

HENRY WILLIAMSON: THE EARLY "CHRONICLE" AND THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY

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THIS ESSAY EXAMINES the opening volumes of Henry Williamson's *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* from the point of view of the author's literary treatment of the relationship between the London suburb and its adjacent countryside. It is well known that the opening volumes - *The Dark Lantern*, *Donkey Boy* and *Young Phillip Maddison* - are autobiographical and mainly intended as an accurate record, based on childhood memories or on journals. Nowhere else does Williamson put history, psychology and topography into such close connection. Roger Mortimore has explained that the aim of the *Chronicle* 'is to analyse one European family to show how lovelessness, the estrangement produced by industrial civilisation, leads to war' and he has also noted that the three volumes being considered here are 'an amazingly rich evocation of London in the Eighteen Nineties that invites comparison with Dickens'. (1) Mortimore's appreciation of the *Chronicle* as a whole also draws out Williamson's disgust at the waste of human life under self-seeking capitalism that was the fate of much of the generation of Londoners nurtured in the 1890s, social evils arising directly from the disproportionate growth of London, which brought concomitant difficulties both to working-class Londoners and to the depopulated countryside. This essay attempts to explore more fully Williamson's literary treatment of these subjects in relation to the first three volumes of the *Chronicle* and also to set them as a wider context within which the novels can be better understood.

Williamson's work takes us to the heart of the theme of the townsman and the country. Before the late nineteenth century town and country had existed in perfect equilibrium. Then towns and cities gained the upper hand, 'so assured and even surfeited of conquest' that they could take the country back on terms, in the shape of suburbs and garden cities. As for Victorian London, this grew with the help of railways into the biggest and wealthiest metropolis in the world. This rapid and exaggerated urbanisation created great conflicts and tensions in the minds of city dwellers. Arthur McDowall has brilliantly summed them up in *Nature and Men*: '...the leaves and flowers and clear air; the unbuilt country beyond, are the savour of his existence: and yet he flutters like a moth to the lights and warmth of the city. He leans to the first and would be lost without the other. Of this internecine conflict he is hardly aware, pleasing himself rather with a sense that he has the best of both worlds. Yet he knows, feeling it in his bones and having it indeed constantly rubbed into him, that this 'best' is no the essence of either; what he has got is just his queer, bivalvular, experience. His fate is to be divided and uprooted; and to the last he will be a stranger to the other two races of men, hugging the secret of his origin very closely lest it put him to an open shame.' (2)

Henry Williamson was aware of this 'internecine conflict'. In the earlier novels of the *Chronicle* series it is a central theme. Indeed, as a writer on the 'condition of England' theme and also concerned with the human values arising from the displacement of handicrafts by the machine, Williamson's particular literary contribution is his identification with the social problems in the wealthiest of the world's cities, presented not simply as a story but as a chapter of his family history.

Williamson's recalled sensations of Richard and Phillip Maddison and the extracts from the journals of Phillip's grandfather in the twenty-ninth chapter of *The Dark Lantern* contain the essence of his political ideas. One entry from the journal reads:

From the land which is the mother of the race go the children to the towns, with their cheap food, foreign product of peasants paid but a few pence a week to produce that food, which is bought by the financiers of the city of London, who virtually control the economies of these foreign countries, for their own profit. These financiers also control the exports of our factories in which the rosy-faced countryman has gone, in a few years to lose his health and his stability of living, which before was balanced in natural work upon the soil.

A generation later the pallid workers in the slums have lost the true virtue of living, and the grime of their foetid surroundings has penetrated their very minds, with their faces turned from the sun, and their bodies become as unwholesome as the bleached white bread deprived of all goodness of the wheat berry. A cancer of untruth eats into the minds of the pallid-faced townsman before the physical cancer absorbs what is left of his bodily living...

