### From Hoxton to Holloway:

### Suburbanising North London in *Demos* and Beyond

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**1. Introduction: Beyond Clerkenwell**

In two earlier articles for *The Gissing Journal* I explored changing definitions of Lambeth in South London as they emerge in Gissing’s varied writings on different portions of it produced particularly in the late 1880s and early 1890s (Finch 2018a; Finch 2018b). Desk research and walks through the present-day London Borough of Lambeth put those writings into dialogue with what can be gathered about Lambeth in historical perspective. In a complex way, Lambeth has become both a local government territory extending well into outer suburbs, and a neighbourhood close to central London. As this fact demonstrates, multiple significations associated with individual urban place names can overlap or even exist distinct from one another. Literary authors frequently manipulate and adapt such complexities, and Gissing was a master of such practices.

Within London during its period of massive population and physical expansion from the seventeenth to mid-twentieth centuries, place names often shifted their coverage or were forgotten. There were also actual legal arguments over who a particular territory belonged to in governmental (as opposed to private property) terms, for example around Chancery Lane in the very centre of London. There, in the period 1760 to 1815, parochial authorities, the Cities of London and Westminster and extra-parochial bodies, notably the Inns of Court, struggled for jurisdiction (Boorman 2013). Between the 1860s and the 1880s, through newspaper journalism, Clerkenwell became synonymous with outdated and supposedly corrupt forms of local government, specifically the parish vestry whose members were an oligarchy of local businessmen (Owen 1982: 172–175). Writing in 1931, Harry Barnes made ‘The Clerkenwell Comedy’ of ‘houses crammed from cellar to attic’ with people exploited by ‘the farmer of houses’ symbolise the rotten housing conditions of Victorian London (Barnes 1931: 180–183). In fact, the scandals which besmirched the name of Clerkenwell between the 1850s and the 1880s were located in multiple parishes: St James’s, Clerkenwell and, to its east, the parish of St Luke’s, sometimes called ‘St Luke’s, Clerkenwell’ (Ibid., 173). The word ‘Clerkenwell’ labels a locality of historically varied extent and borders just north of the City of London. As the editors of the 2008 *Survey of London* volumes on Clerkenwell put it, moreover, twenty-first-century views of a renascent Clerkenwell as ‘a compact “urban village” just north of the City’ omit ‘most of the land-area belonging to the historic parish from its twelfth-century beginnings down to 1900’ (SoL 46: 3–27). Notably, they omit the northerly zone known as Pentonville which developed as a residential suburb on elevated ground in the early nineteenth century. At the time of Gissing’s *Demos*, the overlapping jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Board of Works and the civil parish put in place during the 1850s still applied. Two years after the 1886 publication of *Demos*, the London County Council (LCC) was authorised, then, in 1899, London County was divided into 28 Metropolitan Boroughs, the latter established by Conservative central government as a counterweight to the power of the Council (Porter [1994]: 406). In the process, Clerkenwell and St Luke’s lost any formal local government status, both becoming part of the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury, which was in turn incorporated into the London Borough of Islington in 1965.

Earlier accounts of Gissing and Clerkenwell have focused on *The Nether World*. Andrew Whitehead (2010) has written of this novel that it portrays ‘Clerkenwell as Hell’. As Whitehead (2011) elsewhere points out, Gissing uses the word ‘Clerkenwell’ more than seventy times in the course of *The Nether World*. *Demos*, published three years before *The Nether World*, covers territory physically close to that of the later novel – indeed, the climactic scene that leads to the death of its protagonist Richard Mutimer, a socialist leader, takes place on Clerkenwell Green (Gissing 2011: 439–448; numbers in brackets hereafter refer to this edition). Richard’s death, it bears observing, does not actually take place in Clerkenwell but is specified as being in a different local government district never actually named in the novel, St Luke’s (446). In the earlier novel, Gissing attempts no aesthetic transformation of that area that would give it a symbolic status. Such a transformation is one Gissing instead achieved three years after the publication of *Demos* in *The Nether World*. The inspiration, it would seem, was the sight of his first wife Nell’s corpse – in Lambeth, on 1 March 1888 – following which experience he announced in his diary that he would ‘never cease to bear testimony against the accursed social order that brings about things of this kind’ (Gissing 1978). If *The Nether World* is a novel depicting that ‘accursed social order’ as well as being ‘Gissing’s most sustained study of slum life’ (Keating 1979: 83), *Demos* is a political novel. But it is also a much more sophisticated work of literary topography, tracing modes of experiencing a radically expanding London, than has so far been recognised.

*Demos* contains scenes of political meetings on and around Clerkenwell Green in central or ‘old’ Clerkenwell (a key setting in *The Nether World*) but also numerous accounts of lodgings and housing in neighbourhoods in or bordering Clerkenwell. These lodging and housing arrangements are, in different ways, impermanent. They are based on rental agreements established quickly and equally liable to abandonment. Examples include the ‘one room only’ taken after an afternoon’s search by Emma Vine ‘in a woeful byway near Old Street’ when she discovers that the suddenly wealthy Mutimer has abandoned her (237). And they include the two rooms ‘at a lodging-house not far from the reservoir at the top of Pentonville Hill’ taken by Mutimer for himself and his wife Adela (who is distinguished from him by ‘[p]erhaps […] three generations’ of ‘gentility’) after losing his fortune (Ibid., 350). These neighbourhoods include Old Street, Pentonville, Highbury, Hoxton and a portion of southern Islington just north of the Regent’s Canal. Several were in local government districts adjacent to the parish of St James, Clerkenwell: Islington and Shoreditch, for instance. Rather than a strict dichotomy of nether and upper worlds, then, what Gissing presents in *Demos* comes closer to ‘London’s kaleidoscopic reality’ in the first half of the twentieth century with its suburbs of varying prosperity at different distances from the centre (White [2001]: 122). *Demos* is subtitled *A Story of English Socialism* and a further place dimension of the novel is the question of whether in it Gissing pillories the specific aspirations of the London working class, or attacks the hypocritical social climbing that for him characterizes English manners as a whole.

