa Catanoso, a former president of the Anglo-Italian Club. The literary activities of the members of the circle which hosted the lecture are attested by a number of books and collections of verse. Wide-ranging activities are covered by the recent volumes in front of us: a collection of poems in dialect composed a hundred years ago, an enquiry into cultural life in Reggio in the early twentieth century, letters and extracts from the diary of Vincenzo Spinoso, poet and short-story writer, etc.

This pleasant cultural event was announced in the Reggio edition of the *Gazzetta del Sud* for 25 June, with a portrait of Gissing ("Rhegium Julii," p. 24), and belatedly reported on 10 September ("Incontro con il prof. Coustillas," p. 24). As a piece of journalism, it belongs with an interview by Tommaso Migliaccio entitled "Intervista al maggior studioso mondiale dello scrittore inglese che il secolo scorso visitò la città: Catanzaro è ospitale come la descrisse Gissing," accompanied by a photograph of the former Albergo Centrale, the home of the world-famous, yet persistently elusive Coriolano Papparazzo (*Gazzetta del Sud*, 25 August, p. 21). Much as it belongs with an interview given at Bovalino Marina to Gianni Carteri for *Il nostro tempo*: "Gissing, viaggiatore inglese: Lo studioso Coustillas offre particolari inediti delle tre visite che il narratore di Wakefield fece in Italia" (6 October, p. 9).

### III

#### *Catanzaro Ieri e Oggi*

This is an engaging book and an unexpected one. We had become used to volumes on the extraordinary town of Catanzaro looking like coffee-table books or being lengthy histories, crammed with picturesque details about local personalities, past and present. *Catanzaro Ieri e Oggi* (Catanzaro Yesterday and Today) by Aurelio Fulciniti, subtitled *Attualità dei ricordi ed osservatori tra '800 e '900* (Editore: Teleselling, via Largo Prigione, 7 – 88100 Catanzaro) is nothing of the kind. You should imagine a 128-page book in pale yellow card covers with plenty of attractive illustrations that give you the feel of the late nineteenth century. The paper used by the printers is also pale yellow, only a paler shade than the covers, and the uncommon type looks very arty. As publication took place in late 2001 the price on the back cover is given in lire (20,000), a sum easily convertible into pounds, dollars or euros. The author is a young man of twenty-eight who reveals his age in the book, and his foreword, we venture to say after meeting him and his father in Catanzaro Lido and Catanzaro last June, is a fair reflection of his personality: “Many of you,” he begins, “before reading this small book, will not fail to ask themselves what message it purposes to offer.” Despite all the criticisms of local life it contains, the author candidly describes his book as essentially “*una dichiarazione d’amore verso la città di Catanzaro*” (a declaration of love for the town of Catanzaro). He is aware of being something of a kill-joy with clear eyes, but if he kills at all, he does so with kindness. At the *municipio*, no one is likely to be really offended by any of his acidulous remarks ; indeed some of his fellow-townsmen with an office in the town-hall may not ungraciously admit that a number of these remarks (*vide* the scaffolding which on two sides of the Farmacia Leone has very efficiently contributed in the last four years to the uglification of the Corso Mazzini) are not altogether unfounded. But foreign visitors to whom the historical associations of the town mean so much cannot possibly side with either party. Aurelio Fulciniti is a gentleman. He is not bent on offending any of his fellow-citizens, only to give the authorities a rousing shake when they nod a little too conspicuously.

The book is divided into seven chapters which cover the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and consists in a series of discussions of as many travellers who wrote down, in books, volumes of correspondence or diaries, their impressions of Catanzaro. Few readers will have come across the

name of the man who heads the list in the table of contents, Duret de Tavel, a French officer of Napoleonic times who unsparingly noted in his diary that Calabria was “a region isolated from the rest of Europe by ignorance and barbaric customs,” yet conceded that Catanzaro was “one of the most gracious towns in Calabria and undoubtedly the most pleasant one in which to live.” Tavel’s good opinion of Catanzaro women is not shared by Fulciniti. Whereas the Frenchman of two hundred years ago pronounced these women “the most attractive and the most congenial of the two provinces,” the author complains that they are “*difficilissim[i] da conquistare*,” and apt to show “*un rigorismo formale quasi cattolico*.”

Chapter II, which is devoted to Luigi Settembrini (1813-1877), the Neapolitan revolutionist, is of special interest on account of Gissing’s very positive response to the author of *Ricordanze* (Reminiscences), whom he read after Ernest Bovet lent him a copy of the book in 1903. Settembrini was at one time professor of eloquence in Catanzaro, and Aurelio Fulciniti quotes him about life in his native town in the 1830s, when the disastrous earthquake of 1783 was still vivid in the minds of survivors. “Ah!” sighed a man in Settembrini’s presence in 1832, “were it not for earthquakes and brigands, Calabria would be the best country in the world.”

