

THE PLACE OF BLOOMSBURY IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE GISSING

By Professor Richard Dennis

The Victorian novelist, George Gissing, is not often associated with Bloomsbury. Yet among his twenty-three novels published between 1880 and 1905, at least nine contain scenes set in the area between Oxford Street and Euston Road, Tottenham Court Road and Gray's Inn Road.¹ We do not need a novelist to tell us about the topography of Victorian London or even to describe the conditions in which Londoners lived: there are more than enough social surveys, tourist guides and journalistic 'explorations' of 'how the poor live'. But novels are invaluable in showing how the spaces of the city were perceived and used and how the city was 'performed' in everyday practice. So in this paper I am interested in how Gissing made use of the area's geography and how his characters moved through Bloomsbury and the wider metropolis at a variety of scales.

My starting point is Henri Lefebvre's discourse on *The Production of Space* and his conceptual triad of 'spatial practices', 'representations of space' and 'representational spaces' (Lefebvre 1991). In the readings of most commentators, 'representation of space' is a conceptual act undertaken by planners, politicians, academic theorists and novelists – in other words, the discourse of the powerful, telling us how we should think about the organization of space – whereas 'representational spaces' are the spaces of resistance, of carnival, of subversion, the appropriation of space by the powerless or, more generally, 'spaces that are lived, experienced and recoded through the actions of those who occupy and use them' (Elden 2009, 590). 'Spatial practices' could be interpreted as the material expressions of these representations in action and movement: actually building an environment of boulevards or apartment blocks, or introducing regulations to control land use or manage traffic; or occupying space, not just symbolically, as in carnival, but in the practices of everyday life, the routine of the journey to work, or of house-hunting, or the 'polite politics' of tactical transgression.

This is not a simple typology. The boundaries between representations and practices are impossible to police and, of course, working historically, we can rarely know about practice other than through its representation. But, at the very least, Lefebvre's work offers a useful discipline in how we think about space as a social product. So where do the spaces of novels fit in? Franco Moretti (1998) argues that making maps of novels can change the way we read them, revealing themes and arguments that their authors never made explicit. For Moretti, space is 'an internal force', shaping narrative from within: '*what* happens depends a lot on *where* it happens', and 'without a certain kind of space, a certain kind of story is simply impossible' (Moretti 1998, 70, 100).

Another literary commentator, Andrew Thacker (2003), wants to clarify our use of the terms 'place' and 'space'. At the time of human geography's quantitative and humanistic revolutions in the 1970s, 'space' was abstract geometry – the friction of distance, the spatial coordinates of one location relative to another – while 'place' was associated with 'sense of' – it was the character of a location that made it unique, that provoked emotional reactions. But for Lefebvre and Thacker, not only is space deemed to be socially produced, not just a spatial container and never empty, but space implies history, change, becoming, while place is (just) about being. Thacker invokes Michel de Certeau and his distinction between 'place', which we map, and 'space', which is actualised through the tour (de Certeau 1984, 117-22). Place implies stability; space is about direction, movement, velocity. Space is a 'practiced place'.

Michelle Allen (2008, 140-1) summarises 'the differences between the two ways of representing urban experience' by comparing two authorial instructions from Gissing's novel, *The Nether World*

¹ Gissing died in 1903, but two of his novels, *Will Warburton* and *Veranilda*, were published posthumously.

(1889): ‘Look at a map of greater London’ and ‘Let us follow her’. In the former, Gissing introduces a description of the north London suburb of Crouch End, first locating it on the map, then describing the ‘newness’, ‘dampness’ and sham gentility of streets and houses that hide the truth of poverty and the promise of a future slum. In the latter, he invites us to follow one of the novel’s most upright characters, Jane Snowdon, on a visit to one of the poorest and most tragic characters, Pennyloaf Candy, by now the widowed Mrs Hewett, living with her young son in one room behind a secondhand clothes shop in ‘a poor street in Clerkenwell’ (Gissing 1973, 364, 387). Gissing’s scene-setting (and both of these examples are, essentially, scene-setting) frequently involves a sense of social exploration; the reader as outsider is guided into and through a hitherto unknown territory rather than simply observing it from a distance. In his first published novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), the opening injunction is to ‘Walk with me, reader, into Whitecross Street,’ a slum that few contemporary readers would have dared to enter alone (Gissing 1985, I, 3).