The historic centre of Clerkenwell is north and south of today’s Clerkenwell Road with Clerkenwell Green on one side of it. Clerkenwell grew beside the main northward road out of London (today St John Street) around the precincts of the medieval nunnery of St Mary and, immediately to its south, the Priory of the Order of St John of Jerusalem (SoL 46: 28–37, 115–141, citing Gissing’s account of the St John’s Square area in *The Nether World*). The area was bounded on the western side by the River Fleet. Between 1840 and 1880, two major roads were built through the area. Farringdon Road now ran north-south down the valley of the Fleet becoming a boundary that could only be crossed via a couple of streets which Gissing labelled a ‘tract of modern deformity’ in *The Nether World* (Gissing 1992: Ch. 31). Then, completed in 1878, Clerkenwell Road cut through. This was an east-west connection linking Old Street with Holborn and St Giles – an inner-ring northern bypass of the older congested east-west routes to its south (see Weller [1868]: sheets 30 and 31, showing the route of the new road just before its construction). By the late nineteenth century, Clerkenwell was one of London’s main industrial centres, ringing with the sounds of factories and transport related to their work. In 1898, London’s larger factories (defined as having over 100 workers) were massively concentrated in the area due north, north-west and west of the City of London (Clout 1991: 93). Clerkenwell in 1939 looked much as it had looked in Gissing’s lifetime (Porter [1994]: 393). And unlike the East End of London or the City, Clerkenwell was relatively untouched by either Second-World-War bombing or twentieth-century slum clearance. After all, some of its most notorious districts had been replaced by model dwellings, the modern mass housing of the era, in Gissing’s lifetime, as charted in *The Nether World*. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, its disused warehouses and factories filled with creative industry businesses: advertising agencies; web designers. But the idea of Clerkenwell as a particularly old, inner (or Dickensian) district remains. Indeed, such an idea seems important to the post-1980 reawakening of Clerkenwell, scripted as a long-forgotten yet surviving portion of old London.

But looking beyond Clerkenwell proper to a zone connecting it with Pentonville, Shoreditch, Hoxton and Islington reveals a much more varied and even confusing picture. As with the two earlier articles about Gissing’s Lambeth, the method used in preparing this one involves walking. In this case, I took a single walk on a Sunday in October 2019, from the City of London northwards to Wilton Square (N1) a key setting in *Demos*, then back from there crossing the Regent’s Canal and City Road to the former St Luke’s Church building on Old Street (EC1). On several previous occasions I had walked in old Clerkenwell, around Clerkenwell Green, St James’s Church and the remnants of the medieval Priory of St John south of Clerkenwell Road, and in the ancient streets connecting that village nucleus to Smithfield. On that October day I ignored this more obviously historic and distinguished area. Walking is an act of fieldwork long overlooked by literary scholars as a specific research method but now included in the methodologies of cultural geographers and urban historians: it brings about an appreciation of how our bodies relate to the physical world and how words themselves are embodied (Ameel et al. 2020: 13; Ward 2014: 761–62). Gissing himself walked London neighbourhoods before writing about them. By including walked fieldwork in the methodology, Gissing’s ‘art of writing place’ can be better appreciated (Ward 2014).

**2.** Ways of Viewing City Zones: Micro and Macro; Integrated and Dispersed

The present essay works to pinpoint sites named in *Demos*, reading the novel as a portrait of ‘English socialism’ based on a variegated sector of the metropolis with its own inner and outer zones, wealthier districts and slums. Scholarly accounts of how a particular city is represented in a particular novel sometimes use a single extended passage from the novel as the basis for an overall interpretation, even of the writer’s attitude as a whole. Jeremy Tambling (2009: 268; cf. Finch 2019a: 177–80), for example, contrasts Dickens’s walkable city with the more dispersed, geographically larger metropolis observed by Gissing via an account of a tram journey northwards from King’s Cross in *Thyrza*. Alternative approaches include the cartographic, in which the multiple city references of a text such as that of one of Gissing’s 1880s novels, absolutely brimming with the names of London streets and districts, are mapped and connected with characters’ movements. Working together with the Drawing Office of UCL’s Geography Department, Richard Dennis (2010a; 2010b; 2013) has produced maps of this sort for *Workers in the Dawn* and *Thyrza*. Some sites in *Demos* appear on a map of ‘The Other East End’ which Dennis created for a 2010 book chapter (Dennis 2010a: 39). I have elsewhere attempted a broader estimation of how the concept of the wider East End is logged in cultural representations over a 150-year span from the 1830s to the 1980s (Finch 2016: 153–72). This region is only mentioned a few times in *Demos*, in the location ‘in the remote East End’ of Manor Park Cemetery, which ‘gives sleeping places to the inhabitants of a vast district’ not far from ‘the dreary expanse of Wanstead Flats’ (233). There, Mutimer buys a burial plot for Emma Vine’s sister Jane, whose death is linked to Richard’s neglect of Emma. References to the East End in *Demos* cluster in the novel’s third and final volume (Dennis 2010a: 41). It is in ‘the East End’ that Richard plans to relaunch himself as a popular orator (398), his reputation in Hoxton and Islington having declined. Emma ends the novel living in an East End suburb on the western, London, side of the River Lea whereas Manor Park and Wanstead lie east of it, formally in Essex in 1886.

As Dennis (2013: 562–563) points out in mapping *Thyrza*, the young Gissing in his 1880s novels would often work with a structural contrast between an intimately local ‘world’ and a near-global range enjoyed and explored by moneyed characters. The later sort of large-scale mobility is important in Gissing’s 1890s accounts of the bourgeois existence, however treacherous and unstable, notably in *The Whirlpool*. *Thyrza* emphasizes both the micro-local and the macro-scale of intercontinental travel, the latter carried out by its moneyed, high-minded protagonist Walter Egremont. In contrast, a large-scale section of the world’s most populous city is indicated in *Demos*. Glimpses are gained of other London sectors and, in the countryside but dependent on a ‘region blasted with mine and factory and furnace’ some miles off (35), the fictional Wanley. In *Demos*, movement on a global scale is connected with the novel’s villain, the crooked financier Willis Rodman.

Gissing’s literary assembly of a city image involves a pile-up of toponyms and a sense of many different wealth levels while London, biggest of cities, lacks real qualities of difference within itself, being a mere monument to materialism and forgetfulness of human culture. His urban vision, then, makes the city not a place-world (or self-sustaining spatial environment) complete in itself, but a wrong turning or a parody of what human culture ought to be. In the year of Gissing’s death, by contrast, Georg Simmel pronounced the city something new but essentially complete in itself as a social world, embodying ‘specifically modern life’. Simmel’s, not Gissing’s, is the vision of the city that afterwards followed different routes in the twentieth-century thinking of Chicago School sociology and, in Europe, of Walter Benjamin (Simmel [1903]: 409). Gissing’s city is capacious. It includes areas that lack classically urban qualities, teeming neither with people nor with social variety – dull and repetitive streets of houses, often its comparatively decent areas (57). As Rebecca Hutcheon (2018: 4) notes, the metropolis is far from being the only category of place imagined in Gissing’s writing, and may even be overstated in post-1970s Gissing scholarship. This essay reads Gissing’s city fiction of the 1880s as part of the process of suburbanization of London and its surroundings in this era, amounting to a simultaneous expansion and questioning of the field of the urban or, in the terms of Henri Lefebvre ([1970]: 1–22), a shift ‘from the city to urban society’.

