

# **The Life and Works of W. G. Collingwood**

A wayward compass in Lakeland

**Malcolm Craig**



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## Archaeological Lives

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Front Cover: W.G. Collingwood at age 43: Self portrait as Sea Captain.  
Back Cover: W.G. Collingwood aged 52. Collingwood (R.G.) Archive Cardiff University.

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Dedicated to Margaret Craig



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## Chronology

- 1854 Born at 87 Chatham Street Liverpool to William and Marie Elizabeth née Imhoff.
- 1856 Birth of only brother David in Liverpool.
- 1858 Birth of only sister Ruth in Liverpool.
- 1859 Attended Liverpool Collegiate.
- 1872 Student University College Oxford, tutor Bernard Bosanquet.
- 1873 Death of Mother, Marie.
- 1873 Visited John Ruskin, with father, at Brantwood.
- 1874 Worked on John Ruskin's road building project at Ferry Hinksey.
- 1875 Began translation work for Ruskin in April, 'The Economist of Xenophon'.
- 1876 Translation work with Alexander Wedderburn completed in July.
- 1876 First in Greats at Oxford University in September.
- 1876 Joined Slade School of Arts in October, tutor Alphonse Legros.
- 1876 Met and corresponded with Edith Isaac.
- 1876 Made applications for University Fellowships.
- 1877 Alpine Tour.
- 1878 Made summer visit to John Ruskin at Brantwood.
- 1879 Made summer visit to Ruskin at Brantwood.
- 1880 Exhibited at The Royal Academy with portrait of his father.
- 1880 Met artist Edward Burne-Jones and tutored his son Philip.
- 1881 Began working with John Ruskin as Geological Surveyor and Draughtsman or 'General Assistant' initially from September to early January 1882.
- 1882 Painted picture of John Ruskin, in January, at work in his study at Brantwood, Lawrence Hillier as model.
- 1882 Toured France, Switzerland and Italy (including Alps) with John Ruskin, early August to early December.
- 1883 The 'Philosophy of ornament published.
- 1883 'Limestone Alps of Savoy' published, based upon geological data collected during the tour of 1882.

- 1883 Married Edith (Dorrie) Isaac in December at Kensington Registry Office London.
- 1883 Moved with Dorrie to a cottage at Gillhead Windermere.
- 1883 Visit to Brantwood (Ruskin) with bride, December 29 to January 6.
- 1885 'Book of Verse' published.
- 1886 Birth of first child Dorothy (Dora) Susie at Gillhead.
- 1886 'Astrology in the Apocalypse' published.
- 1887 Birth of second child Barbara Crystal at Gillhead.
- 1887 Joined Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society.
- 1887 Lawrence Hilliard (Ruskin's Secretary) died.
- 1889 Birth of only son Robin at Gillhead.
- 1889 Visit to Seascale with Ruskin, Arthur and Joan Severn.
- 1889 'Biographical Outline of John Ruskin' published.
- 1889 Two Sonnets in Igdrasil (Journal of Ruskin Reading Guild).
- 1890 Six Papers published in Igdrasil.
- 1891 Birth of fourth child Ursula Mavis at Gillhead.
- 1891 'The Art Teaching of John Ruskin.
- 1891 Edited 'Poems of John Ruskin' in two volumes.
- 1891 Moved family from Gillhead to Lanehead, house on the east side of Coniston Water.
- 1892 Excavation work on Peel Island, Coniston Water, with Dorrie.
- 1893 'The Life and Work of John Ruskin', published.
- 1893 Edited three volumes: 'Writings of John Ruskin'.
- 1894 Joined the Viking Club.
- 1895 'Thorstein of the Mere' published.
- 1896 'The Bondwoman' published.
- 1896 Arranged exhibition in Coniston of Ruskin memorabilia.
- 1897 'Book of Coniston' published.
- 1897 Visit to Iceland with Jón Stefánsson.
- 1897 Excavation at Springs Bloomery, Coniston.
- 1899 Became a member of the Alpine Club.
- 1899 Edited work of W.S. Calverley published.

- 1899 Coniston Tales published.
- 1899 'A Pilgrimage to the Saga-steads of Iceland' published
- 1900 Death of John Ruskin, buried at Coniston.
- 1900 Forward to the John Ruskin Exhibition published.
- 1900 Editor of Transaction (TCWAAS).
- 1901 Designed the Ruskin Cross for his grave at Coniston.
- 1901 'Life and Death of Cormac the Skald': translated with Jón Stefánsson.
- 1902 'The Lake Counties' published.
- 1902 Ten papers published in various journals (see Appendix A).
- 1903 Death of his Father, William.
- 1903 'Ruskin Relics' published.
- 1905 Lecturer at University College Reading.
- 1905 Became President of the Viking Club (served two years).
- 1905 Lecturing visit to Denmark.
- 1906 Second lecturing visit to Denmark.
- 1906 Nine papers published in various journals (see Appendix A).
- 1908 'Scandinavian Britain' published.
- 1908 Celebrated, at Reading, 25 years of marriage.
- 1908 Appointed professor of Fine Art at University College Reading.
- 1909 'Thorstein of the Mere (Revised Edition).
- 1910 'Dutch Agnes her Valentine' published.
- 1911 Wrote Forward to 'John Ruskin' by Andreas Mollerup.
- 1911 Provided costume sketches for 'Danish Scene' at Festival of Empire.
- 1911 Resigned from post at University College Reading.
- 1912 'Elizabethan Keswick' published.
- 1913 Became member of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District.
- 1913 Elected to the Society of antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
- 1917 'The Likeness of King Elfwald' published.
- 1920 Nominated President of the CWAAS.