Gissing was writing at much the same time that Charles Booth was engaged in his monumental survey of *Life and Labour of the People of London*. Booth’s poverty maps may be regarded as exercises in panoptic scene-setting: the city surveyed from above.² But the parallels between Booth’s ‘scientific’ method and Gissing’s socially and geographically precise storytelling go beyond panopticism, illustrating how social survey and social realism in literature were both products of modern mentalities, *combining* panoramic *and* intimate ways of seeing society, from above and from within. The latter is evident in the manner of Booth’s data collection as much as in Gissing’s translation into narrative of his own mix of library research and fieldwork. The foundation of Booth’s maps was street-by-street perambulation, as his assistants interrogated the School Board Officers house-by-house through the streets of the East End or – in the 1898-99 revisions of the survey – as Booth’s assistants accompanied police officers on their beat, discussing the characteristics of each street they traversed. This was a relational view of poverty, ‘practising’ each place in the context of the places they had visited previously or of the same place as it had been ten years earlier. Comparing successive versions of Booth’s map for Bloomsbury, we can see how and why some streets had been re-coloured – for example, in 1889, Little Gower Place (south of, and parallel to, Gower Place, and now incorporated into UCL) had been ‘light blue’ [Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family], but it was reclassified in 1898 nearer to ‘dark blue’ [Very poor, casual. Chronic want]. Endsleigh Gardens was ‘less good’ than Taviton and Gordon streets, and was on the slide socially: ‘red [Middle class. Well-to-do] rather than the yellow [Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy] of the map’. Of Burton Crescent (now Cartwright Gardens), ‘the east side should be pink [Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings] rather than the purple [Mixed. Some comfortable others poor] of the map’, but the west side remained ‘purple’, tainted by some ‘questionable characters’ and the fact that houses were let out in floors.³

Complementing these observations, Gissing’s texts show us the experience of displacement, mobility and transiency in the slums of central and inner London, and the everyday life of residents of lodging-houses and houses let out in floors; and Gissing goes beyond Booth in penetrating not only the street but the room. Adrian Poole (1973, 53) has argued that Booth’s desire for objectivity ‘neutralise[d] the possibility of any human threat or interaction between the faceless, recording observers, and the slums, the dirt and disease’. I think this is exaggerating the impersonality of Booth’s methods, but I take Poole’s main point, that it was the relationship *between* the room and the street that was often most important to Gissing, and that single rooms provided the settings ‘for all the most intense emotions’ (Poole 1973, 45). Lynne Hapgood, too, notes that Gissing used

² For Booth’s and Gissing’s awareness of one another, see Booth 1889, 157; Mattheisen, Young and Coustillas 1993, 249, 307; Coustillas 1978, 232, 313; Postmus 2007, 160-3, 335-8.

³ For Booth’s original maps, see Reeder 1987; for the revised maps and associated notebooks, see Booth Online.

‘movement from room to street, or stasis within rooms, to externalise a language of the subconscious and so make explicit a specific state of socially produced consciousness’ (Hapgood 2000, 300).

In the space (of the paper) that remains, I will explore two ways in which Gissing produced and utilised space in some Bloomsbury and inner London settings he employed in his novels:

- Topographical space: the real spaces in which he *placed* his stories, and where space at different scales – the neighbourhood, the street, the room – was a container for action and a location relative to other locations, but also signified status and character;
- Journeys and spaces of meeting: how characters get to where they are going, the significance of the routes they follow, and where they meet, either by ‘accident’ – where the author contrives meetings in order to further his plot – or by arrangement – where characters agree to coincide in public space, where they can be private in public;

Topographical space

One question raised by Moretti (1998, 18) is especially pertinent in the case of George Gissing: ‘Why do novels so often mix real geographical sites and imaginary locations? Are the latter needed for some *specific* narrative function? Are there, in other words, events that tend to happen in real spaces – and others that “prefer” fictional ones?’