Of François Lenormant, with whom chapter III is concerned, Fulciniti pleasantly echoes the views on local hospitality that had caught Gissing’s eye when reading *La Grande-Grèce*. The dates of the French historian and archæologist’s stays in the Mezzogiorno, 1866, 1879 and 1882, make a comparison with Gissing’s testimony almost *de rigueur*, as Gissing himself realised. Unsurprisingly, Lenormant is treated with great kindness and respect by his latest commentator, who concurs with Giuseppe Isnardi, the subject of chapter VII, when he calls *La Grande-Grèce* the indispensable book about Calabrian culture, the basic work for the revelation of Calabria to itself and to the foreigner, a judgment that the passing of time has not rendered invalid, though the lack of an English translation is more than ever to be deplored now that cultured readers all over the world do not invariably read French. “His chief merit,” writes Fulciniti, who has nothing to say about Lenormant’s achievement as an archæologist and about *l’altro ieri* in general, “consists in having dispelled many myths and common-places about the Mezzogiorno.” Generosity being sometimes contagious the young writer, acknowledging Lenormant’s occasional poetic inspiration, concludes: “I bow to him as the Frenchman who, more than any other has successfully sounded the souls of the *catanzaresi*, so ignored they are and at times so busy ignoring themselves.”

Caterina Pigorini-Beri is the only woman whose work Aurelio Fulciniti discusses in his book, and it is to be feared that she has remained virtually unknown outside her own country. Her book, *In Calabria*, was first published in 1892 and the personal impressions of the deep South she records anticipate Gissing's by fourteen years. The wife of an archæologist, Luigi Pigorini, she could hardly have been less articulate about her husband's and, for that matter, Gissing's concerns: she has much to say about social life at Catanzaro Lido, amusements on the beach, the local use of dialect (which Fulciniti values, and which is becoming unpopular), and after she moved from the lido to the town, about the latter's notable characteristics. She quotes an old proverb which Dr. Sculco probably had in mind when he tried to dissuade Gissing from leaving for Catanzaro: "*Il trovare un amico è così raro come un giorno senza vento a Catanzaro*" (Making a friend is as rare an event as a windless day in Catanzaro). Little though we know Caterina Pigorini-Beri, we can assert that, like her successsor in the book, she was no friend of the Bourbons. In present-day Italian, *borbonico* is not a flattering epithet.

The chapter on Gissing—the fifth and longest, and one of the most stimulating—expresses unqualified admiration for him, interspersed with barbed words aimed at the local authorities. The unabbreviated translation of it given herebelow by the editor, who acknowledges the assistance of Drs. Michael Cronin and Francesco Badolato for some difficult points, speaks for itself. The last paragraph, with its unexpected, paroxysmic use of *tu* is unparalleled in the book ; it is also a posthumous homage to a writer who, once more in his native land, looked back upon Catanzaro nostalgically. The climax begs for quotations in anthologies.

As so often in books on Calabria, Gissing's name, magnet-like, attracts that of Norman Douglas, who wrote so feelingly about *By the Ionian Sea* in one of the last chapters of *Old Calabria*. Aurelio Fulciniti, in chapter VI, shuns this association, perhaps because Crotona, not Catanzaro, is the main link between the two travellers. He prefers to focus his attention on some material aspects of Douglas's approach to Catanzaro, for instance and not unreasonably, on the history of the Museo Provinciale, whose curator was for years a woman of notorious professional incompetence. The problem that loomed so large behind her appointment was that of unemployment. Better an incompetent curator than no curator at all, the authorities responsible for her appointment thought. It would be difficult not to approve of Aurelio Fulciniti's ironical denunciation of some old abuses that remind us,

*mutatis mutandis*, of scandals like those that roused Dickens's ire in the previous century.

A chapter on Giuseppe Isnardi concludes the book. Born in 1886, this Northerner had, we are told, many points in common with Settembrini, and his most signal achievement lies in his analysis of southern daily life, which had and still has little enough that invites comparison with that in the largest towns of northern Italy. The title of Isnardi's book, *Frontiera calabrese*, is highly suggestive ; it could have been used many times before its first publication and would not be unsuitable to-day even though, for numberless reasons, Calabria and Catanzaro have changed considerably in the last hundred years. For some unspecified reason which could well be the fear of earthquakes and the feeling of personal insignificance they produce, Isnardi thought that Catanzaro is a town in which you learn not to take yourself too seriously—an attitude which is assuredly that of the author in this unpretentious yet purposeful book. Like so many other travellers who stayed in Catanzaro and admired its extraordinary setting, he remembered it as a place where hospitality is sacred and where foreigners are welcomed with great kindness, quietly and without excessive zeal.

