

The Cinder Path by Spencer Gore

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Spencer Gore, Letchworth, and the Creation of The Cinder Path

In 1912, during the summer, Spencer Gore went to live in Letchworth, which was a new town in England. While in Letchworth, Gore painted some of the most spectacular landscapes of his career, making use of vivid colors and stylized forms. Among these paintings was *The Cinder Path*, which depicts a region on the outskirts of Letchworth. The perspective of Gore implies that the path, made of industrial waste, retreats steeply into the middle distance, with hedges and fields arranged around it (Green 45). A straight path that leads directly toward the town that is visible on the horizon and away from the viewer anchors the composition of *The Cinder Path*. *The Cinder Path*, alongside other paintings, portrays Gore as an accurate topographer and a keen observer who assumed a fundamentally naturalistic method of landscape painting.

While Gore was not a perpetual resident of Letchworth, he was markedly attracted by the modern philosophies and ideas of Ebenezer Howard. The solutions that Howard offered to the deteriorating conditions of the inner city, focusing on the prevalent anti-urbanism as well as widespread rural nostalgia, were aimed at resolving the traditional country or town dilemma (Gore 2). *The Cinder Path* uses geometric patterns as well as color markings. According to Upstone, in formulating his theories, Howard was influenced by the works of William Morris and John Ruskin, though his original inspiration to construct Letchworth originated from reading the works of Edward Bellamy, particularly *Looking Backward* (22). The novel, published in 1888, was a fictional text about an idyllic Boston; projected in the next 112 years, capitalism would have been eliminated, and the society would then be focused on maintaining a mutual and fulfilling egalitarian life. In view of Upstone, the novel made Howard realize the impressive possibilities of a new development and civilization that was devoted to service to the community rather than self-interest as the main motive (23). In order to formulate his plans, Howard carried out research on the industrial housing at Bourneville and later published his book that saw him meet one of the speakers, George Bernard Shaw (Upstone 26). Later by 1903, Howard had been appointed to build Letchworth, hence Gore's inspiration to develop *The Cinder Path* that depicts a region on the outskirts of Letchworth.

Gore's relative personal adaptation of French Impressionism as well as Post-Impressionism was made visible and manifested itself in his original use of color. After joining the Fitzroy Street group of painters and constantly receiving encouragement from Sickert, Gore painted a number of London theatre interiors, with the main feature of his paintings being increasingly robust contrasts of color (Green 45). In spite of a tendency to attractiveness, his paintings maintained an ardent sense of design, partly due to his practice of working from small but well-documented drawings. The majority

of his paintings around this period dwelt on his area of residence, Mornington Crescent, its street facades and its gardens. Gore later became Camden Town Group's founder member in 1911 (Green 45). The landscape paintings of Richmond and Hertfordshire created by Gore in 1913 later became increasingly effectively designed and packed down.

Garden City Design and the Modern Landscape of Letchworth

Letchworth, the town depicted in the painting, was sensibly and soberly designed, with its structures mostly made in somewhat comfortable, vernacular forms of modern style. However, from the onset, the new town attracted people composed of a potent mixture of militant vegetarians, socialists, eccentrics, and teetotalers (Morgan et al. 43). The Skittles, which was the town pub, only served non-alcoholic drinks. What is more, there was a school that had classrooms that were open to individuals and aimed at promoting the healthy impact of [fresh air](#) that people breathe on the lungs while also promoting a suitable atmosphere for theosophical meditation. The decision to commission Letchworth House represented a bold choice as well as a commitment to a liberal, new way of life, though one that appeared to be an idealized, craft-based, agrarian past. Gore's Letchworth vocation of 1912 was probably just a mere convenience, a relocation of the family to a more relaxed place to live (Morgan et al. 44). Nonetheless, the environ of Letchworth, coupled with its intense idealism, served to significantly spur Gore to create his stylistically more innovative and advanced works of art.

In painting *The Cinder Path*, Gore made use of simple but extremely effective compositional expedient of a straight path leading directly away from the standpoint of the viewer. The device strongly improves the pattern-making and geometric effects of the painting as it leads the viewer's eye into the work, in which it is instantly confronted by opposing and contrasting planes, as well as by the angularity and sharpness of stylized forms. Moreover, as Morgan et al. opine, the device offers a regulating effect by suggesting a human presence while also providing both psychological and formal stability (45).

