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Gissing and Exeter, Part Three: Man About Town

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In this final part of my exploration of Gissing’s time in Exeter, 1891-1893, I begin by considering some aspects of existence that all of us have to make time for – eating, drinking, shopping, going to the doctor, and similar ‘facts of everyday life.’ Exeter was a small city, easily walkable, especially by as determined and inveterate a pedestrian as Gissing, but we can gauge where he walked through by considering where he walked to, not only in the city centre but also on frequent walks into the immediate surroundings. We can also infer his familiarity with the city by identifying places he included in his novels, sometimes by their real names – Longbrook Street, Northernhay, Southernhay, Salutary Mount – and by observing the activities and persons he situated in those places.

Everyday life
Gissing mentions (and frequently prices) furnishings and other items that he bought for his successive homes in Prospect Park and St Leonard’s Terrace, and especially items needed when Walter was born, but he never tells us where he or Edith shopped. For himself, he bought socks, two new hats, a “decent stationery-case,” a cheap summer suit (50/-), a copying press and ink; for the household he ordered coal, and bought carpets, oilcloth, blind,
sheets, dinner and tea services, chest of drawers, sofa, camp-stool, and a gas stove; for Walter, a cap and veil, perambulator, high-chair, and cot. The only grocery items he recorded as buying were Walter’s baby food (‘Mincusea’ – a patent food prepared from cow’s milk) – and Allen’s & Hanbury’s malted food), Christmas cake for the servants, stout for his mother, and “things for lunch” to entertain his former student, Walter Grahame. Yet he seems to have been familiar with everyday shopping for he reported to Ellen:

Food is splendidly cheap here, – all except butter, which of course goes off to London. The best beef-steak, 10d. a lb. Mutton chops, 6d. a lb. Excellent bacon 5d. ½ a lb. Potatoes are sold by the score (20 lb) at something less than a penny a lb. We get plenty of fish; I hope to make a dinner of it twice a week.

Before he married, he twice recorded making dinner at home of eggs and bacon, and once “made dinner of chops,” but as often when on his own, he dined at the Coffee Tavern. There were several coffee taverns in 1890s Exeter, but the most prominent was at the entrance to the Eastgate Arcade, run by the Exeter Coffee Tavern Co. Ltd. and erected in 1880-1881, at the same time as the Arcade. By 1894 the manageress was Miss M. Cornish, and we may recall (see Part I) that Gissing records sleeping at the Coffee Tavern and at Mrs Cornish’s on successive nights when he first arrived in Exeter in January 1891. The evidence of a connection here is circumstantial but suggestive. The Eastgate Coffee Tavern was not listed in Hawes’ Hand Book to Temperance Hotels, unlike three other Exeter hotels – the “City,” opposite Queen Street Station, Evered’s, in Paul Street, and the “West of England” Coffee Palace, 86 Fore Street (“Good Beds. Luncheon or Hot Dinner from 9d to 1/6. Tea 6d to 1/2.”), but it was a properly alcohol-free venture. More likely to appeal to Gissing were the prices. Dinner could be obtained for as little as 5d; steak puddings and pies with two vegetables cost 6d, and dinners off the joint 7d. Coffee itself was 1d a cup. On the second floor, next to the manager’s and servants’ rooms, there were three cubicles for single men, ideal for Gissing as he waited to move into his own lodgings.

Gissing also dined more grandly, but only courtesy of visitors who, apart from his own close family, never stayed with him in St Leonard’s Terrace. Morley Roberts visited twice in March 1891 and April 1893, on each occasion staying at the New London Hotel. On his first visit, he dined with George and Edith, presumably in their lodgings, but in 1893 he invited George to dine with him at the hotel (though he did have tea at the Gissings’ the next day). In November 1891, Gissing’s new publisher, A. H. Bullen, stayed at the Royal Clarence Hotel, facing the Cathedral, and entertained Gissing to dinner there. Walter Grahame also stayed at the Clarence, but dined alone after a lunch of fowl, apple tart, and Burgundy at St Leonard’s Terrace. The New London opened in 1794 as one of the city’s principal coaching inns. Guests included Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson. The landlord from 1869, Robert Pople, was also City Sheriff in 1890 and mayor for three years in the mid-1890s. The hotel was demolished in 1936 and replaced by the Savoy Cinema, a typical example of Art Deco cinema style, itself demolished in 1987. The site is now a Waterstone’s. The Clarence began life in 1769 as the city’s Assembly Rooms, soon converted to a hotel favoured by the elite. Following a visit by the Duchess of Clarence in 1827, the hotel changed its name to the Royal Clarence. Its situation between the High Street and Cathedral Green added to its kudos, retained until 2016 when it was gutted in a spectacular fire.