Lexical choices and arrangements of literary characters establish the social and mental span of this metropolis. Chapters 3–5 of *Demos* introduce the three Mutimer siblings, Richard and his younger brother and sister, who live with their widowed mother. The Mutimers occupy both physical borders and social ones. They are attracted by wealth and the possibility of ascending in rank, but the threat of poverty still haunts them. The adjective *extreme* and its derivatives appear numerous times in the novel, applied to the Mutimers as well as those socially above and below them. Threats to be ‘avoided’ (368, 385) – of public shame including scandal, or applications for parish assistance – are examples of ‘extremity’. Emma Vine’s sister Kate Clay, giving in to alcoholism, displays the signs of ‘extreme poverty’ (387). Richard is drawn to ‘the “extreme” school’ in his reading matter, ‘[s]ocial, political, religious’ and propounds ‘extreme politics’ (72, 383). Richard’s younger brother, when first introduced, dresses ‘in imitation of extreme fashions’ (70). All three of the Mutimer children are border-crossers. It might seem that Gissing is condemning their efforts to leave their social class: indeed, he prepares misfortunes and unpleasant surprises for all three (although Richard’s sister Alice, unlike her brothers, is permitted a happy ending). But perhaps they are simply representatives of their time as their parents, comfortable with artisan-class status, were with theirs. Within ‘a story of English socialism’ they are English modernity, a representative trio.

London literary topographies, efforts to write the city, have been produced via more and less theoretical approaches (Dart 2012; Groes 2011; Humpherys 2006; Wolfreys 2004). The time is now ripe for systematic assessments of how London literary topography should be organised. This essay proceeds with a three-part literary topography of suburbanising North London in Gissing’s 1880s fiction, focusing on *Demos*. First, several writers’ visions of a single area with a fairly rich literary history are reviewed. Then, at the heart of this essay, I investigate the North London toponyms of *Demos*. After that, some topographic sensings of the same zone gained by physical fieldwork and desk research enter the picture.

**3. Literary Clerkenwell: Dickens to Hollinghurst**

In the mixed zone focused on Clerkenwell he creates in *Demos*, Gissing produces an atypical representation of this particular urban region. The Clerkenwell of *The Nether World* reverses a tradition in depictions of Clerkenwell. In this tradition it appears as a picturesque urban village, albeit riven by commerce, industry and decay. In 1840, in *Barnaby Rudge*, Charles Dickens presented Clerkenwell as a simultaneously peripheral and integral part of London. In that novel of recent history he had introduced Clerkenwell as already ‘the venerable suburb—it was a suburb once’ at the time of the novel’s setting ‘six-and-sixty years ago’ in the 1770s (Dickens 1892: 29).

Although this part of town was then, as now, parcelled out in streets, and plentifully peopled, it wore a different aspect. There were gardens to many of the houses, and trees by the pavement side; with an air of freshness breathing up and down, which in these days would be sought in vain. Fields were nigh at hand, through which the New River took its winding course, and where there was merry haymaking in the summer time. Nature was not so far removed, or hard to get at, as in these days; and although there were busy trades in Clerkenwell, and working jewellers by scores, it was a purer place, with farm-houses nearer to it than many modern Londoners would readily believe, and lovers’ walks at no great distance, which turned into squalid courts, long before the lovers of this age were born, or, as the phrase goes, thought of. (Ibid., 30)

The plot of *Barnaby Rudge* involves numerous getaways through the narrow, labyrinthine streets of the city’s less fashionable quarters. Clerkenwell has an ambivalent identity within these action scenes, at once charming (as marked by the proximity of ‘[n]ature’ and ‘farm-houses’) and embedded in the most confusing urban growths. The central site in the Clerkenwell of *Barnaby Rudge* is the sign of the Golden Key, where Gabriel Varden heroically plies his trade as a locksmith. Close to the end of the novel, the narrative steers through ‘a wilderness of streets’ familiar, Dickens claims, to ‘everybody […] acquainted with the relative bearings of Clerkenwell and Whitechapel’ (Dickens 1892: 574).

Historic Clerkenwell, with its literary and architectural associations, is not absent from *The Nether World* (Hutcheon 2018: 63–107), but for Gissing in this novel no remnant of the picturesque remains in its present day. *The Nether World*, for example, contains the invented Shooters Gardens, focused on the ‘interesting house’ shared by ‘twenty-five persons, men, women and children’ including the ironically named Candy and Hope families (Gissing 1992: 249; Finch 2019a: 184–86). Even superior portions of Clerkenwell such as Wilmington Square, close to which the intelligent artisan protagonist Sidney Kirkwood lodges, lack appealing qualities.

Dickens’s emphasis on the picturesque in Clerkenwell in 1840 (looking back to the 1770s and beyond) bears comparison with post-World-War-One treatments blending this view with a contrary one, for example in the anti-slum campaigning journalism of Harry Barnes and the naturalist fiction of Arnold Bennett. The word ‘Clerkenwell’ functions in a mantra-like fashion throughout Bennett’s 1923 novel *Riceyman Steps*. The main setting of this novel is considerably to the north west of the old centre of Clerkenwell on stairs that are a public street (the *Steps* of the novel’s title), leading from the grinding traffic noise of the King’s Cross Road to a declined and cramped square, closely based on the real-life Granville Square. The area was, in effect, a suburb of Clerkenwell, developed by the 1840s on land long part of the parish but formerly covered in fields (SoL 47: 264–297). In the opening paragraph of *Riceyman Steps*, King’s Cross Road is identified as being ‘in the great metropolitan industrial district of Clerkenwell’ (Bennett [1923]: 1). This identifier might not make Clerkenwell sound very picturesque. But Henry Earlforward, the miserly book-dealer protagonist of Bennett’s novel, is a Clerkenwell patriot, raised in the area. He is anxious to show its medieval survivals – ‘the quarter of the great churches’ – to the woman he is courting (Ibid., 62). Myddelton Square in *Riceyman Steps* exemplifies ‘the more romantic leafy regions of Clerkenwell’ (Ibid., 176). In both novels, there is a sense completely lacking from *Demos*, of Clerkenwell as a world in itself, complete with its own higher and lower levels, while it might also be the complete reversal of another London: the upper world of ‘society’ and the West End.

At the end of the twentieth century the novelist Alan Hollinghurst continued these traditions but in travel writing not fiction. He presented himself as that characteristic London figure the intra-city commuter, resident in one district but knowing another intimately by travelling to it and working there every day. Clerkenwell, after all, had long been an employment centre for Londoners living elsewhere, especially northwards. In an essay contrasting his adoptive hometown London with Houston, Texas, Hollinghurst (1999) identified the blend of past, present and future within a tight, walkable urbanity as characteristic of the former city, in contrast with the very different North American mode represented by the latter. He called the piece ‘From Hampstead to Houston’. A London of Hampstead on the heights, with Clerkenwell and Camden below, is very much one Gissing would have recognised. In Houston, awareness of ‘different types of ruin’ and what it means to be a boomtown, brings to mind Clerkenwell for Hollinghurst (199, 165). Clerkenwell, for him, does not surround a priory or even an east-west road cutting through it, but the north-south axis of the mid-Victorian Farringdon Road and Metropolitan Railway, ‘clustered around a deep railway cutting halfway between the City and West End’. Hollinghurst notes the arrival of expensive restaurants and laments the demolition of a vast warehouse made picturesque (‘Piranesian’) by age, together with a ‘small-scale Victorian commercial building’ which in this view seems to have character – in contrast with the ‘anonymous’ (but equally commercial) architecture that replaces it. Clearly neither Gissing nor Bennett would have found anything aesthetically pleasing about the buildings mourned by Hollinghurst. Dickens in *Barnaby Rudge*, meanwhile, wrote about an era before those buildings were even built, but precision metal trades animated his Clerkenwell, too, with his locksmith character a forerunner of Hollinghurst’s ‘watchmenders’.