The volume is prefaced by the editor of *Il Giornale di Calabria*, Giuseppe Soluri, who writes eloquently of the author and the aims of his book. He has evidently read *By the Ionian Sea*, Gissing being the only foreign traveller he mentions. One of the pleasant aspects of this leisurely roll call of judgments passed on Catanzaro by varied personalities is its half-tone illustrations of the main sites of the city as it was at the turn of the nineteenth century. The plaque commemorating Gissing has not been overlooked.

The last words of the author's foreword, "*Perdonatemi...se potete*" (Forgive me if you can) are echoed above the last illustration, a panoramic view of Catanzaro as Gissing saw it: "*Grazie di avermi perdonato*" (Thank you for having forgiven me). For anyone who wishes to see what the town and its attractions were like when *By the Ionian Sea* was written and published, this is a book to buy.

[“La città studiata ‘ieri e oggi,’” *Il Quotidiano*, 24 Nov. 2001 ; Maria Rita Galati, “Dichiarazione d’amore alla città,” *Il Domani*, 27 Nov. ; “Il Comune premia poeti e pittori,” *Il Domani*, 12 Dec. ; e.Vi., “Il premio ‘Città di Catanzaro’ arriva al quinto anno,” *Il Quotidiano*, 22 Dec. ; “Assegnato il Premio Catanzaro,” *Il Giornale di Calabria*, 23 Dec. ; l. s., “Consegnati i premi Città di Catanzaro,” *Gazzetta del Sud*, 27 Dec. ; Tommaso Migliaccio, “Confronto critico fra la città di oggi e quella di ieri,” *Gazzetta del Sud*, 26 June 2002; Vito Samà, “Una dichiarazione d’amore per la città” (with illustration), *Gazzetta del Sud*, 20 August.]



George Gissing was a very productive novelist who, breaking away from the fixed patterns of Victorian conventions, reflected in his books his own tormented life against a background of contemporary problems.

*By the Ionian Sea* was his only travel book. This book expresses Gissing's admiration for that classical culture which accompanied him throughout his life, urging him to achieve his old dream of visiting at long last the shores of Magna Graecia.

Only once, owing to his precarious health conditions and to his stubborn determination, did he manage to visit Catanzaro, gratifying us with the most vivid and enthusiastic pages of his book.

He was coming from Crotone, the town of Magna Graecia by the Ionian Sea. Struck down by fever and dyspepsia, Gissing spent a great part of his stay in Crotone at the Albergo Concordia. Being in the town in the days of depression and malaria he felt a need for a sudden change of air and he impatiently looked forward to his leaving for Catanzaro, a mountain town with a cooler and healthier climate.

Dr. Riccardo Sculco, who had cured him, continuously tried to dissuade him from going to Catanzaro. Apart from anything else, Gissing did not even manage to see the temple of Hera Lacinia, the only reason for his stay in Crotone.

"Far better wait at Cotrone for a week longer and then go to Reggio, crossing to Sicily to complete your cure." Dr. Sculco's arguments when insistently trying to dissuade him were always the same and rather vague: the very hard climate and the terrible wind, so bad for the lung disease from which Gissing was suffering.

The reason for Dr. Sculco's suspicion with regard to Catanzaro was in fact quite different, and it is characteristic of the Crotonian of yesterday as of the Calabrian of to-day: the blind rivalry between the towns of the region, the war among the poor which has slowed down our development.

What seems strange, however, is that the town of Catanzaro should be the butt of so much rancour.

Many people to-day ascribe this hostile attitude to the important administrative position of Catanzaro as chief town of the Region ; others to a rivalry connected with the fans of the football teams of Calabria ; others again to reasons resulting from the ignorance of Calabrians bent on forgetting the misfortunes of their own land by blaming a community chosen as sacrificial lamb.

If such is the case, Catanzaro is invested with a role of which the inhabitants of Crotone, Cosenza and Reggio would have little enough reason to be proud.

The Revolt of Reggio in 1970, over seventy years after Gissing's visit, represents the climax of this rivalry which the English writer attributed to the well-founded assumption that "poor fever-stricken Cotrone regarded with a sort of jealousy the breezy health of Catanzaro."

After a slow, quiet journey by train and stage-coach, Gissing arrived in town, finding "respectable" accommodation at a hotel that was to play a fundamental part

in the history of our town, changing its proprietor into an icon of the world of international *gossip*. The proprietor of this hotel, the Albergo Centrale, situated in a building still standing in the main street (in front of the historic Palazzo Fazzari) was named Coriolano Paparazzo. On 23 October 1999, nearly two years ago, before a small group of fellow citizens, the Mayor had a marble plaque unveiled near the main door of the former Albergo Centrale, which read more or less like this:

In questo palazzo, già Albergo Centrale, nel 1897 soggiornò il romanziere inglese George R. Gissing (1857-1903), ospite del proprietario, Coriolano Paparazzo. Il cognome di quell'albergatore ricordato in un capitolo di "By the Ionian Sea," sarebbe diventato celebre molti anni dopo, grazie a Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano e al Film "La dolce vita."