- 1924 With daughter Barbara designed the 1914- 1918 War Memorial to be placed on the summit of Great Gable.
- 1925 'Lake District History' published.
- 1926 C.A. Parker's 'The Gosforth District' revised by W.G. Collingwood.
- 1927 'Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age' published.
- 1929 Ten papers published in various journals (see Appendix A).
- 1932 'The Lake Counties' revised.
- 1932 'A Pedigree of Anglian Crosses, Antiquary Journal (last paper).

## Figures

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## Abbreviations

(AH)	Abbot Hall, Kendal.
(CACU)	Collingwood (R.G.) Archive, Cardiff University.
(CW1)	First Series of Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society.
(CW2)	Second Series of Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society.
(CW3)	Third Series of the Transactions; does not apply to Gershom's period.
(CWAAS)	Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society.
(EI)	'Dorrie' Edith Issac
(E.M.D.C.)	Edith Mary Dorothy Collingwood.
(Igrasil)	Journal of the Ruskin Reading Guild: quarterly magazine and review of art, literature and social philosophy.
(JDANHS)	Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society.
(JFRCELD)	Journal of the Fell and Rock Club of the English Lake District.
(NCM)	Northern Counties Magazine.
(PPHFAS)	Papers and Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society.
(PSAN)	Proceedings of the Society of antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
(R.G.C.)	Robin George Collingwood.
(RPI)	Retail Price Index.
(RWS)	Royal Water Colour Society.
(TCWAALS)	Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Association for the Advancement of Literature and Science.
(TCWAAS)	Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society.

(T D & G NHAS)	Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society.
(TNNAS)	Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society.
(THSLC)	Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.
(ULC)	University Library Cambridge.
(W.C.)	William Collingwood.
(W.G.C.)	William Gershom Collingwood.
(YAJ)	Yorkshire Archaeological Journal

## Conversion note

### Length

Miles, Feet and Inches are shown together with Kilometres, Metres and Centimetres, decimal values in parenthesis.

### Pounds, Shillings and Pence

Money values vary over the years so only Pounds, Shillings and Pence are used. To help the reader unfamiliar with this currency: 20 shillings to the pound sterling and 12 pence to the shilling (240 pence to the pound). The currency was in use during Gershom's time and in the UK until 1971. When seen as appropriate, a comparison is made between these money values compared with equivalent value, 2010-2015, using the retail price index (RPI).





## Preface

Preface, something readers skip in a book? Please do not skip this one especially if you are not familiar with the works of W.G. Collingwood, he does not come readily to mind when thinking of notable lives such as Darwin, Freud or Churchill. W.G.C had a varied complex life and a more detailed background is needed to 'set the scene' which is to be found in this preface.

To close friends William Gershom Collingwood was known simply as 'Gershom'. I have been presumptuous in using Gershom too where a more friendly tone is felt appropriate otherwise 'W.G.C.' or 'Collingwood' has been adopted when a formal tone seemed appropriate, also to be in keeping with the sensible practice of his generation, addressing people only by their surname to avoid over-familiarity. Only to John Ruskin, who liked inventing nicknames, was Collingwood known as 'Collie' or 'Colliewallie'. Long before writing this biography, I became confused between W.G. Collingwood and R.G. Collingwood, thinking there may have been a small printing error and they were not different people, especially when both were at times writing about the same subject set in the same area (archaeology in the English Lake District). Son Robin introduced the 'G' (George) later in life leading to possible confusion between W.G. and R.G. Collingwood.

R.G. Collingwood moved during his life between: philosophy, history, archaeology and music; in a way similar to his father (W.G.) who moved between: art, antiquity, archaeology, history, writing fiction and non-fiction.

John Ruskin quickly summed up his young friend when he and Gershom met in Oxford, describing him as like a compass needle *'that would find some attraction one way or another'*. From this insight I thought of a title 'Wayward Compass in Lakeland' because in my view Gershom never did have one attraction or career settled in one direction or another and spent most of his life in Lakeland, becoming an authority on the history of the place and its people.