In fact, while Dickens was referring to what was built up in 1780, therefore the oldest portions of Clerkenwell near its churches, Bennett and Hollinghurst both mean somewhere broader and more personally defined. Bennett’s Earlforward is technically a resident of the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury in an era when Clerkenwell no longer has any formal existence. Hollinghurst places Clerkenwell on either side of the chasm of the Fleet River, which once formed its western boundary, and so includes within it portions of what was formerly Holborn (and is now the London Borough of Camden) in it.

### 4. A Varied and Expansive Zone: North London in *Demos*

Listing the inner North London toponyms of *Demos* makes the novel’s true character apparent. It is a broad portrait of a large and varied segment of London and (what in the twentieth century became) inner suburbs. This contrasts with earlier views of *Demos* as either splenetic (‘reeking of hatred for the working class’, in one assessment) or justifiable in its response to the masses in industrialised late Victorian England and their growing importance in politics after the Second Reform Act of 1867 (Kermode 1983; Coustillas 2011: 5). The main London zone of *Demos* ranges socially from Hoxton upwards towards the zone where Richard initially imagines living when he inherits money, because it is the most desirable suburb in the sector he knows personally: ‘somewhere out Green Lanes way, or in Highbury or Holloway’ (77). Hoxton is here not an underclass zone as in the twentieth-century memoir written by A. S. Jasper (1969), who was a youth a generation after *Demos* was published, but centrally and solidly working-class. Other London localities are glimpsed briefly in *Demos*, for example St John’s Wood, where the radical gentleman Westlake lives (82), flashier and less respectable but still socially desirable Bayswater (293) and, less well-favoured, Brixton and the East End (398, 420, 459). There is also the out-of-London England of the Midlands countryside at Wanley.

While there are 75 instances of ‘Clerkenwell’ as a word in *The Nether World*, in *Demos* there are only sixteen. Meanwhile, the four place names ‘Highbury’, ‘Hoxton’, ‘Islington’ and ‘Pentonville’ appear between them 54 times in *Demos*. A number of streets in the St Luke’s area are mentioned once: Old Street, City Road, Goswell Road. The picture of London northwards from the City is thus multipolar, and not based on a single place name as in *The Nether World* and *Riceyman Step*s. Working through the places and place names of North London in turn, examining how they appear in *Demos*, enables the suburbanising moves scripted by the novel to be traced. The next section examines the main toponyms in turn. Pentonville, taking in land both north and south of Pentonville Road (including the building of the Angel, Islington) was technically part of St James, Clerkenwell when *Demos* was written (SoL 47: xxii), while Highbury and Holloway, mentioned separately in the section that follows, were northern suburbs of Islington. Clerkenwell and Islington as local government areas in the 1880s had their own urban and suburban portions, so were not divisible into ‘Inner London’ and ‘Outer London’ as became usual during the twentieth century and official after 1965 with the formation of Greater London.

The word ‘Clerkenwell’ makes its first appearances in Chapter 17 of *Demos*, and then as part of the name of Clerkenwell Green. This open space, surrounded by streets of factories and workshops, was used for large political meetings throughout the nineteenth century, including by the Chartists in 1842 and the Reform League in 1866 (White [2007]: 365, 371). A few months after the publication of *Demos*, in February 1887, ‘a meeting and torchlit procession’ took place there on the anniversary of the huge socialist demonstration of the previous year in Trafalgar Square leaving ‘shop windows [smashed] from Clerkenwell Green to Goswell Road’ (Ibid., 381). The chapter begins with the emergence of a rival to Richard Mutimer for the allegiance of ‘the Socialists of that region’, Mutimer having left the area for the Midlands after housing his mother and siblings in the local gold (highest-level) region: Highbury. These rivals, led by a man Gissing calls ‘Comrade Roodhouse’, arrange meetings on Clerkenwell Green (238–239). Clerkenwell is the focus of inner North London political activities again in Chapter 31 when we hear that Richard, after returning to London and taking lodgings at Pentonville, ‘succeeded in forming a new branch of the Union in Clerkenwell, and by contributing half the rent obtained a room for meetings. In this branch he was King Mutimer.’ Then, in Chapters 34 and 35, uses of the word ‘Clerkenwell’ and the phrase ‘Clerkenwell Green’ all relate to Richard’s political agitation which leads to his death. ‘Clerkenwell’ as an entity related to radical politics is thus kept strictly separate from other place names (including ‘Pentonville’), some of which denote territory that was in the Parish of Clerkenwell in 1886, prior to the formation of Finsbury Metropolitan Borough. Clerkenwell is above all associated with the word ‘meeting’. A look at the map indicates Clerkenwell as the place through which people heading from Shoreditch, Dalston, Hoxton or Islington towards the West End would naturally move: it is a node of the region.

Hoxton is mentioned 25 times in *Demos*, frequently paired with Islington either in a way that brings the two together or that contrasts them. After two opening chapters indicating the genteel Midlands environs of Wanley, where the proceeds of industry are spent, Chapter 3 is the first London-set chapter of *Demos*. It opens with an extended description of the area either side of the Regent’s Canal, Islington to the north and Hoxton to the south, as a division within plebeian London. The identification of the key London setting as the ‘borderland between Hoxton and Islington’ and the political body Richard leads being ‘the Hoxton and Islington branch of the Union’ serve not to distinguish the neighbourhoods from one another but to bring them together (56, 87). Grouped like this, ‘Hoxton and Islington’ become a metonym for plebeian London, as emerges in Richard’s rabble-rousing oratory and in his thoughts after he leaves London for Wanley (92, 115). Together, in classic Gissing terms, they equal public houses, greed, exploitation, and an absence of thought or culture.