Moretti observes that Jane Austen’s happy endings could not be located in ‘real’ places, whereas more pessimistic narratives remain tied to the real world. It’s unsurprising, therefore, that Gissing’s characters so often live in real streets, even in particular blocks of flats, when they are in London, but are allowed to enjoy holidays or nostalgic visits to ‘unreal’ childhood idylls such as ‘Bloomford’ – ‘in one of the pleasantest of the southern counties’ (Gissing 1985, I, 17) – in *Workers in the Dawn*, a place which in retrospect is too good to be true.

Authenticity was also a matter of research. In *Workers*, Gissing used ‘real’ locations he was familiar with – Gower Place and Huntley Street in Bloomsbury, for example, in both of which he had lived himself – but relied on vague generalizations for areas with which he was still personally unfamiliar. The philanthropically minded Helen Norman, for example, prepares for a life of good works by exploring the slums of London. Gissing begins by enumerating her visits to Soho, Seven Dials, Drury Lane and Clare Market, all West End locations that Gissing and his readers were likely to know, but then he resorts to sending her ‘through all the unutterable vileness which is to be found on the other side of the river, then through everything most heart-breaking that the wide extent of the East End has to show’ (Gissing 1985, I, 256). Subsequently, Helen goes to work with Mr Heatherley, a nonconformist minister in the East End, but we are offered few clues as to where Gissing’s ‘East End’ is located. Helen can access it by train from her home (Portland Place), so presumably she travelled east on the Metropolitan, which, in 1870 when the novel is set, extended only as far as Moorgate. We also learn that Mr Heatherley lived ‘a short distance from the City Road’ (Gissing 1985, I, 268). Evidently, Gissing’s ‘East End’ in *Workers* was not as far east as ours is, nor was it as far east as his was to become by the 1890s. By then he had had time to explore those parts of the city in which he never lived (such as the East End), engaging in research – in Lambeth for *Thyrza* (1887) and Clerkenwell for *The Nether World* (1889) – and keeping a scrapbook of articles transcribed or clipped from newspapers and magazines (Delany 2008; Postmus 2007).

In *Workers in the Dawn*, Arthur Golding progresses from Adam & Eve Court, Whitecross Street, a real slum demolished by the Metropolitan Board of Works in its first round of slum clearance schemes just at the time the novel was published (Yelling 1986), through Little St Andrew Street, Seven Dials to Charlotte Place, to Gower Place, to Huntley Street. In the two years prior to completing *Workers*, Gissing had lived at Colville Place, a side street close to Charlotte Place (off Goodge Street), at 31 Gower Place, and at 70 and 35 Huntley Street (Woolven 2004).

Gissing had moved to 31 Gower Place in September 1878, sharing a single room with Nell Harrison, whom he had met in his student days in Manchester, and whom he married in October 1879, shortly before he began offering *Workers* to a succession of publishers. The marriage was disastrous – Nell was mentally unstable and an alcoholic and, at least in her Manchester days, worked part-time as a prostitute. In the novel, the same is true of Carrie Mitchell, one of Arthur's fellow-lodgers in Gower Place. When Carrie becomes pregnant (not by Arthur, who hardly knows her at this point), her landlady proposes evicting her rather than 'lose the good name o' th'ouse an' all' (Gissing 1985, II, 60). Carrie takes to the streets where, in one of the novel's most melodramatic purple passages, Arthur stumbles across her in a snowstorm on Christmas evening, huddled under the awning of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, Tottenham Street, with her dead baby in her arms! Restored to health, and established in lodgings in Huntley Street, Carrie soon agrees to marry Arthur, who is now living just a few doors away in the same street. In Gower Place, the landlady and her family are portrayed by Gissing as vulgar and uncultured: they 'could not be called poor', but squandered their money 'in surfeit and vice', oblivious to any sense of 'their mental and moral debasement' (Gissing 1985, II, 6). In Huntley Street, Carrie's landlady turns out to be equally uncouth, plying Carrie with brandy for which she then demands payment, and fighting with her in a local pub, while the landlady's daughter takes Carrie to the Oxford Music Hall (at the junction of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road), 'a place in which no woman who valued her reputation would care to be seen' (Gissing 1985, II, 106). Married, and moved into Arthur's more decent lodgings farther along Huntley Street, Carrie falls foul of his impeccably respectable landlady, Mrs Oaks, who confronts Arthur: 'I shall be obliged to ask you to find other lodgings [...] the character of my house is being damaged. These girls that come so often to see your wife have such a very – unrespectable appearance [...] I shall have my house empty if it goes on' (Gissing 1985, II, 188).