The only other business transactions that Gissing records are with his bank, his doctor, his dentist and the removals company that shipped his furniture and books back to Brixton. When he received a cheque for £105 from Lawrence & Bullen for Denzil Quarrier, he wrote to the Exeter branch of the National Provincial Bank of England, asking to open an account. It may seem extraordinary to us that Gissing had never had a bank account during his life in London, but until the mid-twentieth century only a small proportion of the population had their own chequeing accounts. As recently as 1967, only 28 per cent of over-16s had a bank account. A decade later it was estimated that more than half the population was still ‘unbanked.’ So Gissing was by no means unusual, even among the middle classes. Prior to 1891, he would send publishers’ cheques to his sister or mother in Wakefield and they would send him cash through the post as and when he needed it. When he started to write cheques in order to withdraw cash, he had to ask Algernon for instructions on how to word them. The bank was located in the same block as the Royal Clarence, fronting on Cathedral Green but extending through to the High Street.

In late April 1891, Edith complained of “indigestion etc.” (actually, six weeks pregnant), Gissing visited a “Doctor” (no name) who called to see her the following day. A week later, “Day lost in waiting for the doctor.” By mid-May, “Edith ill with dyspepsia, or whatever it may be.” There are no more references to a doctor until 5 October 1891 when “Dr. Henderson called for first time.” Edith went into labour on 9 December. Henderson visited again, chatted with George, and administered chloroform to Edith. He declared his care successfully completed on 21 December, and sent a bill (which Gissing paid by cheque) for three guineas. But ten days later, Henderson was back to cope with Edith’s influenza, prompting a further bill for one guinea. He returned in May 1892 (only £1 this time) and again in April 1893, resulting in a final bill for 10/6 (half a guinea), settled just before the family left Exeter for Brixton.
Along with his wife, two nieces and three servants, Dr William Henderson, aged 56 in 1891, occupied a house at 18 East Southernhay, a few houses north of the Exeter Literary Society, and arguably one of the best addresses in Exeter.

Southernhay comprised a central park bordered by four 1790s terraces on the west and a more eclectic mix of Georgian and Regency housing on the east side, most of which still survives. Henderson had been born in Scotland, but became prominent in Liberal politics in Exeter. Sheriff in 1881, Alderman in 1882, and appointed a J.P. a few years later. By the time he became the Gissings' doctor, he was "in an indifferent state of health" and died less than two months after the Gissings left Exeter.  

After Edith had suffered toothache for more than a week, they went searching for a dentist and settled upon "Mundall [sic], Bedford Circus" who charged two guineas for his services. Stephen Mundell, I.D.S.R.C.S.Eng., operated from premises at 19 Bedford Circus, although by 1893 he had moved to 38 West Southernhay. Besleys Directory indicates that, by then, there were four dentists operating from separate premises in West Southernhay and another two in Bedford Circus. Mundell, aged 29 in 1891, was another in-migrant to Exeter, in this case from Leeds but, as with Henderson, his wife was born locally. Bedford Circus, begun in 1773 though not completed until 1832, comprised three-storey, basement and attic, terraced houses, much like surviving crescents and circuses in Bath, ideally suited to members of the medical and legal professions carrying on their practice from home. Although many of the houses were gutted in the Exeter Blitz, not by direct hits, but by fire spreading from nearby properties, the circus could have been restored. Instead, the entire development was bulldozed and replaced by bland, low-rise shops, themselves superseded by a taller but equally undistinguished shopping precinct in 2007.  