The sinister migration from the land to the towns, this spoilation of the true wealth of the nation, which is the health and strength of its people and the fertility of its mother soil, where will it end?...When will a prophet arise to lead the people back to their natural heritage, before the nation shall perish even as ancient Rome? (3)

Roger Mortimore has asked: "It would be fascinating to discover whether such a journal existed or whether it was concocted by Williamson, from borrowings from Richard Jefferies". (4) This question deserves some consideration. Let us deal first with Jefferies. It is well known that discovering Richard Jefferies' work at the age of twenty-three after horrifying experiences at the Front during the First World War was one of the great turning points in Williamson's life. Now Jefferies' attitude to London is one of ambivalence, as it is in so many aspects of his relationships. He was, as Keith has remarked, an appreciator of the city, witness Samuel J. Looker's *Richard Jefferies' London*. (5) In Jefferies' *Nature near London* (1883) we find him seeing two sides of London. He was extremely sensitive to the qualities of the suburban landscape as he perceived it from his residence at Surbiton. One of the messages of his book to Londoners is that there is still a wealth of unappreciated, accessible countryside awaiting enjoyment on London's doorstep. 'Fields came up to his front door. Nearby were woodlands in which nightingales sang. There was farmland, the Hogsmill stream, heaths, commons, parks, and the Thames, perhaps to remind him of Coate Water...' (6) Jefferies himself remarks that his preconceptions as to the amount of wildlife then existing within twelve miles of Central London 'were quite overthrown by the presence of as much bird-life as I had been accustomed to in distant fields and woods'. Yet Jefferies also noted the baleful effect of the penumbra of London, 'the unseen influence of mighty London'. 'The strong life of the vast city magnetized me, and I felt it under the calm oaks. The something wanting in the fields was the absolute quiet, peace and rest which dwells in the meadows and under the trees and on the hilltops in the country.' (7)

For a violent reaction to the urban evils of London as Jefferies felt them one turns, of course, to his *After London* (1885), published within a year or so of his death. In this strange book there is no lucid, rational case against contemporary London such as we find in Maddison's journal, though in an allegorical form Jefferies' dislike of 'villadom' and all it stood for is readily apparent. Jefferies' notebooks, containing much unpublished material, reveal his changing attitude to London. His earliest entries relating to holidays at Sydenham with his

relatives, are enthusiastically receptive to the excitement and re-invigoration he experienced, though the later ones mock the smug, narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy and stuffiness of that inner London suburb. (8) More of Jefferies' reflections on London are contained in his manuscript headed 'London: notes and reflections'. He regarded 'the immense city, more than a great country itself', piled up brick by brick, not as a great human achievement but, conversely, one suggesting 'almost unlimited possibilities of improvement'. Parts of the city excited him with their sense of mystery and charm such as Bermondsey, with its red tiles and chimneys framing masts suggestive of 'much sailing to and fro upon the sea'. Invariably, however, Jefferies is wearied and saddened by the fatuity and blindness of the human society created within the enormous commercial and industrial city. (9) Unlike Conrad, whose imagination was quickened by the immense possibilities London afforded for story-telling - '...room enough there to place any story, depth enough there for any passion, variety enough there for any setting, darkness enough to bury five millions of lives...' (10) - Jefferies was left with a sense of despair and disappointment at modern life in the ultimate British city, convinced that the deeper and better elements of the human soul were not expressed there. How unsatisfying London was to Jefferies is summed up in this representative thought: 'It is important to see more of man than appears in London. Here is charm - any person you meet in the street may have come from the ends of the earth... In a provincial city, in Paris...you sense that there is something beyond, a place where more of man may yet be seen, that you have not seen, some mystery of life remains unexplained. But in London you sense you can go no further...' (11)

Can Williamson be said to have 'borrowed' from Jefferies? The answer appears to be, not directly. That Williamson shared the enthusiasms and dislikes of Jefferies is common knowledge. To that extent he may be said to have drawn upon his inspiration when writing the earlier volumes of the *Chronicle*. Nowhere in Jefferies' work, however, is there a succinct account of political and social views on the lines of the ideas Williamson expresses in *The Dark Lantern*. To trace the identification between Henry Williamson's thoughts on urban civilisation of the 1890s and that of contemporary opinion, we have to look elsewhere.