Both Gower Place and Huntley Street were coloured pink – fairly comfortable – on Booth's map, which might appear at variance with Gissing's depiction of slovenly vice. In Gower Place, the house occupied in 1878 by Gissing was inhabited in 1881 by four families (a coppersmith, a hackney-carriage driver, a carpenter, and a widow) and three male lodgers (a bookbinder, a German hotel manager and an annuitant widower), a pattern of occupancy repeated in most of the houses along the street; while 70 Huntley Street (where Gissing lived from January to June 1879) accommodated six families, variously headed by a widowed former laundress, a cab driver, a fishmonger's assistant, a carpet planner, a carman and a smith (Census 1881). But the census merely reports the occupants' employment, not their lifestyle. Gissing's account in *Workers* seems more plausible when set alongside his own admission in a letter to his brother, Algernon, that he and Nell had been forced to leave Gower Place 'in consequence of some unpleasantness' (Mattheisen, Young and Coustillas 1990, 139). Booth's researchers, updating the original poverty survey in 1898, noted of Huntley Street: 'no prostitutes. In a working-class street like this the inhabitants won't let any prostitutes come, if they do, they complain to the agent at once and he turns them out' (Booth Online B355, 119).

University Street (also 'fairly comfortable' on Booth's map) features in *Workers* as the lodging of the dissolute Augustus Whiffle, a student, not at University College, but at King's, where he has been sent by his father to train for the Anglican ministry. Whiffle spends his time carousing with fellow members of the 'Eau de Vie' (the Young Men's Conversational Club) or looking out of his window at 'the streams of girls' leaving 'the work-rooms in which the neighbourhood abounds' and whistling to attract the attention of 'the prettiest that passed' (Gissing 1985, I, 299-300). By the time Gissing wrote his novel, the north side of University Street was dominated by Shoolbred's department store and its associated workshops, but numerous other manufacturers lined the street including tailors, bootmakers, a surgical bandage maker, upholsterer, dressmaker and piano maker (Post Office Directory 1882). Whiffle progresses from an on-off affair with Carrie to a liaison with Maud Waghorn, the well-off young wife of a dissolute middle-aged businessman resident in 'a stately house in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park'. When Maud leaves her husband after only six months, she

moves into 'a couple of modest rooms' in Gower Street ('middle-class' in Booth's classification) (Gissing 1985, II, 124, 376).

Bloomsbury recurs in two later 'slum novels', *Thyrza* and *The Nether World*. In the former, Gissing situates the bourgeois but cultured Walter Egremont in rooms in Great Russell Street, convenient for his unfulfilled aspirations to engage in serious research in the British Museum. Even after he has abandoned any pretensions to research, Egremont remains in Great Russell Street: 'He was indifferent as to where or how he lived: all he asked was the possibility of privacy. [...] This was a mere *pied à terre*; it housed his body and left his mind free' (Gissing 1984, 83). We get a similarly impressionistic description of Joseph and Clem Snowdon's rooms in *The Nether World*. Seeking a more pretentious address than their previous lodgings in Clerkenwell, the Snowdons move west to occupy the floor of a house in Burton Crescent, a street notorious for two unsolved murders in the late 1870s and early 1880s, which prompted the change of name to Cartwright Gardens.

The lodgings were taken furnished, and a bondmaid of the house did such work as was indispensable. Dirt and disorder were matters of indifference to the pair, who represented therein the large class occupying cheap London lodgings; an impure atmosphere, surroundings more or less squalid, constant bickering with the landlady, coarse usage of the servant (Gissing 1973, 259).

The Snowdons perfectly fitted the description contained in Booth's Police Notebook (1898): 'some questionable characters; houses let out in floors' (Booth Online B354, 75).