W. J. West alluded to "the well known sisters" who ran a servants’ registry office in Southernhay as a possible, if inexact, model for Mary Barlout and Rhoda Nunn in The Odd Women, although they, of course, had much higher aspirations for the women they trained. Certainly, Gissing records visiting several Exeter registry offices while “servant-hunting” in December 1891, from one of which he “got a good idea for the opening of a novel.” East Southernhay accommodated the ‘Female Servants’ Institution (Miss G. F. Lewin, Hon. Sec.),’ but the businesses listed as Servants’ Registry Offices in city directories were
nearly all in side streets close to High Street. The only one resembling West’s description was in Bampfylde Street, run by the Misses Ashman. The census confirms that Margaret (37), Maria (34), Blanche (33), and their widowed mother (62) together kept a registry office for servants, while living in a house on the St Thomas’ side of the river (10 Fairfield Terrace). Their advertisement appeared daily in the Devon and Exeter Gazette, unchanged during the whole of Gissing’s time in Exeter:

BAMPFYLDE SERVANTS’ REGISTRY – No FEES to LADIES or SERVANTS till ENGAGED. Any number of thoroughly respectable servants always wanted. No hotels. Stamped envelope. – Bampfylde-street, High-street, Exeter.

Evidently, George was out of the ordinary in making enquiries rather than leaving it to his ‘LADY.’

A final business that Gissing bothers to name was “Monsells [sic],” who “agreed to do my removal for £15.” This compared with the £14.15s which the Baker Street Bazaar had charged to move his belongings to Exeter in January 1891. ‘Mousell Bros. furniture removers & repository’ were based in London Inn Square, close to the New London Hotel, so a location with which Gissing was very familiar. More importantly, although the business had originated in Exeter, it was an extensive operation with branches in London, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Paris, and Bouligne, and a head office, presumably because of its centrality, in Leamington. The company owned 350 pantechinicon vans in the 1890s. Evidently, a move from Exeter to Brixton was child’s play for Monsells. The business was absorbed into Bishop’s Move in 1953.

Rus in urbe

A chief attraction of Exeter was its intimate relationship to the surrounding countryside, with attractive views from the city to the surrounding hills, and of the city from the outlying villages (present-day suburbs) of Pennsylvania to the north and Alphington to the west. Gissing recorded numerous walks to the surrounding villages – Ide, Alphington, Wonford, Countess Wear, Cowley Bridge, Pinhoe, Sowton, Topsham, Clyst St Mary, Clyst Honiton, Clyst St George, and Stoke Canon (all less than 5 miles from the centre of Exeter); Bramford Speke (“the most beautiful village I ever saw”), Newton St Cyres, Thorverton, and Silverton (5-9 miles); and longer walks which required travelling by train one way – to or from Crediton, Dawlish, and Teignmouth. Many of these walks he took with Edith. Some – those undertaken when he was living in Prospect Park – he incorporated into *Born in Exile* as Peak is first shown the delights of Stoke Canon and Pennsylvania Hill in the company of the Warricomes, and then makes his own explorations of the area.

One short walk – for Gissing and Peak – was to Heavitree, really a suburb of Exeter by the second half of the nineteenth century, but fixed in Gissing’s mind as the birthplace of the Rev. Richard Hooker (1554-1600), a protestant theologian who, in the nineteenth century at least, was interpreted as arguing against the extremes of puritanism and advocating the integration of revelation, reason, and tradition, in other words, a founder of what became mainstream Anglicanism. Gissing had been reading Hooker in London only a few days before deciding to move to Exeter. A statue of Hooker now occupies a prominent position in front of Exeter Cathedral but this was not erected until 1907. Peak walks through Heavitree (when Hooker saw the light here, how easy to believe that the Anglican Church was the noblest outcome of human progress!) and on and on, until by a lane with red banks of sandstone, thick with ferns, shadowed with noble boughs, he came to a hamlet which had always been one of his favourite resorts, so peacefully it lay amid the exquisite rural landscape. [...] From the old church sounded an organ prelude, then the voice of the congregation, joining in one of the familiar hymns. [...] He entered the churchyard, and found the leafy nook with a tombstone where he had often rested (*Born in Exile*, Part the Fourth, III).