Catanzaro 23 Ottobre 1999

L'Amministrazione Comunale

[In this building, formerly the Albergo Centrale, stayed in 1897 the English novelist George R. Gissing (1857-1903), guest of the proprietor, Coriolano Paparazzo. The surname of this hotel keeper, mentioned in a chapter of *By the Ionian Sea*, was to become famous many years later, thanks to Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano and the film "La dolce vita." Catanzaro, 23 October 1999. The local authorities.]

Anybody who like me knows the world of Fellini or has seen the film "La dolce vita" will remember at once that *paparazzo* was the nickname of the photographer who accompanied the smart worldly journalist Marcello Mastroiani in his nightly rambles in the Roman social scene of the Via Veneto. True, of this film one more easily remembers the Juno-like Anita Ekberg bathing in the Fountain of Trevi, but the name *paparazzo* has become universally synonymous with a particular type of press photographer.

This category of photographers, much liked and well-paid by sensational newspapers, but hated by famous people, who often turn against them brutally, owes its international definition to the town of Catanzaro.

Of this I, too, was convinced, except that one day I heard on television some news that set me thinking.

In an old interview Fellini attributed the word *paparazzo* to the surname of an old Neapolitan schoolfellow of his.

Doubt overcame me: "Had the *comune* made a mistake? Of what avail or otherwise could it be for the master of Rimini to conceal the precise origin of the word?"

This doubt still haunts me to-day despite the assurances given by the critic and journalist Mario Foglietti and many friends and actors who worked with Fellini. At all events my thanks to Gissing for having spoken of Signor Paparazzo's hotel in more than positive terms. They prove that the town at least then boasted accommodation facilities suitable for entertaining foreigners worthily.

Nowadays as well there exist logically several hotels in Catanzaro, but few of them offer hospitality of the kind the Albergo Centrale once did.

A printed notice placed in the room reminded guests of the regret of the proprietor, who “had heard with the greatest displeasure that certain travellers who slept under his roof were in the habit of taking their meals at other places of entertainment.”

Signor Paparazzo took offence at this practice and he “had the honour of begging his respectable clients to bestow their kind favours on the restaurant of the house.” “For my own part,” Gissing declared, “I was not tempted to such a breach of decorum ; the fare provided by Signor Paparazzo suited me well enough, and the wine of the country was so good that it would have covered many defects of cookery.”

Who knows if there still exist to-day inn-keepers, restaurateurs or other tradespeople worthy of such sympathy and kindness. True, there must be such people, but much more common is the existence of so many of their colleagues who treat the client with insolence and impatience, the whole affair as if it did not behove them to do honour to customers, and not vice versa. Besides, and this will seem strange, but I have known so many people who prefer to patronize an establishment where they see themselves badly treated, and fleeced to boot, and who snub establishments where stylishness and moderate prices are the rule.

A strange individual your Catanzaro consumer. And to think that people always pretend that they will not return to an establishment with which they were dissatisfied on their first visit.

Perhaps my fellow-townsmen are a little sadistic and have a great love of suffering. Indeed there is no doubt about this, but I, for one, prefer a tradesman (this is just an example) who is courteous to one who is ignorant of the most elementary rules of good education, as sometimes happens.

Gissing, as he later walked about the town, first noticed that the castle built by Robert Guiscard had been deliberately pulled down, completely removed for the sake of widening a road, now called Via Carlo V.

“Catanzaro is the one progressive town of Calabria, and has learnt too thoroughly the spirit of the time to suffer a blocking of its highway by middle-age obstructions.”

Although it may be difficult for a town to achieve progress by hastily doing away with its own past, we must unfortunately make a remark which totally contradicts that of Gissing. Catanzaro, dear friends, nowadays seems to be or really is the most conservative of towns, not just of Calabria, but in all Italy. Suffice it to think at what pace novelties reach the town: at least, three, seven or ten years after they reach Rome or even Cosenza. Let me give you a short example.

Where can we still see, except in some remote villages, a municipal library that registers internal and external loans on paper and not with a computer, using index cards instead of the more modern magnetic cards?

This might be only a small handicap to-day in the age of computers and electronic communications, but it betokens the decidedly backward environment of the town, which only in private houses succeeds in redeeming itself a little. It is indeed a fact that many families show a degree of modernity superior to that of the town in which they live.

Gissing, once up in Catanzaro, wished to meet new people, in particular somebody who could speak his own language and act as a guide. He found such a person when he met Signor Pasquale Cricelli, English vice-consul in Catanzaro, who took him to see many interesting things, and “brought him into touch with the every-day life of Catanzaro.”