Gower Place reappeared in Gissing's later novel, *Eve's Ransom* (1895), again as a street where it was possible to obtain respectable lodgings, no doubt reflecting his second experience of living on the street – in 1882 – when he was able to afford three rooms in no. 15, on the south side of the street, from where he enjoyed a 'proper kitchen [...] *absolute* privacy' and a view 'onto one side of University College' (presumably over the top of the slum cottages in Little Gower Place) (Mattheisen, Young and Coustillas 1991, 54-5). In *Eve's Ransom*, Eve Madeley lives in a house with 'a clean doorstep and unusually bright windows', while Maurice Hilliard finds rooms to let just across the street, 'comfortless, but would suit his purpose for a time', his purpose being to observe Eve's comings and goings (Gissing 1929, 39, 41).

An even later venture into Bloomsbury occurs in *The Crown of Life* (1899), when Piers Otway receives a letter from his brother, Alexander, who 'wrote from the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury Square', actually from 'the top floor of a great old house in Theobald's Road'. An engaging, chaotic family occupy accommodation of like character: 'a large room, magnificently lighted by the sunshine, but very simply furnished. A small round table, two or three chairs and a piano were lost on the great floor, which had no carpeting, only a small Indian rug being displayed as a thing of beauty, in the very middle'. Alexander boasted no pictures, only 'strips of bright-coloured material [...] hung from the cornice', a 'handsome tea-service' of which 'every piece was chipped or cracked, and not one thoroughly clean', few books though he was well-read, and no spare bed, but offered Piers 'a shake-down here on the floor'. In sum, 'the appearance of the place suggested bachelor quarters'; in practice, Alexander was happily married with small children. Everything about the space confirms Alexander as an 'irregular' journalist, the nearest among all Gissing's Bloomsbury characters to what we might expect of a Bloomsbury resident (Gissing 1978, 46-8, 52).

For Gissing, locating his characters in real streets and districts was a stage in determining their status, their moral stance, how they might behave. Even if his readers – without the benefit of his topographical experience, and with no *A to Z* and no copy of Booth's maps immediately to hand – could not translate address into character, it was vital to Gissing that he created this corroborative

evidence. Focusing on suburban fiction, Gail Cunningham (2000, 64) concludes that Gissing's locations 'have a precision that informs meaning'. But, as the examples from Huntley Street and Gower Place indicate, Gissing was also interested in the relationship between nearby addresses, what could be observed of one place from another and how characters might move between them. In the final part of *Workers*, Gissing makes some revealing comments about his perceptions of location and privacy. After a spell apart, Arthur attempts to live with Carrie again. He deliberately chooses lodgings out of central London, in Hampstead, where he hopes she will be out of the way of temptation from her old haunts and her old friends. But Carrie soon succumbs again, prompting their landlady to evict them. Thereafter, 'Owing to her disreputable conduct, Arthur was compelled to change his abode repeatedly, coming at each time nearer to the town, for the sake of the increased privacy which – paradoxical as the assertion seems – a crowded neighbourhood secured for them'. Moreover, moving steadily downhill, from Hampstead to Highgate to Camden Town, brought Carrie physically ever closer to the temptations Arthur wished to avoid. Carrie soon strays back to Tottenham Court Road and 'the old sphere of licentious gaiety' (Gissing 1985, II, 397-8).

Spaces of meeting and journeying

Gissing's novels are full of carefully plotted journeys. In *Workers*, Arthur Golding and his friend, Mark Challenger, come across the destitute Carrie Mitchell outside the Prince of Wales's Theatre as they return to Gower Place from a Christmas Day visit to the sick John Pether, who had been Arthur's neighbour when he was an apprentice to a printer and printseller in Charlotte Place. Rather than follow the simplest possible route – along Goodge Street and up Tottenham Court Road – Gissing explains that 'They had taken a short cut which brought them into Tottenham Street.' Later, when Arthur is courting Carrie, he is careful not to meet her outside her own lodgings, but in the more private and secluded atmosphere of Torrington Square; and 'the stillness of the dull January afternoon' in an almost empty Torrington Square provides the setting for Arthur to propose marriage immediately they are reconciled after a quarrel (Gissing 1985, II, 83, 108).