The kernel of Williamson's political philosophy introduced through the device of the Maddison family journal is as radical and humanist in general outlook as that of the group of avant-garde writers absorbed in the social and political problems towards the end of the nineteenth century that clustered around the figure of Charles F.G. Masterman (d. 1927). Masterman has been aptly described as a 'man of amazing promise and half-fulfilment, half man of letters, half politician, torn between the ideal of service and plagued by a restless imagination'. (12) After a distinguished university career at Cambridge, Masterman went to live in the slums of Camberwell to found the Cambridge University Settlement and to study the lives of the poor. He became the centre of a remarkable group of young friends, all of whom were involved with him in his London work, and with whom he retained a lifelong connection. They included the historian G.M. Trevelyan, the journalist (but also brilliant author of the best and most reliable history of England from 1870) R.C.K. Ensor, and the future left-wing politicians Charles Trevelyan, Noel Buxton and F.W. Pethwick-Lawrence, each of whom held office in Labour administrations. Also included in the Masterman circle was Reginald Bray, who led an equally distinguished life on the local rather than the national stage, and to most readers will doubtless be an obscure and shadowy figure, but as a young man wrote books such as *The Town Child* (1907) which contain precepts similar to those held later by Williamson. This interesting group of *fin de siècle* writers anticipate twentieth century sensibility and problems and are amongst the first to deal in an analytical and historically conscious fashion with social and environmental issues. (13)

To Masterman, one of the greatest social evils of the day was the disproportionate growth of London, then the greatest city on earth, created by free trade.(14)

He identified the amorphous, chaotic, coagulating inner suburban ring of labouring poor dwelling in their infinite hopelessness amongst the gin palaces of ghettos which had sucked in people from the surrounding districts, as London's most characteristic product. His picture of their monotonous daily lives, their long journey to work, the wolfed-up meals, 'the engine-like activity and moroseness even of pleasure', in short the bleakness and futility of human life in block buildings at places such as Southwark, Lambeth, Camberwell, Deptford and parts of Wandsworth, is sketched in vivid but unexaggerated phrases. Quite apart from the appalling social problems of these gigantic dormitories, Masterman was concerned with the 'awful barrier' which had been created between the urban and rural communities in and around London. He perceived London's lop-sided and monstrous growth as a 'menacing congestion' overshadowing what remained of Surrey's countryside, known only to its inmates when they came from the slums in nomadic hordes to 'blink in dull wonder' on Kent and Surrey farms when they harvested crops on lands where cattle had taken the place of men. How to reveal to these 'townees' their countryside heritage when it was threatened with the relentless march of their buildings was regarded by the Masterman group as not the least of their problems.

Masterman also outlined vividly the relationship of this 'ghetto-belt' to the other social districts of London, extending in a series of ever widening concentric rings or belts like the layers of an onion. The innermost belt was the City of London itself, 'spinning the financial web of the world'. To the west lay the squares and parks of the West End. Wrapping round both these inner rings like a gigantic vice with huge blunt arms was the ghetto belt, described previously, dubbed 'the abyss' and posing the riddle as to how to transform the lives of its stunted, narrow-chested, bow-legged, easily wearied but voluble and excitable inhabitants.

On the outer margin of the ghetto belt the texture of streets opened out and neighbourhoods became cleaner and brighter. Houses were small but were bow-windowed. Children played indoors, not in the streets. The population was clad sombrely in black and attended church on Sundays. This was Clerkdom, the preserve of Dulwich, Forest Hill, Clapham, Hornsey and Haringay. Beyond this again, occupying the higher and healthier heights, was Villadom, a belt of detached houses in substantial grounds symbolised by Sydenham, Upper Norwood and parts of Camberwell, the cultural headquarters of London in the 1860s and 1870s. Horse-drawn carriages came daily out of trim lodge gates, taking wealthy businessmen to the railway station en route to a counting house under the soot-laden pall of London. Armies of servants, tradesmen, coachmen, crunchy gravel drives, laurel and geraniums characterised this belt. Symbolising Victorian attitudes of mind in Villadom is Hilaire Belloc's *Emmanuel Burden*. For a vivid evocation of the lower middle class in Clerkdom there is no better example than Williamson's in *The Dark Lantern* or *Donkey Boy*.