Of the two, Hoxton and Islington, the former stands more for industrialised work, drinking and residential squalor: it is the more urban portion, in other words. In Chapter 9, Richard walks half a mile from the house in Highbury he has taken for his mother, sister and brother, hails a hansom cab and rides in it to the vicinity of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, walking from there ‘by foul streets’ to a pub run by the brother of his henchman Daniel Dabbs (138). In the 1880s, the Britannia was Hoxton’s most famous landmark, seating four to five thousand people and employing its own full-time company of actors (White [2007]: 276). Hoxton itself was not noted for skilled trades – ‘the cunning fingers and the contriving brain’, to borrow Gissing’s phrase from *The Nether World* for central Clerkenwell (Gissing 1992: 11) – but for casual labour, including at City Road Basin, the dock on the Regent’s Canal located just outside Hoxton in the City Road West ward of St Luke’s (LMA: 30444). When Gissing wrote *Demos*, Hoxton had begun gaining a reputation as a den of thieves, (Ibid., 332–334, 343–344). During the first half of the twentieth century, when inner London saw a massive exodus of skilled working-class people, Hoxton had as bad a reputation as any London district, one hinted at in the title and contents of Jasper’s memoir of childhood and youth there either side of the First World War, *A Hoxton Childhood* (1969). In *Demos*, senses of Hoxton griminess colour Emma in popular repute when the scandal of ‘Richard and the obscure work-girl in Hoxton’ breaks (292). They also suggest that the ‘ironmonger’s shop in Hoxton’ where Richard’s wastrel younger brother Harry (always styled ‘’Arry’ in the text) is apprenticed as his last chance is low down on the scale of London businesses (403). While Hoxton never becomes ’Oxton, it does stand for the lower sections of the urban world in ‘Richard’s avoidance of his Hoxton friends’ after inheriting money (249). The Hoxton of *Demos* is neither a micro-locality as the Lambeth of *Thyrza* is (Finch 2018a: 7 – 8; Finch 2018b: 28) and nor is it a vision of hell transferred to contemporary London as Whitehead correctly identifies the inner Clerkenwell of *The Nether World* to be. Instead, the Hoxton of *Demos* stands for the unrelievedly plebeian – it contains the ‘Mean Streets’ which Arthur Morrison in the 1890s would later put in the East End as a whole, as opposed to the totally other and alien streets of the city’s most extreme slums, like Morrison’s Jago.

Compared to Hoxton, Islington is the suburban or suburbanising side of the ‘dun borderland’ around the canal, the grimly respectable side. Gissing expresses this view of it, combined with the pairing of the two districts already mentioned, in scene-setting depth at the opening of Chapter 3 of *Demos*, a passage that will be discussed separately below. Most of the mentions of Islington after that are in the pairing ‘Hoxton and Islington’, while the fact that the respectable still-outer-London suburbs of Highbury and Holloway were technically part of Islington’s very large civil parish (as was the northern strip of Pentonville) is left out. Hoxton (formally in Shoreditch, which in 1900 became a metropolitan borough itself) and Islington have never been in the same local government area. But Hoxton and southern or central Islington share a postcode: N1 since 1917. They are in a sense North London while Clerkenwell and St Luke’s are East Central, a subtle but important distinction. ‘Hoxton and Islington’ is thus a largish unit of lower London in *Demos*, and a kind of microcosm of working-class England, considering that the novel’s full title is *Demos: A Story of English Socialism*. Whitehead (2019a) has noted, as a negative, the limited nature of the portrait of locality in *Demos* compared with those of Clerkenwell and surroundings in *The Nether World*, and of Lambeth in *Thyrza*. But the somewhat schematic place description of *Demos* and its focus on the (largely negative) character of the London masses instead of on topographies perhaps derives from Gissing’s effort to make this novel model the negative effect of the materialistic and uncultured English environment on the doctrines of socialism, imported from the Continent. The word to emphasize in the subtitle is thus not ‘socialism’ but ‘English’.

An individual address in Islington, Wilton Square, is mentioned more times than Islington itself in *Demos*, nineteen overall. This is the ‘certain square on the borders of Hoxton and Islington, within scent of the Regent’s Canal’, where Richard was raised (115). Here, ‘within scent’ emphasizes the square’s pretensions: since you can smell the canal from there, it cannot be genteel. Portions of Islington slightly further west, close to where Gissing actually lodged in 1879 to 1880, get a comparable treatment in *The Nether World*: outside the abyss but on its edge, to paraphrase Forster in *Howards End*. Wilton Square was (and still is) ‘an irregular triangle’ containing houses ‘of one storey, with kitchen windows looking upon small areas; the front door is reached by an ascent of five steps’ (56, 57). The technique involves precision about minute distinctions of location and architecture. Wilton Square is identified as being ‘[o]n the dun borderland of Islington and Hoxton, in a corner made by the intersection of the New North Road and the Regent’s Canal’ (56). In Gissing’s account, it is notable for having in its centre ‘an amorphous structure, which on examination proves to be a very ugly house and a still uglier Baptist chapel built back to back’ (56–57). There is a small anticipation of *The Nether World*’s fuller aesthetic transformation of the inner city into hell in the quotation from Dante’s *Purgatorio* used to joke about the canal ‘*maladetta e sventurata fossa*—stagnating in utter foulness between coal-wharfs and builders’ yards’. The canal, Gissing claims, is a firm dividing line between two socially distinct neighbourhoods, working-class Hoxton to its south, ‘everywhere toil in its most degrading forms’ whereas

[w]alking northwards, the explorer finds himself in freer air, amid broader ways, in a district of dwelling-houses only; the roads seem abandoned to milkmen, cat’s meat vendors and costermongers. Here will be found streets in which every window has its card advertising lodgings; others claim a higher respectability, the houses retreating behind patches of garden-ground, and occasionally showing plastered pillars and a balcony. The change is from undisguised struggle for subsistence to mean and spirit-broken leisure; hither retreat the better-paid of the great slave-army when they are free to eat and sleep. To walk about a neighbourhood such as this is the dreariest exercise to which man can betake himself; the heart is crushed by uniformity of decent squalor; one remembers that each of these dead-faced houses, often each separate blind window, represents a ‘home,’ and the associations of the word whisper blind decay. (57)

Wilton Square is placed ‘on the north side of the foss, on the edge of the quieter district’. With characteristic irony, Gissing suggests that the ‘uniformity’ of the semi-respectable district is worse than places where the ‘struggle for subsistence’ is ‘undisguised’. The point is to emphasize the economic range within an urban immensity governed by a single – inhumane – economic system.

Throughout *Demos* the Wilton Square house where the widowed Mrs Mutimer and her three adult children live at the beginning of the novel, is a kind of touchstone of ordinariness for the class Gissing labels the ‘mechanic’ class. Daniel Dabbs, for instance, is ‘in most things a typical English mechanic’ (383). When Richard gets into a jealous rage with Adela she feels he speaks ‘like any London mechanic, with defect and excess of aspirates, with neglect of g’s at the end of words’ (365). The Mutimers reside at Wilton Square because of the labour of Richard’s father Joseph, a ‘harmless necessary artisan’ who ‘earned a living by dint of incessant labour, brought up his family in an orderly way, and departed with a certain sense of satisfaction at having fulfilled obvious duties’ (57). The move to Highbury when Richard inherits a fortune from his namesake great-uncle, a Midlands industrialist, is a move towards instability for Mrs Mutimer who is never comfortable in the upscale suburb. When the Mutimers go to Highbury, the Wilton Square house becomes home to Emma Vine and her sisters. For them, this move is an ascent from rooms in Hoxton, but they affect the local social tone themselves by adding ‘a notice in the window that dress-making and millinery were carried on within’ (141). Mrs Mutimer is ‘constantly’ drawn back to Wilton Square to visit the Vines then, as it were finding her own level, moves back there after Emma rejects Richard’s patronage, his social-climbing marriage to Adela having become known (204, 240–241).