The squares of Bloomsbury also punctuate developing relationships between Jasper Milvain and Amy Reardon in *New Grub Street* (1891) and between Eve and Hilliard in *Eve's Ransom*. Jasper and Amy bump into one another in Mudie's Circulating Library in New Oxford Street and he accompanies her back to the nearest Metropolitan Railway station (Gower Street, now Euston Square). As they pass through Bedford Square, Jasper tells Amy that he is 'practically' engaged to the worthy but much less exciting Marian Yule: 'Amy glanced at the trees, now almost bare of foliage; then her eyes met Jasper's, and she smiled significantly. "I should have thought your aim would have been far more ambitious," she said, with distinct utterance.' From there, up the length of Gower Street, 'they talked of several other things less personal', but 'by degrees' their conversation became 'now and then almost confidential' (Gissing 1968, 400-1). Eve and Hilliard take a more easterly, nighttime trajectory through Bloomsbury, from Holborn up Southampton Row 'neither speaking until they were within sight of Russell Square', where Hilliard confesses 'I like this part of London [...] I often walk about the squares late at night. It's quiet, and the trees make the air taste fresh.' Now, the renewed silence between them as they pass 'out of Russell into Woburn Square' takes on a different quality: 'Night was now darkening the latest tints of the sky, and the lamps shone golden against dusty green' (Gissing 1929, 82-3). The rhythm of the Bloomsbury townscape – from nature to culture, park square to terrace, quiet solitude to noisome traffic, moonlight to lamplight – is made for brief but profound encounter.

So are the less populated recesses of the British Museum, places where you could be private in public. When, in *The Nether World*, Bob Hewett, married to Pennyloaf Candy, bumps into Clem Peckover, married to Joseph Snowdon, one day on High Holborn, they adjourn to the museum:

'Ever been in that place?' Clem asked.

'Of course I have,' he replied, with his air of superiority.
'I haven't. Is there anything to pay? Let's go in for half an hour.'
[...] Much Clem cared for antiquities; when she had wearied herself in pretending interest, a seat in an unvisited corner gave her an opportunity for more congenial dialogue [...]
'Do you come here often?' she asked at length.
'Can't say I do.'
'Thought p'r'aps you brought Mrs. Pennyloaf. When'll you be here again?'
'Don't know,' Bob replied, fidgeting and looking to a distance.
'I shouldn't wonder if I'm here this day next week,' said Clem, after a pause. 'You can bring Pennyloaf if you like' (Gissing 1973, 220-1).

On one's own, by contrast, it is possible to be private almost anywhere. When, in the first edition of *The Unclassed* (1884), Waymark walks from Kennington to Regent's Park, his thoughts and actions en route play a critical role in exposing his emotions and identity, much as, in later, modernist novels such as *Mrs Dalloway*, we understand the characters through their walks and rides through the city. Leaving a restaurant on Tottenham Court Road, Waymark philosophised on the futility of urban life:

Again amid the crowd. All at once he found himself laughing aloud, and had to turn aside to a shop-window, lest he should attract attention. The idea was too absurd! What in the name of sense and reason did it mean, this hustling and bustling of the people on all sides, these grave-set, often fierce-set faces, this desperate seriousness in pursuit of a thousand conflicting ends? Among all these sweating millions not enough wit to perceive that it was themselves plying the whip upon their own backs; that with themselves lay the choice between this insensate rush and welter, and a calm pilgrimage from cradle to grave. [...] Our friend walked on, regarding all he passed with a good-humoured pity (Gissing 1884, I, 226-8).

Less internally revealing but equally complex journeys also feature in *Workers in the Dawn*. The urbane artist, Mr Gresham, happens upon Arthur's apprentice artwork in the window of Mr Tollady's shop in Charlotte Place while taking a perfectly logical 'short cut' out of Oxford Street by way of Rathbone Place on his way home from the Strand to the Regent's Park end of Portland Place. Mr Tollady, in his turn, takes Arthur on long Sunday afternoon walks which provide stimuli for discussing relevant aspects of London's politics and working-class history. Walking City-wards from Charlotte Place one Sunday, they cross Smithfield Market, pass along Little Britain, into Aldersgate Street, Barbican, Beech Street and so to the foot of Whitecross Street, which Tollady associates with the Debtor's Prison, but which offers Arthur the opportunity to introduce his employer to his own childhood in Adam & Eve Court. Finally, they exit into 'the more open neighbourhood of Old Street' before turning homewards: an all-too-believable field-trip route. Likewise, when Arthur was living in Chapel Street, near Edgware Road, but has lost his job and his lodgings and is contemplating suicide, he walks east along Marylebone Road, past the St Marylebone Workhouse which haunted Gissing throughout his London life, down Tottenham Court Road, deviating first to the east for a last look at Huntley Street, then to the west to pay his respects to Charlotte Place, and then a twenty-minutes sharp walk to the Strand and down the (unnamed) street in which his radical friend Will Noble lived, aiming for the Thames but unconsciously hoping that Noble would emerge from his lodgings at just the right moment to rescue him (Gissing 1985, I, 225, 159-64, II, 216-8).