Gershom was born in Liverpool in 1854 and died in Lakeland in 1932. His father William Collingwood was a well-known Artist and Mother Marie Elizabeth née Imhoff was Swiss. The name 'Gershom' pronounced Gur-shahm has a Hebrew meaning of 'a stranger here' or 'exile' leading to speculation that the Collingwood family could be Jewish, especially when he married Edith Isaac but there is no evidence of a Jewish connection in either family (being Jewish comes through the mother's bloodline). When daughter Dora Collingwood was older, she remarked that, 'we have a great deal of Hebrew blood in our veins though I am thankful to say our ancestors changed their religion a hundred and fifty years ago'. I have not been able to find evidence to justify this statement. Though when writing about

evidence I am reminded that archaeologists regularly point out that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

One of a number of titles given to W.G.C was 'antiquary' normally used for someone who studies ancient artefacts but for Gershom this also included imagining how people lived, what people made and what, possibly, they could have felt and thought, even to imagining the existence of ghosts based upon folklore tales told to him as a boy. Grevel Lindop in his 'Literary Guide to the Lake District' (1993) wrote that Gershom '*almost single-handedly transformed the historical and archaeological understanding of the Lake District*. This influence alone should establish him, in Britain at least, as a well-known figure of the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but adequate recognition did not come. The Dictionary of Literary Biography, late nineteenth century and early twentieth century ought to have acknowledged his fiction and non-fiction writing but listed only his work as a writer of biography, although the review by Phillip Mallet did include most published fiction and non-fiction, briefly, in vol.149, 1995.

Lack of recognition is difficult to understand, though he readily admitted to shunning publicity of any kind; an important question is to ask is why recognition was not thrust upon him? Gershom was a writer of well-received books both non-fiction and fiction, wrote numerous learned papers (Appendix A) and as an artist exhibited paintings at the Royal Academy, he also helped establish the Lake Artists Society; served as Editor then President of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society (CWAAS) and worked closely with John Ruskin for 19 years. A friend of Gershom, writer and Oxford University lecturer Edward Thompson, wrote in the early 1930s that '*versatility has been one thing that has kept him [Gershom] from recognition*' Edward John Thompson was around 30 years younger than Gershom and correspondence passed frequently between them, mainly Gershom giving encouragement to the younger man. Thompson was a Methodist minister and later became Lecturer in Bengali at Oxford University. Various possible reasons for a lack of prominence in W.G.C's own right are explored in this book but in the use of one word 'versatility' Thompson possibly comes closest to explaining the lack of adequate recognition.

Despite his many achievements, anyone referring to a biography of W.G. Collingwood would have to explain, in most cases, what he did. One possible reason for lack of full recognition could be a difficulty in pigeonholing him. He had a wide range of interests and expertise, described as: Author, Editor, Poet, Lecturer, Artist, Antiquary, Iceland Explorer, Comparative Philologist, Amateur Geologist, Amateur Cartographer and Amateur Archaeologist. A list of this kind attributed to one person almost inevitably leads readers to think he must be a professional in one and an amateur in all others. Where the word 'amateur' is omitted it can be assumed that Gershom was professional in that he was paid either directly or

through royalties, and where amateur is stated he received no financial reward. The terms 'amateur' and 'professional' are not used here to indicate proficiency, as is now common, but is used in the traditional sense, unpaid or paid respectively.

Another possible reason for lack of full recognition was that Gershom spent most of his life in, at that time, an infrequently visited part of Lakeland; Ruskin who lived nearby had made a name for himself when he moved, aged 52, to Lakeland in 1871. Taqui (Barbara) Altounyan, writing about her maternal grandfather (W.G.C.) in her book 'Chimes from a Wooden Bell' expressed surprise that her mother Dora in a letter to her sister Barbara wrote that: *'the Collingwoods were lacking in something, some vitamin necessary for complete success in life, causing inability to take opportunities. Perhaps lack of perspicacity in choosing what horse to back is part of it'*. While the comment could possibly be applied to Dora's father (W.G.C.) it did not apply to her brother, Robin George Collingwood or to her paternal grandfather William Collingwood, so the broader reference to 'Collingwoods' in Dora's statement is difficult to justify. Inspection of published obituaries in the National Press and Journals invariably show specialisation as a dominant theme in the lives of men and women recognised with obituary notices; in this respect, Gershom went against the trend because despite his life as a polymath, obituarists served him well. Obituaries of William Gershom Collingwood appeared in newspapers and journals, which offered additional insights. The most detailed obituary appeared in The Times newspaper of October 3, 1932 written by his son Robin George. There were suggestions that this obituary partly compensated for Robin saying little about his father in his own writing (and even less about his family); he was very close to his father, which made this neglect, if that is what it was, difficult to understand. In fairness to Robin George, he did say in the preface to his autobiography (1939), *'the autobiography of a man whose business is thinking should be the story of his thought. I have written this book to tell what I think worth telling about the story of mine. An autobiography has no right to exist unless it is 'livre de bonne foi' (a book in good faith).*

This would be a reasonable explanation for Robin's lack of recognition of his father in earlier works, which were mainly about philosophy or history; they were primarily about his thoughts.