Encircling this belt was a sixth ring, not considered by Masterman, but an integral part of London, the so-called 'World of Nature' or 'London's Countryside'. Parts free of bricks were etherealised by landscape artists such as John Linnell, Helen Allingham, Birkett Foster. It was still a working landscape in part; for example, the herb gardens of Mitcham which figure in *Donkey Boy* or the flower and vegetable grounds of West Middlesex, covered with sheets of glass. Between Surrey and Kent, where the shape of the land was pleasantly diversified, this 'working' landscape had been steadily re-shaped with pleasure farms, private parks, wild gardens and arboreta, pheasant shoots, a contrived artificial landscape tributary to country houses, *fermes ornees* and ornamental cottages. Around railway stations 'squadrons of villas' were being pegged out and land was selling at what were fabulous prices.

This social dissection of London at the turn of the twentieth century was the

basis of the progressive and radical approach to social justice and human rights held by Masterman and fellow contributors to such books as *The Heart of the Empire* (1901), *The Abyss* (1902), *England: a Nation* (1904), *The Condition of England* (1909). The political philosophy of the Masterman group was developed further in such journals as *The Independent Review*, whose editorial board included Masterman and reflected the changing social conditions and outlook of *fin de siècle* writers. Masterman emerged as a politician, to hold office in the Liberal administrations before the First World War, an anti-imperialist, anti-Free Trader, dedicated to the revival of British agriculture on the basis of 'peasant' farms and small-holdings, in the conviction that the English 'peasantry' cherished values which were permanently sound. He had an enduring vision of the heights and depths which human nature can attain and is one of the prophets who has never been accorded proper honour in the England he loved and which, in a delayed fashion, he helped to re-shape.

The nobly-fashioned extracts from the journals of Phillip Maddison's grandfather in the twenty-ninth chapter of *The Dark Lantern* fire off aphoristic arrows in all directions but they all land on Masterman's targets. The cherished ideals of the Maddison family and what may be called the democratic socialism of persons like Masterman and his circle are broadly identical. The views of Phillip's grandfather on matters of agricultural and social policy, and his progressive outlook on society in general, leave no doubt that he saw with the same shining clarity as Masterman the forces changing his world. To take but a single example of Masterman's philosophy, his remarks on a suburb thinly disguised as Richmond, will serve to illustrate the connection between him and Williamson: "But for the railway Richford would never have existed. But for Free Trade in commerce and industry that made London the centre of world trade, no Richfords would ever have existed at all. Every morning, that terrific progeny of Free Trade, the city of London, sucks in from all the Richfords overcrowded trainloads leaving rapidly one after another, of respectably dingily garbed human beings..." (15)

Williamson realised that the cause of Londoners' craving for the countryside lay deeper than the immediate urge to escape from the world of mechanical man with its polluted air, noises, speed and turmoil: it was a desire to reach down for security to those basic instincts that lie under the great weight of a super-imposed civilisation. All writers, in a sense, are made by their times, and Williamson was no exception. He became heir to the growing consciousness during the late nineteenth century that Britain had a remarkable heritage of landscape. The works of nature had undergone so complete and subtle a process of adaptation at the hand of man as to be as much the creation of Englishmen's handiwork as of geological elements and other physical conditions. The village fields were seen to bear witness to an uninterrupted rural civilisation without parallel in western Europe and it became accepted that what rendered the English plain more beautiful than corresponding scenery in France and Germany was the detail in the form of fine timbered hedges, copses and other woodland masses, the small fields, scrupulously clean husbandry and old buildings appropriate to their surroundings which covered the broad lines and profiles of the land. Some of these useful gains in insight were attributable to railway travel. Looking restfully at landscape as it swirled past a carriage window brought many surprises and introduced the traveller to the regional variety of the English landscape, now fast fading, which is still its most conspicuous individuality. Travellers by the Southampton railway, for example, were astonished to find themselves 'whirling through miles of desert' within an hour's distance of London. Those heading for the Midlands were intrigued and baffled by the widespread imprint of fossilised plough-marks on pasture. Really observant gazers from windows even anticipated Hooper's now famous hypothesis about the connection between the floristic composition of a hedgerow and its age, for it was noted that in the south the old hedges attained

their richest development and that 'as we work up through the Midlands, the hedges, though still large, and ubiquitous, get simpler; they have not the same slowly acquired wealth of composition'. (16)

From the 1870s explorers engaged in a direct observation of landscape, either for scientific or aesthetic purposes, greatly multiplied, and added many fresh perceptions to our vision. People became conscious that they were mass-producing an urban environment which was destroying the local-mined manner of building as well as older structure. This led to the founding in 1879 of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings by William Morris, under the inspiration of Ruskin, the Arts and Crafts Movement, the setting up of the National Trust (1895), such bodies as the National Photographic Record, which aimed to record buildings before destruction, as well as the recording of nature sites of scientific interest. It was a self-conscious age, aware that it was breaking with its past, intent, just as is our own, on what seemed worth recording before it vanished.