The most impoverished parts of London mentioned in *Demos* all lie in what, until 1900, was the civil parish of St Luke’s – or to give it the official name it bears on an 1855 map made in the year the Metropolitan Board of Works was established, Saint Luke Middlesex (LMA: 30444). They are not in London’s Northern postal district, but its East-Central one, although they lie due north of the City of London. Gissing deliberately labels such distinctions not just by naming neighbourhoods and prominent streets, but by including a postal code. When, staying at Wanley, Alice Mutimer spots a letter addressed to ‘Mrs Mutimer’, in other words Adela, newly married to Alice’s brother, she recognises the handwriting of Kate Clay and confirms her suspicion by inspecting the envelope: ‘The Post-Mark? Yes, it Wwas London, E.C.’ (276). The actual name of St Luke’s does not appear in *Demos*. Instead, Gissing alludes to it via street names, mostly those of the area’s thoroughfares (through which middle-class readers would typically have passed in hansoms or on omnibuses, making the roads known to them if the intricate local government details were not). St Luke’s is the area where the lowest and most extreme slums are situated in Gissing’s *Workers in the Dawn*. The plot of Gissing’s debut novel spirals outwards from Adam and Eve Court, off Whitecross Street, as Dennis (2010b) has charted. It lies immediately to the east of old Clerkenwell, the hellishly extreme slum area of *The Nether World*.

The thoroughfares spanning or bordering St Luke’s include Old Street, the City Road, and Goswell Road. The first of these receives one mention, in Chapter 16, after Richard has jilted Emma:

In the afternoon Emma went forth to fulfil her intention of finding lodgings. She avoided the neighbourhood in which she had formerly lived, and after long search discovered what she wanted in a woeful byway near Old Street. It was one room only, but larger than she had hoped to come upon; fortunately her own furniture had been preserved, and would now suffice. (237)

From there she walks to Highbury where she leaves the key to Wilton Square – demonstration enough that this is a single sector. The City Road, next, is the section of the New Road, London’s eighteenth-century bypass, dividing St Luke’s and Clerkenwell proper to the south from Hoxton and Islington to the north. It is mentioned once in *Demos*, as the place where Emma and her sister move after leaving the ‘woeful byway’: ‘The sisters were now living in a street crossing the angle between Goswell Road and the City Road.’ (389). This is a distance northwards from Old Street, close to the Angel with the suburbs of Highbury and Holloway off beyond that, and thus could seem an improvement. Although Edwin Reardon in *New Grub Street* moves to a ‘slum’ in Islington after the collapse of his marriage (Gissing 2003: 244; cf. Finch 2015: 56–62), in *Demos* Islington stands for a rung up the London ladder from Hoxton and two from the (unnamed) civil parish of St Luke’s. After being attacked by the mob on Clerkenwell Green, Gissing specifies that it is in this precise house, about twelve minutes’ walk away, that Richard is able to take refuge when Emma sees him after he is ‘swept away from the Green’ by the crowd (444). Mutimer is then killed by a chunk of rock ‘hurled with deadly force and precision’ when leaning out of an upper-storey sash window at this house (446). We know the house to be located east of Goswell Road because it fits into ‘the angle between’ there and City Road. Therefore it is technically in St. Luke’s, not Clerkenwell, even though Gissing identifies the site of the death as ‘the Clerkenwell room’ (449; for an 1855 map, LMA: 30444). It might be that the house where Emma and her sister are living is in one of the streets north of Lever Street (today in EC1) such as Hall Street, Moreland Street or Rahere Street. The atmosphere of the house is conjured by relations of sound between its rooms and the street (448), something Gissing also does powerfully in the Lambeth dwelling of the Trent sisters in *Thyrza*.

Next, let us survey the more suburban regions of the pre-1900 civil parishes of Clerkenwell and Islington. Most of Pentonville, as stated already, was technically part of Clerkenwell when Gissing wrote. Today, with its N1 postcode and the incorporation of the LCC-era borough of Finsbury in the post-1965 London Borough of Islington, Pentonville is typically regarded as a south-western section of Islington. It receives six mentions in *Demos*, the first in Chapter 26: ‘Adela found herself alighting at a lodging-house not far from the reservoir at the top of Pentonville Hill. Mutimer had taken these rooms a week ago’ (350–351). Alice calls ‘living in two furnished rooms’ there a ‘nice come-down for my lady’ – meaning Adela, and indicating the marginality of the area and mode of living to 1880s London gentility (353). The position of these lodgings on ‘Pentonville Hill’ is again affirmed when Richard returns on foot and by omnibus and hansom from Bayswater where Alice lives when married (363). Later, Alice and her husband move to Wimbledon, far out in the south-western suburbs and in a completely different sector of the metropolis from that where Alice’s roots are (399). As elsewhere in Gissing and later in Forster’s *Howards End*, the getting of money is linked to acts of displacement from locality and shifts towards nomadism (Finch 2011: 259–271); Alice is left in the house by her disreputable husband, knowing no one locally. Pentonville, for its part, is an area of ‘cheap furnished lodgings’ (351). This was a quintessentially middle-class London suburb in the early nineteenth century, on heights to which people formerly resident in Holborn or Bloomsbury might move. By the 1880s, on the evidence of *Demos*, it had become what twentieth-century cities would label a twilight zone. Acquisition of money once more makes Richard restless and he moves Adela to Holloway – an appropriately in-between area considering their uncertain social status (396). Pentonville then disappears.