Peter Johnson (Intention and Meaning in R.G. Collingwood's autobiography 1995) makes the point that R.G.C.'s autobiography was: *'written in the light of his present concerns and aspirations, and these govern his principles of selection and inclusion. What is to count as omission therefore, must be seen in this light.'*

Both the Alpine Club and the Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District paid generous tribute to W.G.C. in their journals. Contributors from both clubs, mountaineers W.P. Hasket Smith and R.B. Graham respectively, highlighted a part of Gershom's life largely overlooked by other writers. He had an enduring

love of mountains, especially in the Alps and Lakeland, a love he shared with John Ruskin: whether Mont Blanc, Jungfrau, Coniston Old Man or Langdale Pikes, to be in the presence of mountains brought him great joy to the end of his life.

Another obituary for W.G.C. printed in 'The Vasculum' for November 1932 (vol. 18, No. 4) was in recognition of his valuable contribution to that journal of papers relevant to the Northern Counties.

In the Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society (TCWAAS), there was recognition of the massive contribution made by him with his papers based upon rigorous research and for his editing of the transactions over many years, but author of this obituary is not clear. This obituary in particular pointed to Gershom's lack of prominence: *'From a young man of brilliant promise, with striking gifts in art and literature, a witty talker and cultivated musician, he had become a scholar and something of a recluse. He had sacrificed all hope of a career to the duty, as he thought it, of tending Ruskin's declining years; painted merely for a livelihood, wrote merely for his own amusement, and turned increasingly towards the past to find an object for his thoughts'*.

While the overall thrust of the statement could be correct, there are certain 'persuader' words, typical of a journalist's writing, particularly the words 'merely' and 'amusement'. Painting for a livelihood is what professional artists do, it is far beyond being 'merely' and to complete his vast literary output demanded a strong interest in the subjects and rigorous scholarship from him, far more than 'amusement'. Possibly this is why Douglas, H. Johnson in 'R.G. Collingwood Studies', thought the hand of a journalist wrote this obituary. One possible name comes to mind: Arthur Ransome, a journalist, may be discernible in this obituary. To accuse an antiquary of turning increasingly towards the past (last line); is rather silly? The highly respected science journal 'Nature' October 15, 1932 also contained a tribute to his life, pointing in particular to his book on stone crosses in 1927 as his most significant work.

Gershom contributed six papers to the Yorkshire Archaeological Journal between 1906 and 1926 and the printed obituary recognised his wide interests and characteristic generosity. Typically when during the 1914-1918 war to raise money for the Red Cross Society he sold presents given to him by John Ruskin, the only way he could offer support because he was too old for active service and was never a wealthy man. Finally, an In Memoriam, published in the Transactions (TCWAAS) of 1953, noting how *'the New Series (CW2, from 1900) of the Transactions owes to him its inception, and the standard which subsequent Editors have been glad to keep before them as an exemplar'*. *There was no branch of the society's activities which did not owe much to his influence, whether by personal research and writing or by the encouragement and support of other members.*

The many obituaries did not enhance his reputation, though any enhancement at this time would be rather late. It was recognition during his lifetime that was lacking; his only son Robin George received his due recognition both before and after his death, but not his father. An interesting comment on this lack of recognition came from the 'In Memoriam' of 1953 that: *'though the outer world thought more highly of his brilliant son, Robin George Collingwood (1889-1943), posterity will perhaps reverse the judgement of their contemporaries.'*

W.G.C., through his research and writing, had great influence upon our understanding of pre-Norman history in Northern England (first to eleventh centuries) sometimes referred to as 'Early Christian Period', a more appropriate term than 'The Dark Ages' often used to describe the period sixth to eleventh centuries. Thinking about this period and arrival of the Normans W.G.C. wrote, *'the Normans arrived late here in the north-west. The date 1066 means to us Stamford Bridge; Hastings is foreign history. East Cumberland and Westmorland hardly began to feel the influence of the invaders before the twelfth century; the sea coast not until much later; the mountains, never, until after the Normans had given place to the new English of the thirteenth century.* The Battle of Stamford Bridge, referred to by Gershom, was fought between the armies of English led by King Harold Godwinson and Norwegian led by King Harald Hardrada. After most of the Norwegian leaders died and with the battle won, King Harold travelled south to fight the Battle of Hastings only three weeks later. Officially, the Battle of Stamford Bridge marked the close of the Viking Age in England. For W.G.C. it was the close of his main period of study too. Understandably, for him and his study of the north, the battle of Stamford Bridge was far more significant than the battle of Hastings.

An important part of Pre-Norman study was an understanding of Anglo-Saxon carved stone crosses and their further development by Scandinavian settlers. W.G.C. became an authority on this subject after editing the work of William Slater Calverley, publishing in 1899. In this book, W.G.C. pointed out that the Norman Conquest was at first a political fact rather than a social overturn, at least in the North-West of England. *'To the masses it meant new lords, but not new habits of life and thought'*.