He led him into a pharmacy of some note in the town and still extant. “Imagine a spacious shop,” Gissing reports, “well proportioned, perfectly contrived, and throughout fitted with woodwork copied from the best examples of old Italian carving. Seeking pill or potion, one finds oneself in a museum of art, where it would be easy to spend an hour in studying the counter, the shelves, the ceiling.”

For those who might not yet have understood what pharmacy is concerned, let me recall “the sign that hung over the entrance ; a sort of griffin in wrought iron, this, too, copied from an old masterpiece, and reminding one of the fine ironwork which adorns the streets of Siena.”

In those days the Farmacia Leone (I hope you have already guessed) was first run by two brothers. To-day the staff has increased, and the management has passed into the hands of another family.

Inside the premises remain quite attractive, but the ceiling of the shop and the entrance are in very bad repair and need restoration. At all events the sign over the entrance has not changed in the least and it still signals the oldest and most suggestive shop of the city.

The only regret concerns the state of the building in which it is located, the historic Palazzo Fazzari.

Built about 1870 by the Florentine architect Federico Andreotti in the prevailing style of his home town, it is to-day caged in a close-fitting scaffolding within which no restoration work has ever begun. The responsibility is said to lie with the private owners of the building, but meanwhile the structure is crumbling and the sloping wooden roof is about to collapse.

Such has been the situation for two years, and who knows when a solution will be found. This is one of the thousand open questions that arise in Catanzaro, a town sadly famous for its unsolved problems.

After visiting the most characteristic sites of the town, like the Villa Margherita and the small Museo Provinciale, “noticeable mostly for a collection of ancient coins,” Gissing found refuge at the Albergo Centrale.

“In the matter of public amusements,” Gissing said, “Catanzaro is not progressive.” Only once did he see the announcement of a theatrical performance in two parts. The first was entitled: “The Death of Agolante and the Madness of

Count Orlando” ; the second: “A Delightful Comedy, the Devil’s Castle with Pulcinella as the Timorous Soldier.”

In a town which even to-day remains tedious because of its lack of any kind of pastime, the theatre, whether dialectal or national, is the favourite spectacle of the public ; any theatrical event is attended in most cases by a numerous audience, an obvious improvement on Gissing’s time, when in the old Teatro Comunale he imagined he would find only thirty spectators where three hundred could be held.

Only, paradoxically, to meet the present-day appetite for the theatre, play-houses, where this appetite could be satisfied, are lacking.

The old Teatro Comunale that was in existence in Gissing’s time was formally opened in 1830 and demolished in 1938. In a hundred years’ life, performances of opera alternated with drama, before large audiences. Marinetti also came to this theatre for two futuristic evening performances which remained memorable.

In 1923 was founded the Teatro Masciari, and this still struggles on. After years of depressing oblivion, it remains the only theatre in the town that hosts the theatrical season.

The flight of steps of the edifice, situated just in front of the town hall, is nevertheless in full decay and its framework is so precarious as to cause many people to fear that it may collapse altogether.

Down these steps in the old days, at the end of performances, the worthy bourgeois of Catanzaro came out.

To-day I wonder whether the mayor, when looking out of the windows of his office, which is situated above the main door of the town hall and consequently just in front of the steps, does not feel a moment of shame on seeing this small monument in such a shaky condition.

Let us hope he will have a good word to say. Otherwise the city’s visiting card will be a sad one.

After Masciari came the old Teatro Politeama, that is, to make things clear, the one with the famous little “soughing” curtains and the roof which could be opened and, in summer, allowed excellent ventilation, letting out the clouds of cigarette smoke (it was not yet forbidden to smoke in cinemas).

I went to the cinema for the first time when I was nine. I went with my family, and it was to the Politeama. I do not remember what film I saw, but my heart bled in the summer of 1992 when bulldozers pulled down the theatre, which had been closed for years, at the same time as the covered market, in order to build on the same site a new building which to this day has not been inaugurated, the new Teatro Politeama.

Planned by Paolo Portoghesi, one of the greatest living Italian architects, the sight of it suggests the idea of a magnificent triumph of glass and copper.

There has been much controversy during nine years of work and interruptions of the same at the theatre. Many people find it unsuitable for an exiguous, irregularly shaped historic centre like the present one, others pronounce the number of

seats (about a thousand) to be too great, others again are content just to regret the old Politeama.

To these criticisms one can very well answer that if the theatre were unsuitable, Portoghesi would not have liked it to be in that district. He could not have supervised, directly and punctually, the steady progress of the work.

Besides, the number of seats strikes me as right. If a theatre wants to offer the splendours of the old Teatro Comunale, which on account of its beauty and its resemblance to the Teatro San Carlo of Naples was known as the Teatro San Carlino, it must have sound ambitions. Only thus will it be able to become, as the town intends, one of the major theatres of the South, if not of Italy. And then nostalgia will possibly be appeased when the theatre has become a term of reference for the cultural renaissance of Catanzaro, so eagerly desired but, so far, so vainly sought.