Highbury receives twelve mentions, all connected with ‘the house at Highbury’ to which the Mutimers minus Richard are ‘removed from Wilton Square’ after he inherits the money (127). The contrast between this northern portion of Islington and the southern parts is not emphasized: instead, the toponym serves to mark the desirable. Considering other treatments in texts of the 1880s and 1890s, Highbury is where Josh Perrott, the protagonist’s father in Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago* (1896), goes burgling from his slum home 2.5 miles south east of it (Morrison 2012: 114). Charles Booth’s 1890s poverty maps show Highbury New Park and a few roads of houses near it as the only gold streets north of the river and east of Bloomsbury (Booth [1898–1899]). The house they move to is described (129), and it is clearly not the very grandest sort of Highbury house: ‘It was a semi-detached villa, stuccoed, bow-windowed, of two storeys, standing pleasantly on a wide road skirted by similar dwellings, and with a row of acacias in front’. The Mutimers’ house is large enough to be called ‘the big house in Highbury’ by Kate Clay (277), but she comes from poverty in Hoxton. Not very many Highbury houses surviving into the twenty-first century fit the house’s description: most are of more than two storeys whether they are grand villas (detached or semi-detached) for example on Highbury New Park, or terraces on more cramped streets to the west towards Highbury Corner. Nor are many stuccoed, although there is perhaps evidence supporting a position for the house which Richard takes closer to Canonbury station or even to the east near Barnsbury Square. Highbury New Park, a middle-class suburban development of the 1850s, did contain some two storey stuccoed residences, but ‘bow-windowed’ sounds like a house from another Victorian decade (Hinchcliffe 1981: 34 Plate IIA). Earlier, in *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing had chosen Highbury as the location of a privileged character’s home that is nevertheless still in the same geographical orbit as the slums of St Luke’s – in this instance the philanthropic intellectual heroine Helen Norman.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The other northern suburb of Islington, less socially elevated and still further north from Clerkenwell and Hoxton, is Holloway. It gets ten mentions in *Demos*. After inheriting money Richard considers living there then settles on Highbury (77). The other nine mentions are all towards the end of *Demos*. At the beginning of Chapter 32 Richard, now in coin again, leaves the Pentonville lodgings, moving Adela and himself to ‘a house in Holloway, the rent twenty-eight pounds, the situation convenient for his purposes’ (396). By the time of the First World War, Holloway contained some of North London’s most notorious streets. Their decline had begun in the 1870s, well before the publication of *Demos* – indeed, it was almost immediate for streets that were too close to railways and which failed to find respectable tenants when built (White [1986]: 12–13). By the time the Mutimers move there, Holloway had ‘lost its edge-of-town character’, becoming ‘an unexceptional London suburb’ of the Victorian sort (Ibid., 8–9).

Finally, to turn back to what was once the whole of London, let us consider the City. With no article and uncapitalized, there are 27 uses of the word *city* in *Demos*. Capitalized and with article ‘the’, there are seven. A core complexity in London urbanity consists of relations between the City of London and the metropolis or urban area of London. The City Corporation was the historical government of London and even a rival to the Crown in the region around London. By the late nineteenth century it was ‘an institution dedicated to fighting change’ which had ‘rejected its suburbs’ and now contained a negligible proportion of London’s population – at least as residents (Porter [1994]: 295). *Demos*’s sector of London looks towards the City more than towards the West End. Four chapters from the novel’s end, out of work before getting his last chance at the ironmongers’, ’Arry passes his time by ‘loafing about the streets of Hoxton and the City’. ’Arry is perhaps doomed by his effort to act like a West End man about town when, Gissing announces, he was among ‘the sons of mechanics […] ruined morally by being taught to consider themselves above manual labour’ (400). It is not in the West End, though, but while hanging around the streets and pubs of ‘Hoxton and the City’ that ’Arry establishes himself as ‘the aristocrat of rowdyism’ (401) – in other words gets himself a following among yobs and drunks. Perhaps the location of his loafing leads to his downfall in that, being apprenticed to a Hoxton ironmonger rather than, say, to one in Holloway, these bad influences track him down (he is caught stealing from the till). Richard, in other words, sends ’Arry back to the city (not in but next to the City of London), rather than rescuing him from it.

Otherwise, the City is a place of work which seems to be far from honest toil. At the start of *Demos*, the young Alice Mutimer is employed in ‘the show-rooms of a City warehouse’ no doubt on account of her physical attractiveness. The family having come into money she later marries the dubious Rodman, who is linked to ‘the City’ (356, 399). In the last stages of his own vanity-driven career of utter failure, ’Arry Mutimer accosts Rodman on the streets of the City in the hope of getting a handout (423). The place where money for capitalism is raised, the City of London ultimately becomes directly linked to financial crimes of deception, like the one in which Richard Mutimer is embroiled by Rodman (432), as on a larger scale it would be in Gissing’s later novel of the corrupt above-ground, not nether, world, *The Whirlpool*. In the City, its characteristics spreading throughout the city, swindlers find their eager victims among the greedy.

### 5. Walks and Photographs around Hoxton, 1945–2019

Here I follow somewhat in the footsteps of Whitehead who, ‘[o]n a sunny weekend afternoon’ (Whitehead 2013: 19), perhaps in the early 2010s, took a walk through ‘[t]oday’s “Nether World”’ which he appended to his account of Gissing’s 1889 novel. Whitehead seems to have begun in the centre of old Clerkenwell at St John’s Square, then headed north via Clerkenwell Close and the nineteenth-century social housing built to replace declined earlier tenements as documented by Gissing there. Reaching Exmouth Market, part-way through gentrification when Whitehead visited, he turned back south again to Farringdon Road, the first main slum-clearance artery of the area, built over the old Fleet River.

As in Lambeth, I chronicled the walk with photographs collected afterwards in an online album (Finch 2019b). I walked on the afternoon and early evening of Sunday 20 October 2019, from Bank Station northwards to the Regent’s Canal via the Old Street Roundabout, now associated with tech businesses, commemorated in the new street name of Silicon Way (Finch 2019b: DSC\_0186–0203, DSC\_0207). Next I progressed up East Street and New North Road where much Victorian housing once stood, little now remaining, and much twentieth-century social housing stands, some looking decayed (Ibid., DSC\_0209–0230, DSC\_0236–0237). Then I crossed the lively canal surrounded by bright colour to Wilton Square (Ibid., DSC\_0231–0234, DSC\_0239–0252), still cramped but the houses now prosperous and gentrified. After this, I went westwards along the canal to Shepherdess Walk (Ibid., DSC\_0268–0284), south to the City Road meeting it by the famous Eagle pub (Ibid., DSC\_0285–0290). On the wall in Shepherdess Place due south of the Eagle – historically in Hoxton – two boundary markers survive, dating from 1864 and 1893 and indicating the northern border of the Parish of St Luke, Middlesex (Ibid., DSC\_0287–0288). As the autumn afternoon light faded, the route led southwards from there through the centre of St Luke’s past Finsbury Baths and the former St Luke’s Church (Ibid., DSC\_0295–310), crossing Old Street to Whitecross Street, totemic slum area of Gissing’s *Workers in the Dawn*. Finally, I reached Barbican Station via the Golden Lane Estate. This walk was entirely to the east of the actual borders of Clerkenwell, the eastern border of which is the line of Aldersgate Street and Goswell Road, running up to Angel (SoL 46: xxii).