Gershom's main interest was in the lives of people in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian settlements, although he could not altogether ignore the earlier Roman period of almost 400 years in the north-west of England.

Archaeological work led him to Roman sites and their remains where he developed his own ideas about the extent of Roman influence in Lakeland. Robin George (R.G.C.) accompanied his father on archaeological digs from a very early age and developed a stronger interest in this period to become an authority on Roman settlements in the north and north-west, particularly along Hadrian's Wall. Few scholars had a better understanding of Romano-British life.

When writing his book 'Lake District History', Gershom described the Roman occupation of the area as just '*an episode but the Britons lasted*'.

'Indeed, it is more likely than not that most of us have a drop of the old British blood in our veins [possibly a comment that could be read as valid in 1925]. The idea that the Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians made a clean sweep of the ancient race, especially here in the North-west not only neglects the evidence of place-names but also leaves the whole evolution of our nation unexplained. If they had done so, we should be Danes or North Germans. The rapid and brilliant flowering of the Northumbrian people in the times of Bede and the Bewcastle cross can only be understood only when we regard the Angles of Deira as a mixed race, combining the sturdiness of the Sassenach with the artistic temperament of the Cymru'.

These ideas, followed through by W.G.C. until the end of his scholarship in this field of research, were brought to fruition in his book 'Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre- Norman Age' (1927). Richard Bailey in the Preface to his book 'Viking Age Sculpture' (1980) wrote about Gershom's Northumbrian Crosses. 'That this classic study is a book which remains both an impressive memorial to a pioneering scholar and a constant point of reference for following generations of students; no one will ever match his artist's instinctive understanding of the mind of the medieval sculptor'.

To mark the golden jubilee of the book, a Collingwood (W.G.) Symposium was held (1977) on insular sculpture from 800 to 1066. Typically, when writing about Scandinavian influence, Gershom would make incisive statements based upon rigorous research as in his book 'Scandinavian Britain' writing: '*The Norse settlers did not come as conquerors, entrenching themselves against the natives, but as immigrants seeking a livelihood*'. The settlers were heimafolk, not aggressive heimsfolk.

Not surprisingly, some of W.G.C.'s conclusions have not stood the test of time but in his later years, in true scholarly style, he was always ready to revise earlier ideas in the light of new evidence. One of the most significant examples was to change his ideas about early settlers or visitors to Peel Island on Coniston Water; the name 'Peel' (Peel Island) is suggestive of fortification similar to towers built in the sixteenth century. After some excavating on the island with his wife Edith (Dorrie), he thought the remains were of Norse origin, tenth or eleventh century, but later revised this idea to the remains being from a fourteenth century fort. A significant part of Gershom's life was spent researching the past: through carved stonework (Chapter IX) and Scandinavian influence (Chapter X) in both cases, he struggled with considerable uncertainty emerging from results of past studies and from results of his own research; inevitably a number of conditional tenses have

to be used in describing these periods of his life. He had to accept uncertainty; the idea: because there is no such thing as certainty, there cannot be uncertainty was only of interest to his son and other philosophers.

The first men to arouse interest and stimulate further research about pre-Norman life in Northern England were Dr Charles Parker and Rev. William Slater Calverley; Gershom befriended both pioneers after settling in Lakeland and collaborated with them when beginning his antiquarian and archaeological research. After they died, Gershom became recognised among scholars as an authority on the Early Christian Period in his part of the world; recognised not only in Britain but internationally too.

Letters provide the richest source of details about his life: family, friends and Gershom himself were prolific letter writers and much of this correspondence has survived, held in various archives, though one difficulty has been in reading Gershom's almost impenetrable writing, likened to a spider crawling first through spilled ink then over his notepaper. Fortunately, a number of his letters are transcribed for the Archives at Abbot Hall (AH), Kendal, which inevitably leads to questioning of the transcriber's interpretation of certain words. Although Gershom kept a diary at times, he was not a diarist or as he said 'no Boswell', he learned a great deal from John Ruskin but did not follow his example by writing an account of each day. Ruskin was assiduous in recording thoughts to diaries and journals.

When writing about Great Gable in the English Lake District (2010-11) I felt greatly in debt to W.G. Collingwood for the detailed research he had carried out in the area, and naturally wished to know more about the man. No autobiography or biography could be found. After further searching, I discovered that five writers described something about his life and work but none in a purely biographical way. Mathew Townend in his outstanding book 'The Vikings and Victoria Lakeland' (2009) wrote in the Introduction '*that it is by no means a narrow biography of Collingwood alone*'. A biography of W.G. Collingwood could not be described as *narrow*. The point made by Townend, as I understand it, was that the aim of the book was to contribute to the scholarship of regional medievalism in which Gershom played a central part, but not forgetting a number of key antiquaries who also played their part in our understanding of this subject. The book comes closest to providing a biography of W.G.C.