Such developments at the turn of the century arose from a characteristic that distinguishes all the comfortably-off late Victorians, a predilection for the open air and the idealisation of country life. The continual noise and movement of London and big cities left people mentally and physically exhausted and in need of exercise, or relaxation, or simply a change of scene. The search for fresh air by city-bound merchants, industrialists and writers to revive flagging spirits became almost a national passion. Little wonder that writers wrote of the poisoning and blighting effects of town air and celebrated the south-west wind in prose and verse as the Victorian life-giver 'with a sentiment akin to a religious devotion', since it was the only wind not charged with soot. Williamson's own reference to smoke drifting from factories 'slowly poisoning the leaves' of an oak in *Young Phillip Maddison*, the foetid smells greeting the Norwich traveller at the entrance to Liverpool Street Station, and the stinging dew on the tram driver's eyelids in *The Dark Lantern*, are themselves some of the most vivid evocations of polluted air in the English language.

The poisoned air of Victorian cities heightened the value placed on fresh country air. Thus John St Loe Strachey, the editor of *The Spectator* could speak of the almost mountain air' of Newland's Corner near Guildford, a beauty spot hardly reaching 400 ft above sea-level, (17) and to many wealthy Londoners the countryside which had become a thing to live for was the Surrey and Berkshire Commons, 'pine-country', with which was associated purity and sweetness of air. The cramped and dirty surroundings of cities and large towns sustained an exaggerated love of open landscapes such as downs and heaths where in the long, fine stretches of uninterrupted countryside one had an exhilarating sense of freedom in countryside which one could go over and picnic on at will, without the presence of a single hedge or a notice saving 'Private'. Such countryside became the favourite walking grounds of the long-distance ramblers and some enjoyed the walks so much that they built houses, seeking advice on an architect from the editor of *Country Life*, who would invariably suggest, in order of preference, Edwin Lutyens, Oliver Hill and Guy Dawber, Philip Webb having retired from practice in 1900. From the West End, and such places as Highbury, Stoke Newington and Sydenham, urban dwellers were brought into touch with the delightful range of woodland and heather-clad hills of mid-Surrey and they wanted to share in its beautiful and healthy environment as a refuge from noise, smoke and worries. Much of this landscape is now planted with conifers. Many regret that 'the wind in the heath' is not an enjoyment we still possess.

The fashion for outdoor recreation in the form of long-distance walking, rock-climbing and, at the turn of the century, golf, or for more serious pursuits such as geologising or botanising, together with the effects of the heat and smell of Victorian cities in warm weather, created the habit of renting a cottage as a

holiday residence. Many Londoners came to live a double-life, spending part of the year in a town house and moving out to a cottage or farmhouse for the other (and, of course, often wintering in Italy in addition). Everyone who could afford it left the cities for a period in summer and became what the native villagers called 'comers and goers'. Books such as J.W. Robertson Scott's *How to build or buy a country cottage and fit it up* became best-sellers. Businessmen, industrialists, politicians found the heat and continual noise of London getting on their nerves. Particularly sensitive persons like writers may have started the fashion for a seasonal country home. As early as the 1880s one of the outstanding novelists of the late Victorian period, Mrs Humphrey Ward, for example, regularly moved down into the Godalming district of Surrey in summer and wrote there much of her most famous novel *Robert Elsmere*. Soon after, the Webbs were saying that they could not write in London. (19) Although within thirty miles of London, such country districts were then utterly remote from London life, at least they were perceived so by tired refugees from the city. John St Loe Strachey wrote of his summer home at Newland's Corner: 'No one who knows the two roads over the hill today (1922) can have the slightest idea of what a desolate spot Newlands Corner was in the year 1890. There was no post, there was no water; there was no noise of any sort'. (18) J.W. Mackail, the first biographer of William Morris, vacated his home in Kensington and rented Barford near Churt in Surrey during the summer of 1901 and advised a prospective visitor from London: "You don't bicycle, I think? That is, of course, the easiest way of getting here. Otherwise a fly from Farnham is the only means other than Shanks mare. There is a carrier who can take a bag. He only goes on Tuesdays and Fridays." (20) Earlier still, Carlyle had ridden down into Sussex after a period of severe mental strain in London. He wandered through the 'Norman Conqueror's country', green chalk hills, pleasant villages, 'good people', seeing them as images of timelessness. The experience was a complete revelation to him. 'It is all in my preternatural sleepless mood like a country of miracle to me. A sense of magic, of enchantment, hangs over the whole history. The world of Nature is everywhere charged with glamour, silence and appeals which awaken emotion beyond the power of words.' (21)