The logic of all these journeys stands in stark contrast to the extreme coincidences and spatial improbabilities which accompany them: for one, Noble *does* open his front door just as Arthur is stumbling by! Escaping from the Sikes-like Bill Blatherwick, whose assistant in deception he has become, the juvenile Arthur is rescued from a Saffron Hill bar by Ned Quirk, a hot-potato man who has previously shown kindness to Arthur at his pitch at the corner of Old Street and City Road. What the 'strictly temperate' Quirk was doing in the vicinity of a Saffron Hill bar is not explained, nor does it seem likely that Quirk, who was a costermonger by day, would sell hot potatoes at night on Old Street when his home was in Little St Andrew Street (now the southern part of Monmouth Street, Seven Dials). But he facilitates the necessary shift in action from the Dickensian slums (Whitecross Street and Saffron Hill), of which Gissing probably had little personal experience, to the poorer parts of the West End of which he was more confident in his knowledge of local geography. Later in *Workers*, it turns out that Will Noble, who lives south of the Strand, is friendly with the Vennings, who live in the East End and who belong to the church whose minister has agreed to co-operate with Arthur's strictly secular childhood friend, Helen Norman, in her efforts to educate and relieve the suffering of poor East Enders. There is a strange disjuncture here. At this stage in his career, Gissing evidently knew little of the East End himself, and he implies that most middle-class people stayed in areas where they felt at home.⁴ Mr Gresham (West End) refers to the East End disparagingly and summarily as 'the Oriental regions' and 'the unknown regions of the East', but equally, Mr Heatherley (East End) confesses he is 'but little acquainted with the West End of London' and 'did not know Portland Place at all' (Gissing 1985, II, 40, 226, I, 263). Yet the plot of the novel depended on its working-class characters being comfortable everywhere, regularly moving between East End and West End. In theory, the rich, with the benefit of public and private transport, should be more mobile, and, of course, they are in terms of visits to Devon, Scarborough, Paris and the south of France. But the poor are free to range far and wide across London.

Conclusion

For Gissing, space was not only the object of production by architects, builders and the social imaginations and prejudices of his contemporaries, but it was also an active agent in the production of spatial practices, providing opportunities and constraints for his characters. Where other novelists described the locations and interiors of homes to establish the status of their inhabitants but paid less attention to *how* they were occupied, Gissing also set the spaces to work. Like Charles Booth, Gissing not only mapped London from above, but toured its intimate spaces; like his own characters, he displayed a 'ready knowledge of London transit' (Gissing 2000, 54); like an experienced estate agent he was alert to the potential and problems of every kind of property. For the urban historian or historical geographer this means we can 'use' his stories not only as sources of information on taken-for-granted activities unrecorded in conventional histories or as stimuli for investigating places and events that are mentioned in passing, but also as sources of insight into how space functioned in 'everyday life', how places were 'practised', both imaginatively and materially. Bloomsbury, seen from 'above', emerges as a kind of 'third London', to use the term Moretti employs in discussing Dickens's London, not only *between* East and West as in the bohemianism of Alexander Otway or the shabby respectability of Eve and Hilliard, but also as simultaneously East *and* West, a place that can be 'practised' or 'toured' as 'West End' by the Greshams, Egremont and Jasper Milvain or as 'East End' by Arthur, Carrie and her less respectable peers.

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⁴ Gissing first acknowledges spending time in 'the east-end' in a letter to his sister, Ellen, dated 27 February 1883 (Mattheisen, Young and Coustillas 1991, 121).

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