Jeremy Collingwood's book 'A Lakeland Saga' (2012) provided good coverage of Gershom and family life, including a family tree, but here Gershom shares stage with journalist and childrens' author Arthur Ransome. Taqui (Barbara Harriet) Altounyan, a granddaughter, in her books 'In Aleppo Once' (1969) and 'Chimes from a Wooden Bell' (1990) provide useful information about her grandfather.

In addition to these books, are papers by Douglas H Johnson and another granddaughter of W.G.C. Teresa Smith in 'Collingwood (R.G.) Studies' (1994-99); all write about Gershom from a particular perspective at a particular time but none of the man during his whole lifetime, to embrace his many interests. Janet Gnosspeilius planned to write a biography of her grandfather W.G.C. and collected material over a period of fifteen years but died in 2010 before completing her research. On the evidence of what Miss Gnosspeilius did write, in note-form, now held in the R.G. Collingwood Archive at Cardiff University (CACU) her finished work would have satisfied my curiosity about her grandfather, making this biography unnecessary. I was pleased to read the notes and letters related to the research done by Miss Gnosspeilius; her approval I would most like to have, but sadly not possible.

A number of comments about W.G.C. during his life and afterwards point to lost opportunities, but the main opportunity he supposedly lost would most likely have been something in academia as a senior academic. In hindsight he sacrificed very little; a wonderfully varied life replaced what could have been one of rigid conformity in a monastic-like brotherhood, typical of universities at that time (1870s - 1910), or in the words of a fellow student of Gershom at Oxford Oscar Wilde, when asked what he will do with his life, '*God knows. I won't be a dried-up Oxford Don, anyhow*'.

Today, the Collingwood name (apart from admiral in Nelson's fleet) is known mainly through the work of Gershom's son Robin George well known as philosopher and historian, a scholar studied closely by members of the R.G. Collingwood Society and by others with an interest in philosophy or history, or both. I am not an historian or philosopher and, apart from a few comments in the conclusion, do not attempt to assess any influence W.G.C. could have had upon his son R.G.C. towards becoming known, internationally, in both disciplines. I trust that sufficient detail exists here that any reader knowledgeable about the work of R.G.C. may find help in assessing any influence from his father.

The Lives of other notable people sometimes reveal Gershom by association, the strongest being John Ruskin his 'employer', for some years it could be said that Gershom's view of Ruskin from their first meeting at Oxford University until the professor's death almost thirty years later verged on idolatry. Gershom said, '*I don't ask anybody to like Ruskin; I did, because I found him interesting; not because I found him always right. He was extraordinarily nice to me for 30 years, and more of an all-round man than anybody I came across*'.

Through an association with Ruskin, Gershom was fortunate to meet some influential people of the time, especially in the arts; helpful when Gershom was hoping to become a recognised artist himself. Edward Burne-Jones associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood helped Gershom during his early years when attempting to become an artist. William Morris, a close friend of Jones, who with



his co-authored work on Scandinavian history inspired and helped Gershom with his Scandinavian studies. Another artist, friend of his father, William Hunt (RWS) wrote a letter to John Ruskin introducing Gershom, a student about to enter Oxford University. Beyond the art world, and any influence of Ruskin, there was journalist and foreign correspondent Arthur Ransome, best known for his children's books. He looked upon Gershom and Mrs. Collingwood (Dorrie) as second parents and was somewhat in awe of them, yet one way some general readers know of W.G. Collingwood is through the early life of Ransome, but Ransome turned to the two senior Collingwoods for guidance and advice during most of his life. Gershom or Dorrie proofread most of Ransome's published writing. Gershom, who knew Oscar Wilde at Oxford, advised Ransome against writing a book about Wilde but he went ahead, leading to a worrying period in Ransome's life.

Son Robin wrote that his father had sacrificed a good part of his career in devoting time to Ruskin's work, this statement is debatable. During the years working for Ruskin and subsequently helping to care for him until his death (1881-1900) W.G.C. wrote and had published eight books: 'The Philosophy of Ornament', 'A Book of Verses', 'Astrology in the Apocalypse' 'Thorstein of the Mere', 'The Bondwoman', 'The Book of Coniston', 'A Pilgrimage to the Saga Steads of Iceland' (with J. Stefánsson) and 'Coniston Tales'. None of these books was for, or about, John Ruskin and in addition, he wrote 12 Journal papers not related to work done for the Professor. In the same period, W.G.C. edited five works by Ruskin and wrote his biography in addition to a biographical outline; also 'The Art Teaching of John Ruskin'.