The last, extraordinary remark on the disposition of the local inhabitants, Gissing made it for us during an evening he spent in the main café of Catanzaro (perhaps the Imperiale ?), where the English writer had an opportunity to listen, among young and old people, to a conversation the tone of which “was incomparably better than that which would rule in a cluster of English provincials met to enjoy their evening leisure.”

He was especially struck by a young fellow “in no way distinguished from his companions,” who “fell to talking about a leading townsman,” praising him for “his *ingegno simpatico*” and for his “*bella intelligenza*.”

All this with exclamations of approval from those who listened. “These people,” Gissing says, “have an innate respect for things of the mind, which is wholly lacking to a typical Englishman.” In England, Gissing concludes, “from many a bar-parlour I have gone away heavy with tedium and disgust ; the café at Catanzaro seemed, in comparison, a place of assembly for wits and philosophers.”

Now I do not know how many people in Catanzaro have read *By the Ionian Sea* at least once. Only a few, I think, if I am to judge by what I see and hear every day.

If many had read this book, they would sincerely feel flattered on seeing an Englishman deem their minds superior to those of his contemporaries, subjects, moreover, of a queen. The town of Catanzaro, which has neither king nor queen, but its share of nobility inherited from its all-too-often neglected history, is mortified by the behaviour of some of its inhabitants. In fact, local people are losing every day that self-esteem noticed a hundred years ago by an English writer who, after leaving the town, will doubtless have thought, some day or other during the six years he still had to live, of returning there.

We therefore thank him for the wonderful words with which he gratified Catanzaro and for having introduced the town to so many Englishmen and to the thousands of intellectuals in the world whose attention has been piqued by his pages “in which recollections alternate with perceptive and most vivid remarks about the ambience and customs of the town.”

Thank you above all, magnificent Englishman, for having put in evidence the hospitality appreciated by Lenormant and others before you, besides that philosophy of life which local citizens, instead of showing it off, have often concealed like a thing that does not concern them. We love you for it. Whoever has read your book is sure never to forget these marvellous pages. This I can guarantee.

#### IV

#### Colloquium into Book

The Italian title of the book concerned is explicit: *George Gissing a Catanzaro: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Catanzaro 23 ottobre 1999*, a cura di Mauro F. Minervino. The volume was published by the Biblioteca Comunale of Catanzaro last June and its cover is curiously reminiscent of that of the 1996 edition of *By the Ionian Sea* issued by Marlboro/Northwestern. Materially it is and will doubtless remain a curiosity even after its contents have been methodically investigated from p. 5, which gives (in a certain order) the programme of the colloquium as it was lived by the participants in the successive stages of the cultural ceremony, to p. 151, where the reader will find an *indice* (table of contents), which repeats the items of the programme in a different order. The most striking feature of the book, which is printed on glazed paper, is its wealth of illustrations. They will help readers to imagine the festive atmosphere of the *convegno*, which was followed by a visit to a local exhibition of paintings of the seventeenth-century Calabrian artist Mattia Preti. Besides the photos of the mayor and vice mayor of Catanzaro, of the three foreign speakers on Gissing and Calabria, David Grylls, Bouwe Postmus and Pierre Coustillas, the illustrations include views of the *sala consiliare* with such speakers as the editor of the volume, of Dr. Renato Santoro, who read Dr. Badolato's paper, of the unveiling of the plaque and of the plaque itself, as well as views of Catanzaro c. 1900. Altogether a rich pictorial record, quite uncommon in volumes of scholarly interest.

The abundance of the texts printed, whether noted or not in the table of contents, suggests that Dr. Minervino has tried to publish two books between only two covers. His decision to reprint a substantial Italian essay of his with an English title, "Mr. Paparazzo, I presume..." was of course dictated by circumstances, and these should have been taken advantage of by the author to correct some misprints in English names as well as a few factual errors. Anyone who still has doubt about the neologism *paparazzi* should read this long essay which, despite its length (pp. 63-89), fails to

mention a few vital links in the concatenation of events which came to a fantastic end with the death of Princess Diana in the summer of 1997. The bibliography will doubtless be useful to Italian readers if they can be convinced that Gissing wrote other books than *By the Ionian Sea*, but it contains a number of misprints which make one wonder whether they are the printers' or the editor's faults. Save for Italian books and articles, the editor's quest for information seems to have come to a halt about ten or fifteen years ago. The bibliography appears to have been lifted from an Italian book, the updating being a task left to readers. Fortunately the last two sections, "Bibliografia Critica" and "Gissing in Italia" are typographically more reliable, but even the last one is not quite up to date, *Il sale della terra*, translated by Emanuela Ettore, being left out. The last surprise comes in the form of a reprint of Peter Morton's earliest report about "Gissing on the Web."

Altogether an original, intriguing volume, a richly documented account of an event of which no equivalent is extant, but a book which deserved to be edited by more experienced hands.