Given that Peak had gone "on and on" beyond Heavitree, and that Heavitree Church, although established long before Hooker’s time, was mainly a mid-nineteenth-century reconstruction, it is not clear whether the “old church” and churchyard refer to Heavitree, although Posthumus associates this passage with a note in Gissing’s Scrapbook:

A tomb in Heavitree churchyard. Brickwork 2 ft high, with stone slab and high rails. Overgrown with ivy, bindweed, bramble, and Virginia creeper – the last (October) a splendid crimson.

From the garden of Ryecroft’s cottage, “[a]lmost within sight is the tower of Heavitree church – Heavitree, which was Hooker’s birthplace.” Ryecroft likes “to know of anything that has happened at Heavitree, or Bramford Speke, or Newton St. Cyres,” and boasts of knowing “every road and lane, every bridle path and foot-way for miles about” (*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Summer, III, XII). As we can see from the list of walks noted above, Gissing could lay claim to the same knowledge.

Ryecroft recalls first living in Exeter:

till then I had cared very little about plants and flowers, but now I found myself eagerly interested in every blossom, in every growth of the wayside. As I walked I gathered a quantity of plants, promising myself to buy a book on the morrow and identify them all. [...] I had a lodging in one of those outer streets of Exeter which savour more of country than of town, and every morning I set forth to make discoveries. [...] Now inland, now seaward, I followed the windings of the Exe (Ryecroft, Spring, IX).

Gissing’s country walks, too, stimulated a desire to identify trees, ferns and roadside flowers. He “[g]ot from library a book on Trees” and inserted a fernery and a discussion of spleenwort into passages of *Born in Exile* set in
the Warricomes’ house (Born in Exile, Part the Second, IV, Part the Third, IV). He also went foraging. After walking up Old Tiverton Road one Sunday morning, getting “mould for flower-pots with a few ferns,” he reported to Algernon that he was “going in for a little herb-gathering.” Soon, he was gathering bluebells and foxgloves; in September he and Edith went blackberrying, first northwards (Old Tiverton Road and Pinhoe) and then east from their new home (to Wonford). He dug up primroses from a lane and replanted them in his garden, recording with pride when they flowered the following December. And, after refraining from celebrating Christmas 1891, he gathered holly to decorate the house for Christmas 1892.

George and Edith indulged in one other activity that merged town and country, the Exeter Horse Show, which they attended on 19 July 1892. George noted: “Rather miserable, owing to weather.” This was something of an understatement. The Western Times reported that the weather was fine until mid-day, but throughout the afternoon “there were furious sweeps of rain, accompanied by violent rushes of wind […] doing damage to some of the structures and rendering anything like comfort to the spectators impossible. […] The storm stripped several of the stalls, and brought down a few altogether.” In the morning (for the grand opening of the show), the entrance fee was 2/6, but in the afternoon, when the Gissings visited, it was reduced to 1/-. Had they waited until the following afternoon, when the weather was again fine, they would have paid only 6d each, but would have had to put up with much bigger crowds and a military tournament, hardly likely to appeal to George, in place of the jumping events scheduled for the first day. In total, 380 attendees paid 2/6 for the first morning, 1174 paid 1/- for the first afternoon (down about 400 on the previous year), while 5255 attended on the second day (up by more than 2000 on 1891). The show was held on a 9-acre site at Mount Pleasant (close to the tram terminus, north of Blackboy Road), about a mile’s walk from the Gissings’ home in St Leonard’s Terrace.