There were many advantages attached to working with Ruskin: access to a fine library with rare books, meeting many interesting visitors, access to a stimulating environment at Ruskin's home Brantwood. Not least access to Ruskin himself, a man with one of the finest minds of the nineteenth century; a century not matched (nor probably will be) for the existence of fine minds. More correctly, W.G.C. worked *with* John Ruskin rather than *for* him from autumn 1881 until around 1895; during the last five years of Ruskin's life (1895-1900) his role was that of carer and to a lesser extent had been caring since 1890 helping Mrs. Joan Severn, Ruskin's cousin, at Brantwood.

W.G.C. in addition to carrying out projects for Ruskin, and extensive independent research, produced works of art to help support his young family, a fee of around £100 per year from Ruskin paid only the rent. When working with Ruskin he was not an employee in the conventional sense of the word; no fixed hours of work and no regular tasks as part of a job description. His working relationship with Ruskin could be loosely defined as one of assistant, sounding board and friend. There were moments between the two men when they would indulge in what we now call small talk. On one occasion Ruskin was reminiscing about how he attended the

Queen's coronation (Victoria) in 1838 (sixteen years before Gershom was born), dressed like a dandy. Gershom showed him a photograph of a young man dressed in this way and asked 'did you ever wear a coat like that?' Ruskin replied 'I'm not so sure that I didn't. Ruskin normally dressed in homespun woollen clothing and not silk finery, unless for special occasions: Queen Victoria's coronation or presented at Court. Ruskin's clothing is discussed extensively in J.S. Dearden's book 'John Ruskin's Life in Pictures.'

In addition to a retainer-fee paid by Ruskin, the Collingwood family subsisted on earnings from the art of Gershom and Dorrie his wife, together with generous support from a neighbour Susannah (Susie) Beever, and Emma Holt a wealthy visitor from Liverpool. In 1887, after being settled for a while with a young family at Gillhead near Windermere (not lake, Bassenthwaite is the only lake in the Lake District others are either waters or meres). Dorrie wrote in a letter to Ruth her sister-in-law (CACU) of their concern about paying bills, in her words '*Gershom came back and pulled from his pocket two crackling bank notes of £10 each; Miss Beever had got an unexpected £40 and thought I ought to have half. I need hardly tell you she knows nothing whatsoever of our money circumstances.*' Dorrie may well have been right in saying Susie Beever knew nothing of their money circumstances, but Miss Beever may have suspected that Gershom, Dorrie and their young family could be in need of some extra support. In addition to the gift of £20, Susie Beever gave Dorrie three beautiful gold rings that she was going to leave to Dorrie in her will but decided she ought to have them sooner. One ring had six diamonds, one had three moonstones and the third a sapphire; described as blue as our lake when the northeast wind blows. Susie Beever was friend and support for Gershom's family soon after their arrival at Gillhead in 1883. Two years later, he dedicated his book of verse to Susie Beever.

Gershom by force of circumstances had to appreciate the need to make a living but in a letter 1887, (AH) his reference to money as 'filthy lucre', after buying a Palaeolithic chert for a friend, says much about his attitude to finance. Dorrie benefitted from wills left by some of her own family members: in 1915 from the will of Thomas Dains of Ipswich and in 1916 half the estate of Thomas P. Isaac, her brother, amounting to around £800. Money coming to Dorrie in this way, and from her painting, simply helped the family to survive; she left very little money at the time of her death. In her will, it was stated that all her estate pass to her husband then to son Robin absolutely.

For many lovers of Lakeland's past (not now) the thought of living 40 years beside Coniston Water or in any other part of Lakeland would be bliss, idyllic. I now realise that for the Collingwoods their life was fraught with difficulties; few days passed without worries about income and paying bills, they never had much money.

William Gershom Collingwood, in stature a short well-built man with piercing blue eyes and blond hair turned snow-white with age. In character he was generous to a fault, today he would probably be described as naïve; Dorrie kept an eye on him to prevent his generosity being taken too far such as giving his best suit to any passing traveler or a gold sovereign to a beggar. Granddaughter Taqui herself described Gershom as *'sweet, kind and perhaps rather ineffectual person, with many interests but no real brilliance'* this suggests that he could be thought of as dreamy and unworldly with few attributes, not until she read his obituary in The Times did Taqui discover the extent of his achievements; very sad. 'Sweet and kind' were appropriate descriptions but ineffectual can be described as easy-going. Words to a baby granddaughter Barbara Harriet (changed to Taqui) Altounyan from Gershom in a letter, May 17, 1917 (AH) serve well to reflect his nature: *'Darling Little Barbara, I hope you'll like this world, for a visit, a good long one, as much as I do. It is a mixed sort of place, my dear, but there is a lot of good in it, especially mountains and blossoms on trees, and little girls, and nice mothers and aunties and old grandparents'*. [Barbara (Taqui) died aged 84 in 2001].

He was equally generous with his time and knowledge being ready to help anyone without question of payment. Numerous letters exist in archives from W.G.C. to people wanting information: students writing dissertations, amateur geologists, archivists or followers of Ruskin, he replied conscientiously to everyone. John Ruskin defined poverty as 'not having what you need', Gershom would shrug off the idea of being poor by saying the family had all it needed, which was true but nevertheless maintaining even a basic level of income could be a worry from day to day. Gershom worked with almost a complete disregard for monetary reward. To quote from an obituary (TCWAAS): 'In his life he was no less simple and abstemious than if he had been vowed to poverty'.