## V

### The Immediate Future

The above survey of recent Gissing news from Italy must end with an invitation to look forward.

The spring of 2003 will see the publication of a new edition of *By the Ionian Sea* edited by Pierre Coustillas (Oxford: Signal Books). For this edition the text has been collated with the original manuscript: a few significant corrections have been made and two hitherto overlooked authorial cancellations have been printed in a study of the manuscript. The eighteen chapters have been as fully annotated as possible after several research journeys to Calabria, with the assistance of a number of friends and correspondents. The volume will contain about thirty illustrations which include old as well as modern photographs of sites and persons mentioned in the narrative. Gissing's black and white sketches originally reproduced in 1901 and 1905 will be given a new lease of life. The bibliography will cover comments by English, American and Italian scholars and essayists. The introduction will place the book in an international perspective.

A German translation by Karina Of, the translator of *The Odd Women*, will be issued by Wiborada, the Liechtenstein publishers, within the next few months. Gissing's text, entitled *Am Ionischen Meer: Ein Streifzug*



*durch Südtalien*, will be preceded by a foreword contributed by Pierre Coustillas and an afterword by Wulfhard Stahl.

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**In Memoriam**  
**Sydney Frederick Lott**  
**9 January 1920-20 September 2002**

To readers of this journal Sydney Lott was known as a regular contributor from July 1994 to October of last year. His interesting, carefully researched articles were as a rule topographical in nature and one felt, as one broke open the envelopes that contained them and read the accompanying letters, that they were labours of love. He always had something genuinely personal to say about some aspect of Gissing's inspiration which no previous commentator had yet, however broadly, explored. This intellectual hobby, it was evident from the start, was a noble, disinterested one, and one characteristic was attached to it. More often than not, his conception of the subject he was dealing with being a visual one, he offered a carefully selected illustration which was invariably of excellent quality. His regular contributions will be missed by our readers. He doubtless had some more projects in mind, but last year, because he must have felt that his life was drawing to a close, he did not mention any subject that he might conceivably tackle in the near future. His last few months, we are told by his wife Ethel and a devoted friend and neighbour, Andrea Birch, were months of great suffering. But Sydney Lott fought to the end an illness which was diagnosed too late and one of his last requests was for a copy of *The Crown of Life*—which reached him just before it was too late.

Sydney Frederick Lott was born in West Ham and he died in Eastbourne, where he had retired in 1975. He began work as a clerk for Bryant and May at the Bow Works in 1936 and was employed by that firm, which was well-known to Gissing, as his diary for 1888 shows, for some forty years. When he retired he was Managing Director of a subsidiary company, Peerless Gold Leaf, which produced gold leaf decoration for book bindings, cosmetic packaging etc. During the Second World War he served mainly in Italy and kept a diary which he apparently gave to the Imperial War Museum, but he was not the kind of man who was easily prompted to reminisce. Discretion forbade. There was a time when the military authorities in Italy forgot about him, and as Orwell was one of his favourite authors, this singular experience must have reminded him of that of George

Bowling at Twelve Mile Dump in *Coming up for Air*. Besides Gissing and Orwell, the authors he particularly liked were Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, Trollope, Wilkie Collins and George Eliot.

His wife recalls that he was a great admirer of the politician George Lansbury (1859-1940), a leading socialist figure for fifty years and most certainly an admirable man in many ways, a political leader whose charitable work was, it would seem, a model to Sydney Lott. Andrea Birch writes that when he retired to Sussex with his wife and only son Piers, he remained extremely active, "raising money for many charities, most noticeably MENCAP, where he campaigned for the rights of the mentally handicapped." All his activities, which were extremely varied, bore the stamp of disinterestedness. As far as Gissing was concerned he was a great user of library facilities and turned to private libraries only after the institutional ones had revealed the limits of their resources ; he would not hesitate to go to the Sussex Record Office in the hope of identifying such a shadowy figure as the Miss Curtis whom Gissing had met during one of his stays in Eastbourne. It was only very gradually that people around him discovered the extents of his talents. He wrote verse (whether any of it was published cannot be said) and painted in watercolours when time allowed. In a letter of 5 November 2000 he had a charming anecdote to relate: "At the outbreak of war the government issued sandbags and corrugated iron sheets so that Eastenders could construct 'Anderson' shelters in preparation for the expected air attacks. I made a painting of an 'Anderson' and gave it a mock Kipling title-'The Glory of the Garden.' In 1940, the Art Exhibitions Bureau in London assembled 103 such pictures for a touring exhibition of War Pictures. The collection included my 'Glory of the Garden,' and I have found the catalogue issued when the exhibition reached the Grundy Art Gallery in Blackpool in June 1940. When scrutinising the names of my fellow exhibitors I was delighted to see that Sir William Rothenstein was showing no less than three pictures in gouache: 'Ruined Château at Devise,' 'Destroyed Bridge across the Canal du Nord' and 'Flesquières.' This discovery provided me with a rather exciting personal link with Gissing."