Exeter sites in fact and fiction

More dignified amusement was provided by visits to the Cathedral. Exeter was a seriously ecclesiastical city, which was of course the primary reason why the agnostic and combative Gissing chose to live there, to gather material especially for Born in Exile. Gissing recorded several visits to the Cathedral. In the weeks on his own when he first arrived, he wrote to both Catherine and Ellen:

Yes, the Cathedral is very grand. I had it practically to myself for an hour the other morning, & enjoyed it all the more for the fact that the interior is heated with gigantic stoves. It will take a long time to see the building properly.
or simply in a generic street of lodgings, as in ‘Kingsmill,’ we can only speculate. Its situation, between town and country, applied to many parts of what was still a built-up area of no more than 50,000 inhabitants. But its physical geography steeply downhill away from London Inn Square, then as steeply uphill towards Pennsylvania, meant that the views out to the surrounding hills were more obvious. Gissing’s description captures this very clearly:

In a by-way which declines from the main thoroughfare of Exeter, and bears the name of Longbrook Street, is a row of small houses placed above long strips of sloping garden. They are old and plain, with no architectural feature calling for mention, unless it be the latticed porch which gives the doors an awkward quaintness. Just beyond, the road crosses a hollow, and begins the ascent of a hill here interposed between the city and the inland-winding valley of Exe. The little terrace may be regarded as urban or rural, according to the tastes and occasions of those who dwell there. In one direction, a walk of five minutes will conduct to the middle of High Street, and in the other it takes scarcely longer to reach the open country.

On the upper floor of one of these cottages, Godwin Peak had made his abode. Sitting-room and bedchamber, furnished with homely comfort, answered to his bachelor needs, and would allow of his receiving without embarrassment any visitor whom fortune might send him (Born in Exile, Part the Third, II).

To Buckland Warriccombe, armed with the proof of Peak’s duplicity, the terrace was a “row of insignificant houses” with “thin partitions” (Part the Fifth, III).

However insubstantial the houses in Park Place, the part of Longbrook Street in which Gissing housed Peak, may have seemed to Buckland, they are still extant today, unlike so much of central Exeter. In Besley’s Exeter Itinerary and General Directory (1828), Park Place was described as “a new range of buildings,” but it already accommodated two “keepers of furnished lodgings,” with another three in other parts of Longbrook Street. By 1891, there was one lodging-house, at 1 Park Place, where three boarders were looked after by Amelia Callahan, a 48-year-old single woman, and Eliza Bowden, 41, single, enigmatically referred to in the ‘relationship to head of household’ column as “partner.” There were also two lodgers at no. 3, in this case deemed to constitute separate households, each occupying two rooms, with the main household comprising a railway ticket collector, his wife and baby son. The terrace was in no sense a unified row of houses. Each house was different, and they were owned individually. For example, no. 2, advertised for sale in 1884 as an “eligible investment,” comprised seven rooms over three floors, plus kitchen, back-kitchen and wash-house; no. 6, auctioned in 1889, comprised seven main rooms, box-room and two attics. Each house came with a greenhouse, and was sold freehold, except for the “long strips of sloping garden” which were owned on 100-year leases from the Trustees of Hurst’s Charity, formerly the Magdalen Charity.
From the window of his sitting-room he looked over the opposite houses to Northernhay, the hill where once stood Rougemont Castle, its wooded declivities now fashioned into a public garden (*Born in Exile*, Part the Third, II).

It is, indeed, possible to see Northernhay Gardens from Park Place — or, at least, it is possible to see the upper-floor windows of Park Place from Northernhay Gardens, which is how I and, I assume, Gissing established the accuracy of this description. As a public open space, the Gardens date from the seventeenth century, although they were reshaped in the 1860s and, by Gissing’s time in Exeter, they boasted a variety of statues and sculptures, as well as the romanticised ruins on the north flank of the castle.55

Another idiosyncratic terrace to catch Gissing’s attention, also, in part, set back above the road, lay at the approach to Heavitree. *Denzil Quarrier* is set in the imagined town of Polterham, perhaps a cross between Exeter and Wakefield. It is not a cathedral city (and Wakefield Parish Church was not elevated to cathedral status until 1888, after the time when *Denzil Quarrier* is set), but it does have a variety of different kinds of Anglican church. It is also more industrialised than Exeter, with mill chimneys, sugar refineries, and soap works. But the only ‘real’ place name in Polterham was ‘Salutary Mount’, and the only ‘Salutary Mount’ that I have been able to find in Victorian census records was a row of early nineteenth-century, middle-class houses lining the south side of the entry to Heavitree from Exeter.56