Artists too forsook their London studios, gave up historical painting, and buried themselves in fir-covered hills, or remote downland, or in fishing villages, to paint *plein-air*. (22) Many of them interpreted the countryside for the benefit of the suburban patron, whose knowledge of the countryside was limited to experience gained on short holidays. Helen Allingham and Birkett Foster, both resident at Witley in Surrey, fall into this category. They saw the countryside, like their patrons, as a playground. Yet 'playground' is the last word one would have associated with the life of country people. In their art we never see the darker side of country life - its drudgery, the insanitary cottages, the struggle with the heavy clay or the hungry sand. Nature is shown in its happiest moods and most pleasant array, tinged with the romanticism of the resident of Kensington or Sydenham who bought the watercolours. If some of their cottages suggested destitution, they heavily disguised them with roses. Conversely, John Linnell saw Surrey as larger than life: its hillsides become steep mountain slopes; its copses and woods wild to the point of savageness; its skies threatening; its peasants, as if to match nature, titans. In its different response, more challenging than soothing to Victorian minds, this was also a reaction by a townsman to the contrasts between the human construction surrounding man in London and its encircling countryside.

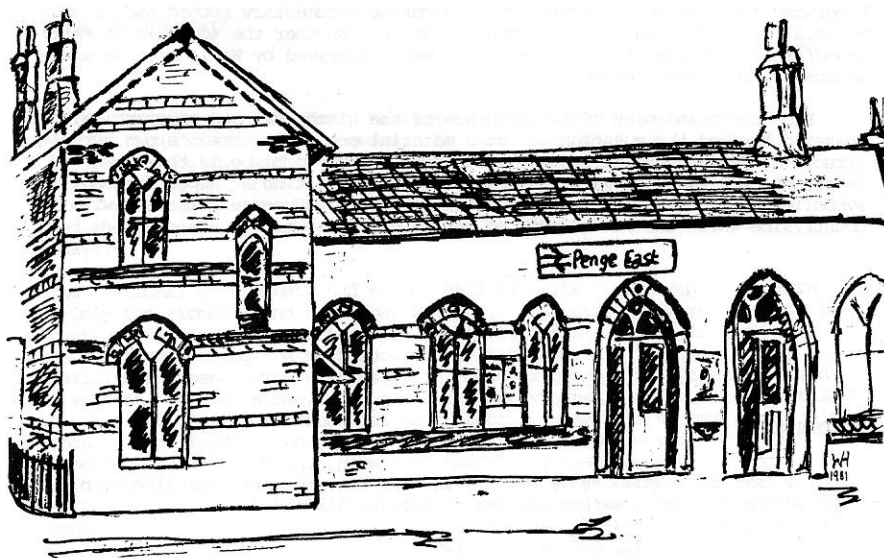
The invention of the safety cycle in 1894 - recalling Richard Maddison's Stanley Rover in *The Dark Lantern* - had quite momentous consequences for recreation. Seemingly the whole world was a wheel by the end of the decade, exploring what was then a strange and half-forgotten rural landscape. Mass visiting by cyclists using the public roads restored some of their former glory. A generation of city clerks and shopmen thronging the trams and third class gas-lit waiting rooms on railway