On a personal level, Andrea Birch, who knew him well for years, describes him as a quiet, private man, an eloquent speaker with a dry sense of humour ; most certainly, we are tempted to add, though we saw him only once two years ago, a thoughtful man with well-defined ideals which inspired sympathy and respect. The service for Sydney that was held on 26 September was very special. The weather was glorious. Ethel chose tradi-

tional hymns, some music from Elgar. A senior MENCAP member spoke of personal memories, a passage from the *Ryecroft Papers* (Winter XXIII, "I am walking upon the South Downs...") was beautifully read by another family friend. "It was very English," Andrea Birch says, "very dignified, and we feel that Sydney would have approved."

Sydney Lott's nine articles appeared in the *Journal* as follows: July 1994, "Gissing in Sussex"; July 1997, "Thyrza's Eastbourne"; April 1998, "The Lamb House that Gissing Saw"; December 1998, "Gissing and St. Sidwell"; April 1999, "The Spade House that Gissing Knew"; January 2000, "Gissing at the Crystal Palace"; July 2000, "Gissing's Dreams and Realities, between wives"; October 2000, "Gissing and London Music Halls"; October 2001, "Gissing and the Railways."— P.C.

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### Notes and News

In his Catalogue of Autographs no. 78, David J. Holmes had for sale two items which may be of interest to Gissing scholars who do not concentrate exclusively on George. No. 30 is a copy of Thomas Waller Gissing's *Materials for a Flora of Wakefield and its Neighbourhood* (London, 1867), \$375.00. No. 59 is a collection of 17 volumes of (mostly) poetry written by Elizabeth Gibson (later Cheyne), sister of the English poet Wilfrid Wilson Gibson; all first editions, a number printed for the author 1899-1913, many inscribed to Algernon Gissing, \$750. George was apparently not aware of this literary contact.

John Sloan has written a volume on Oscar Wilde which is to be published in the Authors in Context series. Barbara Rawlinson was awarded the degree of PhD on 27 September at the University of Leicester. Her thesis was entitled: "The Other Gissing: Short Stories, Essays and Miscellaneous Works." The examiners were Dr. Philip Shaw and Professor Pierre Coustillas. In the wake of this study, Mrs. Rawlinson can be expected to publish a reliable version of "Phoebe" in this journal, the only texts available, in *Temple Bar* (March 1884) and in the late collection *Stories and Sketches* (1938), being heavily bowdlerized. She will also publish a piece of juvenilia entitled "The Grandfather's New Year's Story."

Cyril Wyatt in Tasmania has discovered the existence of a First Day Cover with the well-known photograph of Gissing, Hornung, Doyle and Wells taken in Rome in 1898 by an unidentified person (perhaps Brian

Ború Dunne, Mrs. Wells or Mrs. Hornung) reproduced on the left-hand top corner under the caption “Literary Giants.” The stamp, bearing the heads of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip, was issued in Canada on 26 October 1951. Any additional information about the use of this photograph would be welcome. Prior to the reproduction in the Gissing-Wells correspondence, in Gissing’s *Collected Letters*, and in *With Gissing in Italy*, we only know of its presence in John Dickson Carr’s biography of Conan Doyle (1949).

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### Recent Publications

Articles, reviews, etc.

Hiroko Ishizuka, “The Journey to Death: Gissing and the Mediterranean,” *Kobe Miscellany*, 2000, no. 25, pp. 69-91. In Japanese.

Teresa Liguori, “Un inglese nella Cotrone dell’800,” *Il Crotonese*, 16-18 July 2002, p. 31.

Anon., “Wakefield Characters,” *The Glory of Wakefield*, 150 year anniversary number of the *Wakefield Express*, July 2002, p. 40.

Francesco Badolato, “Una poesia di George Gissing: Italia,” *Pick Wick* (Milano), July-September 2002, p. 14. An Italian translation of Gissing’s poem (1876).

Francesco Marroni, *Disarmonie vittoriane: Rivisitazioni del canone della narrativa inglese dell’Ottocento* (Roma: Carocci, 2002). Chapter 5 is a study of “*The Whirlpool*: Gissing, la vocazione e la modernità,” pp. 157-80.

Erin Williams, “Female Celibacy in the fiction of Gissing and [Ella Hepworth] Dixon: The Silent Strike of the Suburbanites,” *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, Vol. 45 (2002), no. 3, pp. 259-79.

Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Art*, London & New York: Routledge, 2002. Chapter 4, entitled “Authentic *Ressentiment*: Generic Discontinuities and Ideologemes in the ‘Experimental’ Novels of George Gissing,” pp. 173-93, is the well-known essay which first appeared in the September 1976 number of *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*.