In *Denzil Quarrier*, ‘Salutary Mount’ is the name of the house occupied by the all-too-respectable Mumbray family (Chapter XVI). Mr Mumbray, Mayor of Polterham and would-be “Progressive Conservative” candidate for Parliament,
had made his money in soap-boiling. He supported the anti-radical of the town's two literary societies. He was determined to "preserve the purity of home," though his own home-life was hardly characterised by the "holiness, charity, peace" he advocated (Chapter X). 'Salutary Mount' is an appropriately ironic name for his residence. By marrying the artist, Eustace Glazzard, Mumbray's daughter, Serena, rebels against her even more censorious mother, who would prefer her to marry the ascetic Rev. Scatchard Vials. Serena's wedding, "absolutely private," not in her parents' church but in "St Luke's, which was blessed with a mild, intellectual incumbent," is scheduled for 10 a.m. and soon after 11 a.m. she and Eustace are on the train to London en route for Sicily (Chapters XVI, XIX).

The real 'Salutary Mount' makes few appearances in the local press, but two entries during the period when Gissing was writing *Denzil Quarrier* caught my attention. At no. 6, a "freehold family residence" sold in 1883 for £990 [compare Gissing's house in St Leonard's Terrace which was valued at less than £250].

On 30 October, his classified ad appeared immediately above an entry from Miss Vinnicombe, one of Edward Vinnicombe's daughters, who offered guitar lessons, perhaps another prompt for Gissing to change 'Vinnicombe' to 'Warricombe' as he revised *Born in Exile*. Three doors away from Kitchin, at no. 9, the daughter of Robert N. G. Baker, who owned Heavitree Brewery, was married on 23 September in the kind of society wedding that Mrs Mumbray would have hoped for Serena. The bride's husband was Dr Raglan Thomas, 13 West Southernhay. In *Denzil Quarrier*, Serena's brother is named Raglan.

I have already discussed Southernhay as the residence of Gissing's doctor, but it also features in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Ryecroft describes going into Exeter "about sunset" to transact business and walking home through Southernhay, where "as I was passing a house of which the ground-floor windows stood open, there sounded the notes of a piano [...] that nocturne of Chopin which I love best," played by "a skilful hand." Ryecroft's "heart leapt" and he "trembled with very ecstasy of enjoyment." He "waited in the hope of another piece, but nothing followed, and so I went my way" (Summer, XXVI). Lest we too readily equate Ryecroft and Gissing, we should note that Ryecroft goes on to celebrate all kinds of piano-playing, even "five-finger exercises," whereas Gissing had raged at the "vigorous strumming" of the Rocketts in his lodgings in Prospect Park. Likewise, compare the barbed observation in Gissing's *Commonplace Book* - "The cathedral bells are ringing merrily all to-day. I ask the reason, & find that it is to celebrate the coming of the Judges" - with the nostalgia of Ryecroft:

"The Christmas bells drew me forth this morning. With but half-formed purpose, I walked through soft, hazy sunshine towards the city, and came into the Cathedral Close, and, after lingering awhile, heard the first notes of the organ, and so entered" (Winter, XIX).

### Concluding thoughts

No reconstruction of everyday events in a past life can be more than suggestive. For all its nine published volumes, Gissing's correspondence is partial and one-sided, subject to periodic culls like the one he implemented prior to leaving Exeter: "Spent day in reading my collections of old letters. Burnt a great many." Not is his diary continuous or comprehensive. We might expect the mundane事项 of shopping and cooking to register only when there was nothing more interesting to mention. Nevertheless, in combination with the less personal records of censuses, directories, newspapers, and local histories, we can start to repopulate and reimagine Gissing's Exeter.