Strong and energetic he climbed and walked on the mountains and hills of Lakeland throughout his adult life until shortly before his death aged 78. He disliked the idea of growing old and at the age of 40, he shed tears at the thought of his climbing days being over and for a while behaved as though his active life was over too, but soon after the next climb, he realised there could be many more ascents. He continued to paint Lakeland landscapes, often high among mountains, in all weather and in loving detail. Creative artistic activity was a strong theme in the lives of Collingwood families; art in the household meant only one thing, *taking part*, and features strongly throughout this book. A grandfather of Gershom an architect, father prominent as an artist in watercolours, Gershom himself artist and creative writer through to his wife and children with their impressive output in painting, sculpture and writing. Published work from three generations of the Collingwoods helps reinforce the idea that art played a major part in the life of the families. Gershom's father William Collingwood wrote and had published 'The

Value and Influence of Art as a Branch of General Education' (1862); his son wrote and had published a well-received book 'The Art Teaching of John Ruskin' (1891). Gershom's son Robin wrote and had published 'Principles of Art' (1938) and devoted the first chapter of his book 'Speculum Mentis' to the subject.

Gershom had a wonderfully varied life where experiences were valued over recognition, financial gain or the acquiring of possessions, but he was not too well suited to an age of acquisitiveness and increasing specialisation.

Education today drives students towards being monomaths; in contrast, polymaths are often seen as dabblers or worse dilettantes. In the nineteenth century especially at the time of Empire building and before the rigid division between disciplines, the polymath was highly respected. There were individuals helping to establish the Empire who within one career would organise the building of a railway and design a sewerage system in some far-off land, also give advice on forestry, paint watercolours and write poetry. Working in remote parts of the world called for strong individuals who, not able to call upon specialists, showed how initiative and wide-ranging interests and abilities were essential. Gershom was very much of this generation but unfortunately, people like him were becoming a dying breed. Bill Rollinson, a much respected writer of Lakeland life, described W.G. Collingwood as the person he would most like to have met; a sentiment that can be shared by many serious followers of life in England's north-west.

As a researcher and writer, Gershom's output of scholarly work was prodigious especially in the Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society (TCWAAS) where he contributed 66 papers (Appendix A). In addition, six papers in the Yorkshire Archaeological Journal covering mainly Anglian and Anglo-Danish sculpture across the East and West Ridings of Yorkshire. Most papers were the result of travelling to sites, some remote, spending time doing extensive fieldwork. Research done for the Transactions and other journals greatly helped in the later writing of 'Northumbrian Crosses of the pre-Norman Age' (1927), which is still highly regarded. In addition to learned papers, Gershom wrote and had published 19 books between 1883 and 1927 in addition eight edited works and one of translation between 1876 and 1926. The books he wrote included biography, poetry, geology, art, guides, history, travel and fiction. Edited works included poetry, writings of John Ruskin, politics and local history.

His book 'Lake Counties' (1902) continues to be widely read; revised by Gershom in 1932, reprinted in 1938 and 1939, a new edition in 1949 and published with revisions by Dr William Rollinson in 1988. Added to scholarly work he made observations as an amateur geologist resulting in a book 'The Limestone Alps of Savoy'. As a writer of fiction, he used his knowledge of 10 and 11-Century Lakeland to write two outstanding novels: 'Thorstein of the Mere', a story of Norse settlement in and around Coniston, and 'Bondwoman', re-published later as 'Bondwomen';

son Robin described the outburst from the Press about Bondwoman as ‘obloquy for its immoral tendencies’. A similar fate had befallen ‘Jude the Obscure’ Thomas Hardy’s book reviewed by scandalized critics a year earlier, one called it ‘Jude the Obscene’.

The work of writing this biography in narrative form uses varied sources, but to allow the diverse nature of this life to flow as a story references appear in the text wherever possible rather than as footnotes. Further references appear under Notes. The reader wishing to know more about a particular source of information should find sufficient leads either within the text or from the Notes.

The many different activities and interests in Gershom’s life occurred often in parallel and unlike many recorded lives; it is difficult to put any one activity or interest into a convenient time-slot of one year or even a period of years. I have listed main events in his life chronologically, but when writing the text, details inevitably overlap.

When Gershom was writing about Rev. William Slater Calverley, a friend and close collaborator, he remarked that, ‘he [Calverley] would have been the last to wish his biography written’. There must be a suspicion that Gershom would feel the same about any written record of his life; though his modesty would prevent him suggesting that a biography could be written. I offer this account purely out of respect and gratitude, feeling that W.G.C.’s life and works ought to be better known.

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Histon, Cambridge, 2018