stations on week-days spent Sundays learning to read landscape through the eye, helped by the shortening of working hours. H.G. Wells exquisitely caught the new fashion in *Wheels of Chance* (1896) with the young linen-draper Mr Hoopdriver, who sets off astride his temperamental machine, dressed in his new brown cycling suit, to explore the wider world of villages and market towns opening up before him along the Ripley road. Countless readers of Wells' book must have been induced by the inspired Putney shop assistant to learn similarly through the eye, and, following his example, to become 'a bit of a drawer' of buildings and scenery. In this manner the safety cyclists discovered London's countryside, including many villages set in a variously charming countryside and now famed for beautiful buildings grouping delightfully together, preserving traditions in local architecture, but which at that time were known only to artists. The Surrey village of Shere is an example. Perhaps it is a pardonable exaggeration to say that cycling did more than anything else before to make known to ordinary Englishmen the ordinary English landscape.

As Brocard Sewell has remarked, Henry Williamson's mind mirrored the issues and inconsistencies of a civilisation in conflict. (23) This is very true in respect of the uneasy modern relationships between the country and the city. In his profoundly personal documentary of the *Chronicle* Williamson brings into sharp perspective the stark conflicts and tensions arising between town and country in and around London at the turn of this century. The rape of the country by the town and the sense of dislocation that results; the unstable human associations within urban society; the living variety of the city and its interactions; the real and the imagined countryside are all alike brought into focus as they become the background to events in his family story.

These themes can be illustrated readily by way of example, from *Donkey Boy*. Throughout it there runs a strong vein of anger and disgust at the irresponsibility and vested interest with which the south London scene was being spoiled by the jerry-builder. The story of the spoilation of the Hill itself takes on the qualities of a saga. It serves to give a concreteness to the violently disturbed stream of human life which was making up modern London. At such times in human history man reached a stage of civilisation when a knowledge of his origins and an attempt to re-identify himself with them becomes an emotional and intellectual need. Williamson's account of the geological and archaeological societies and their search for the visible remains of the past, people's delight in them and their urge to discover their meaning before they vanish under the bricks and roads is very well brought out: '...very soon the gravel pits, the ditches, the water-courses of the district will have disappeared. So we must to work to make our records for those who are to come after us, before all is covered by bricks and mortar'. One of the most memorable chapters is of the London fog and Williamson's sensibility to Victorian London's man-made climate in the form of the hot, dry smells of summer, the stinging, soot-laden rime, and the meteorological effects of smoke are amongst the most evocative in literary history. Finally, Williamson repeatedly communicates the subtle relationship between the Maddisons and the rural environment.

Inevitably, 'the magical mirror of retrospective memory' that is Williamson's primary means of recreating the past, raises questions of its accuracy. Keith has asked to what extent the literature of the countryside represents a genuine historical situation. (24) In the context of Williamson's first three volumes of the *Chronicle*, sufficient has been demonstrated here to prove that the author's realisation of the political, economic and social problems of the period with which he deals has the ring of truth. Everything we actually hear said and that actually happened, we can be sure existed very much in contemporary people's lives. Through the medium of Williamson's recollections and the journals we can as readers share with him in the identification with people and events at the turn of the last



(Drawing by Will Harris)

The suburban railway station painted by Pissarro in 1871 was formerly identified as Penge, but is now thought to be Lordship Lane. Penge East, shown here, is a particularly fine example of Victorian suburban railway architecture, and it looks as pleasing and friendly a gateway to the railway network as it must have done to nineteenth century Londoners seeking the peace and quiet of the nearby countryside.

century which could not have been so intimately achieved in any other way. The comprehensive use of available evidence Williamson introduces by his methods into biography deserves to be treated as an accurate documentary record and as such is material for historical and geographical study. Whether the journals of Phillip's grandfather ever existed in actuality or were conceived by Williamson as a conscious art form must remain in doubt.

From the standpoint of the accuracy of the historical and geographical processes described the question is not a material one. Williamson's own verbal constructs of reality are sufficiently accurate and vivid to be in their own way as important as Pissarro's painting in 1871 of Penge Station at Upper Norwood, which symbolised the beginning of the imperial city and its uneasy relations with its countryside which the author made so intimately his own.

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