Gissing may have considered his time in Exeter wasted, yet as well as completing three novels - two *(Born in Exile* and *The Odd Women)* acknowledged first-rank and the third *(Denzil Quarrier)* undeserving of the relative neglect it has suffered - and starting many more, some of which bore fruit after his return to London *(In the Year of Jubilee* and the parts of "The Iron Gods" that contributed to *Eve's Ransom*), his personal experiences were not as negative as he later portrayed them - the walks with Edith early in their marriage, his own growing affinity with his son, and the momentary pleasures, such as those recalled, however refracted, in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Walter Grahame claimed, recalling long afterwards his visit in March 1893, that Gissing "appeared to be very comfortable in his home. He seemed busy and happy, was in good health and getting on well with the work he had in hand. His wife was evidently devoted to him, and he was very proud of his baby son." Perhaps Gissing was good at putting up a front, or Grahame was a less perceptive young man. Yet Gissing returned to Devon, not only in his imagination, but also physically, staying at Budleigh Salterton to recuperate for nearly four months in 1897. In early April, he wrote to Walter: "Yesterday I went to Exeter, and saw the little old house in which you were born, and where I often carried you about when you were too young to speak a word or to know who I was. Some day I hope we shall go and look at the house together." Whether they did when Walter and Margaret visited later that month, we shall never know, since his diary is silent for this period, but Gissing's subsequent allusions to Devon and Exeter, in his correspondence and in *Ryecroft*, continue to mix nostalgia, disdain and regret.

2 Variously recorded in his Diary on pp. 236-237, 242, 262, 264, 266-267, 276-277, 280-281, 290-291, 301, 304 (17, 21, 27 January, 19 March, 26 November, 14, 18 December 1891; 2, 9, 14 January, 19 April, 11 May, 29 June, 2, 6, 18 July, 30 July, 1 November, 1 December 1892; 5 April, 12 May 1893).


4 Recorded in Gissing’s Diary on pp. 265, 276, 291, 299, 304 (23 December 1891; 23 April, 10 December 1892; 21 March, 12 May 1893).

5 Letters, p. 277 (7 March 1891). In other letters, pp. 257, 262, 302 (19-20 January, 21 June 1891), he noted the price of butter in Exeter – 1/9 a lb. in January, but only 10/9 a lb. in June; and in Letters, p. 83 (30 December 1892) he complained about the impossibility of getting new eggs.


8 Thomas Rowell Cornish, brieﬁngly Gissing’s near neighbour in Prospect Park, had moved with his wife, Susan, to St James’s Place, Old Tiverton Road by the time of the April 1891 census. Immediately south of St James’s Place was a short terrace of three substantial houses, including ‘Stokeleigh’, the home of James Knill, a stockbroker but, more importantly for our purposes, the secretary of the Eastgate Coffee Tavern. In November 1900, only a month before Thomas Rowell Cornish died, Knill proposed, and Cornish seconded, the nomination of the Progressive candidate for a vacancy on the City Council. By 31 March 1901, the next census date, the newly widowed Susan Cornish had been joined in what was now 25 Old Tiverton Road, by her unmarried daughter, Miss Mary Cornish, by then aged 43. On the basis of Cornish’s and Knill’s connections, it is tempting to infer that Miss Mary Cornish in 1901 was the same person as Miss M. Cornish, the manageress of the Coffee Tavern. But a deﬁnitive link appears a further venture into the Exeter archives.

9 C. W. Hawes, Hawes’ Hand Book to Temperance Hotels (London: National Temperance Publication Depot, 1888); Exeter and Plymouth Gazette Daily Telegram, 30 May 1881, p. 3. I am grateful to my UCL Geography colleague, James Kneale, for the Hawes reference and for advice on the connections between coffee taverns and the temperance movement.


11 Personal communications from Michael Anson, Archive Manager, Bank of England Archive, and Dr Duncan Needham and Professor Martin Daunton, University of Cambridge.

12 Diary, pp. 245-247, 257, 263-265, 267, 277, 281, 301, 307 (25-27 April, 4, 17 May, 5 October, 9-10, 21, 30 December 1891; 17 January, 8, 11 May, 11 July 1892; 7 April, 18 June 1893).

13 Exeter Flying Post, 3 May 1890, p. 3; 19 August 1893, p. 6; Western Times, 15 August 1893, p. 8.

14 Diary, p. 271 (28 February 1892).


17 Diary, pp. 262-263 (2-5 December 1891).

18 Kelly’s Directory of Devonshire & Cornwall (London: Kelly & Co., 1893), pp. 189, 193, 216, 260, 908, 965. Today’s Bampfylde Street is a product of post-war planning: Bampfylde Street in the late nineteenth century was a narrow lane running south out of High Street opposite Castle Street.