The walk and the pictures taken on it can join Gissing’s *Demos* as evidence of the ‘dun borderland between Hoxton and Islington’. Another exhibit is a group of images of the area, chiefly from the period between the 1950s and the 1970s, displayed on the London Metropolitan Archives’ online picture library *Collage*. The area on Old Street, far from the image of ‘Silicon Roundabout’ is the most declined and low-status portion of North London indicated in *Demos*. Emma goes there when she has nothing. In 1974, decades after World War Two, Old Street and the junction of Helmet Row next to the former St Luke’s Church building (closed by the Church of England in 1959) contained derelict buildings and suggestions of the 1880s atmosphere Gissing feels no need to conjure in narrating Emma’s move, letting the toponym ‘Old Street’ do the talking (LMA: 61354).

On the walk, several details of the area partly preserving its qualities as an urban place in Gissing’s time and in intervening stages stood out. Methodists connected with the Leys School in Cambridge established the Leysian Mission in Whitecross Street, St Luke’s, the same year *Demos* was published. It moved to a purpose-built grand redbrick building in 1902. The impressive building still stands and with its original name in terracotta lettering (Finch 2019b: DSC\_0193), although the Leysian Mission merged with the nearby Wesley’s Chapel in 1989. The rainbow-striped pedestrian crossing near the former Leysian Mission building represents the post-1990 revival hereabouts (Ibid., DSC\_0197). Many carriageways intersect here, still, but the shift in emphasis towards cyclists and pedestrians visible in 2019 through publicly displayed maps and signage (DSC\_0186–0192), create an atmosphere very different from that choked by lorries as recorded in 1961 before the roundabout was built (LMA: 63362). The Hoxton portion of New North Road and the area on either side of the canal display recent changes that are even more pronounced. In southern New North Road during the 1970s there were still large Victorian terraced houses seemingly in the last stages of decay. Viewing a 1976 photograph of the houses, it is hard to believe that 37–41 New North Road survived that decade, let alone would still stand forty-plus years on, but they do (LMA Collage 119081). This was the section of New North Road, presumably, where A. S. Jasper and his family lived some sixty years before this photograph was taken. North of the canal, in Islington proper (postcode N1), in Arlington Square and surroundings, public gardens are now beautifully conserved indications of the area’s transition from early-stage gentrifying semi-bohemia in the 1960s and 1970s to high-value property on the international market now (Finch 2019b: DSC\_0264–0266). Securitised new residential squares and warehouses renovated into new commercial expanses have appeared in the twenty-first century both north and south of the Regent’s Canal near the northern end of Shepherdess Walk (Finch 2019b: DSC\_0267, 0283). Yet on Shepherdess Walk a curve of perhaps 1850s terracing indicates the long-held shabbiness of the area (Finch 2019b: DSC\_0274–0279). Here, surprisingly little seems to have changed since 1967 (LMA: 114265), despite the immensely increased financial value of both residential and commercial property in the area. Old sash windows, not unlike the one out of which Richard Mutimer is leaning when killed, are still intact. These seem houses still let to students or social tenants rather than owned by bankers or tech businesspeople.

### 6. Conclusion: Boarders and Borders in a Polycentric London

*The Nether World* does stage the suburbanising move of Sidney Kirkwood from Clerkenwell at the beginning of the novel to Crouch End, another mile north of Holloway, at its end. But the urban world of *The Nether World* is for the most part claustrophobically that of Clerkenwell Close, the knot of streets just north of Clerkenwell Green. *Demos*, in contrast, charts a wide-ranging urban zone containing levels from the most degraded in London (never so epitomised or rhetorically dramatized as in the 1889 novel) through various working-class strata to a level in which newcomers to the city take lodgings in rooms of houses where they could enjoy a pseudo-rich sort of existence. Maps reveal that this zone contains Wilton Square at a point approximately equidistant between the slums south of Old Street to the south and Highbury New Park to the north. It is a zone that people leave when they become established whether in the countryside, at Bayswater – or at Bow Road, in a more respectable portion of East London, where Emma ends up, maintaining ‘that serenity which comes of duties honestly performed and a life tolerably free from sordid anxiety’ (459). Clerkenwell in *Demos* is one centre in a polycentric London. It is the capital of the London which Richard Mutimer knows, London sectors and districts being notoriously alien and even hostile to each other. This makes it appropriate as the site of Richard’s violent death at the hands of the mob he once led.

Clerkenwell is an area with a fairly rich literary history, as the survey of Dickens, Bennett, and Hollinghurst above shows, and its status in *The Nether World* as a modern hell is well established. But this broader imaginative place zone, to use the terminology of Deep Locational Criticism (Finch 2016) is far less well known. The careful deployment of toponyms – the names of streets and districts – was central to Gissing’s literary reworking of the city he inhabited during the 1880s. His main effort in *Demos*, however, was not to represent the city, but to dramatise the operation of socialism in the context of the English class system – materialistic and hypocritical, as he saw it. Two novels written in quick succession, *Demos* and *Thyrza*, follow a practice he began in *Workers in the Dawn*, of representing England as a whole by oscillating between a largely plebeian London and an out-of-London setting where leisured and genteel characters are central. In the early 1890s, he would blur and modify the opposition in the town and country oscillations of *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile*.

The London of *Demos* reaches beyond the sector in focus here, not least in urban moves through western and south-western districts connected with Rodman, who is gradually exposed as a swindler and bigamist. Rodman himself is linked to international, even global, movements of people and capital. He keeps Alice at Bayswater (‘her more fashionable quarter’ in comparison to Wilton Square) and later Wimbledon, then is forced to house the wife, Clara, and son he earlier abandoned in New York at a house in Brixton, Clara having spotted him in the drinking den where she works as a barmaid (356, 419). Alice and Clara’s moves across a broader metropolis happen by ‘omnibus’ and ‘tramway’ (356, 427), which indicates the growing public transport network of the 1880s as another structuring system alongside the suburbanising move outwards in a given direction typified in the Hoxton to Holloway sector on which this article has concentrated. It is an omnibus, too, which takes Adela to visit Emma in the ‘far East End’ at the very end of *Demos*, taking yet another direction on the metropolitan clock face (459).

Hoxton and Islington are areas with less well-established histories as parts of mythic London than Clerkenwell has. Both experienced a startling social ascent – from notoriety in one case, obscurity in the other – beginning in the last decades of the twentieth century. Gissing uses them as zones typifying instability. This relates to a recent history pointing at an uncertain future, in the 1880s, in which the status of Highbury remained at stake – as it filled with smaller houses and gained some wealthy Jewish inhabitants in its larger, earlier streets (Hinchcliffe 1981: 44 fn. 41). As a novel of large-scale displacement, affecting almost every character contained in its complex plot, *Demos* is a forerunner of Gissing’s later novel of advanced – or decadent – financialization and globalization, *The Whirlpool*. Finally, far from being a kind of para-source for urban historians, urban histories must investigate human imaginaries of the sorts that literary texts propose and reveal.

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1. I am grateful to Richard Dennis and Tanis Hinchcliffe for their expertise and for the time both spent thinking on my behalf about where in Highbury or neighbouring sections of Islington the Mutimers’ house could seem to be. Gissing’s Highbury merits further investigation. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)