19 Diary, pp. 234, 236, 307 (29 December 1890; 12-13 January 1891; 15 June 1893).

20 Leamington History Group, “Moussell Brothers, Removal Contractors and Storers” online at http://leamingtonhistory.co.uk/moussell-brothers-removal-contractors-and-storers/. See also the advertisements online at Grace’s Guide to British Industrial History: https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Moussell_Brothers.

21 Diary, p. 239 (11 February 1891). See also Letters, 4, p. 271 (17 February 1891).

22 I have used the word order and spelling of these villages as they appear on present-day maps.


25 Diary, p. 245 (27 April 1891).

26 Ibid., p. 243 (5 April 1891); Letters, 4, p. 283 (12 April 1891).

27 Diary, p. 282 (19 July 1892).

28 Western Times, 20 July 1892, p. 4; Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette, 22 July 1892, p. 2.


31 Diary, p. 305 (15 March 1983).

32 Martial, Epigrammata, V, xx, line 13: “They perish and are reckoned.” In the context of the clock, “(hours of days) pass and are reckoned to our account.”

33 Exeter Itinerary and General Directory (Exeter: T & H Besley, 1828), pp. 24, 122-123.


35 “Northernhay Park and Rougemont Gardens” on Cornforth, Exeter Memories, online at http://www.exeternmemories.co.uk/em/parks/northernhay.php.


37 Exeter Flying Post, 26 September 1883, p. 5.

38 According to the 1891 census, Joseph L. Kitchen [sic] was chaplain at Wonford Asylum, aged 60, and married to Isabella, 59. Not, therefore, a model for the Rev. Villas.

39 Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette, 30 October 1891, p. 3.

40 Western Times, 24 September 1891, p. 3.
Chit-Chat

If Gissing had one blind spot, it was his dislike of George Moore and his realistic fiction of the 1880s and 1890s. It seems that his negative reaction to Moore’s provocative pamphlets Literature at Nurse and Circulating Morals, which attacked the monopoly and power of Mudie’s Circulating Library, can be attributed to his view that artists and writers should avoid public notoriety. After all, in 1886 he had privately rebuked William Morris to his brother for taking part in a Socialist demonstration at which he was arrested. Even so, and despite the fact that Gissing saw Moore as a rival, it is hard to understand his detrimental comment in his Diary about his 1894 novel, Esther Waters. On 10 December 1894, he wrote: “Read ‘Esther Waters.’ Some pathos and power in latter part, but miserable writing. The dialogue often grotesquely phrased.” By the way, one would think from reading the Diary and the 9 volumes of Gissing’s letters that the two novelists never actually met. In fact, on 25 June 1896, he and Moore both attended the Cosmopolis dinner at the Savoy Hotel. The Belfast News-Letter reported on the occasion as follows:

M. Fernand Ortmans, the editor of this international monthly [Cosmopolis], entertained a number of his contributors and literary men at the Savoy Hotel last week. Mr. Frederic Harrison, Mr. Justin McCarthy, Mr. Andrew Lang, Mr. Colvin, Mr. Archer, Mr. George Gissing, Mr. Sidney Low, Mr. “Anthony Hope,” Mr. Harold Frederic, Mr. Yeats, Mr. Arthur Symons, Mr. Pennell, Mr. Wedmore, Mr. Street, Mr. Zangwill, Mr. George Bernard Shaw, Mr. Maarten Maartens, Mr. Geo. Moore, Mr. Fisher Unwin, and Mr. Henry Norman were among the guests.

Gissing wrote in his Diary that same evening:

Went up to the Cosmopolis dinner at the Savoy, a great assembly. New acquaintances: Bryce, Justin McCarthy, Nisbet Bain (who sat next to me), [Israel] Zangwill. Saw Andrew Lang for the first time, but no speech with him. Met Frederic Harrison after a lapse of 6 or 7 years. He made a speech, and a sadly dull one—ponderous, slow. Zangwill decidedly a good fellow, as I have always felt from his books. Home by last train.

It is, of course, no surprise that he doesn’t mention seeing George Moore there.