The Cinder Path is painted on coarse canvas that may have been obtained from the roll with considerable preparatory layers. Such kind of coarse-weave canvas was meant to produce a working surface with a suitable tooth that was intended to take the thick paint (Baker 64). What is more, the coarse-weave canvas was intended to retain the dull aesthetic of the painting by means of diffuse spreading of light from the rough surface. Gore chose to use synthetic ultramarine as well as synthetic lithopone due to his obsession with the whiteness of the grounds. Additionally, blue pigments, particularly ultramarine, served to prevent the yellowing of the oil (Baker 64). Gore also used lithopone since it has a higher refractive index compared to the majority of the alternatives; hence was the most ideal to lead white, as it appears to be extremely white in oil medium. Besides, Gore included other materials, such as chalk and gypsum, in the upper layer due to the porosity of the preparatory surface as well as effects on the drying of the superimposing paint layers (Baker 66).

Notably, Gore experimented with his preparatory materials through a careful selection of materials aimed at creating perfect support for his painting technique. Undoubtedly, Gore, who tried the use of absolute spectral colors, needed pure white ground due to its optical effect, especially because it was permissible to show through in certain areas of the composition.

Naturalism, Composition, and Gore's Treatment of the Built Environment

In *The Cinder Path*, Gore assumed a purely naturalistic style of painting landscapes and failed to introduce artificial features. However, in his pictures of Letchworth, he involved a practice of vindicating the shapes of clouds and trees, giving them straight outlines and edges as well as extremely geometric, stylized structures (Carlyle 108). Notably, this depiction was due to the comprehensive study of his subject. Regardless of such simplification of his forms of paintings, Gore still aspired to remain true to nature. Through *The Cinder Path*, Gore conveys the message that it seems a mistake to separate the attractive side of painting from the naturalistic while also demonstrating how simple nature is. What is more, Gore implies through his painting that the simplification of nature requires a thorough knowledge of the complications of the simplified forms. He does so not only for decorative effect but also for the purpose of generating a greater truth about nature (Carlyle 110). Above all, Gore, through *The Cinder Path*, seems to be interested in the character of his subject to express the emotional significance that lies in objects. The naturalistic form of painting further denotes that Gore finds objects more interesting the way they are.

The Cinder Path depicts a point in Letchworth in which countryside and town intersect, the peculiarly concentrated and whitewashed structures with red-tiled roofs that spread out across the horizon. Such a kind of blending was a fundamental principle that lay behind the construction planning of Letchworth. According to Carlyle, the town's planner sought to see the country and the town married for the purpose of creating a new and improved way of modern living (112). In view of Carlyle, the planner designed Welwyn Garden City and Letchworth and London's self-contained satellites, entirely provided with various civic amenities (114). The town's architects ensured that the structures were properly designed, built, and cheaply priced. Additionally, they ensured that the town's landscape, as well as its layout, were carefully considered. The planners did so in the belief that a good life, coupled with quality life, would serve to not only renew but also inspire the population, thereby leading to a better society.

The Cinder Path was painted from colored chalk and squared-up pencil drawing. Being that *The Cinder Path* is one of his largest pictures ever, its size suggests a sense of splendid ambition and significance. The painting's composition has a remarkably high horizon, an element accentuated by the line of red-roofed houses stretching out across the painting (Morgan et al. 49). Besides, Gore's painting is held together by the unwavering maintenance of melodious color, with a dominance of pinks, purples, and mauves. The outlines of *The Cinder Path* have been drawn with the brush for the

purpose of allowing them to be visible. Furthermore, in some regions, the canvas has been left to remain bare for the purposes of giving emphasis to certain forms' outlines. Such places include the fence, the trees, and the path. The yellow color of the field visible in the middle distance demonstrates that ripe corn is grown in that region, while the crops in the foreground might be mangolds or turnips. The post embedded in the immediate foreground has been foreshortened into a slanted form and is likely to have had a name or directions on it (Morgan et al. 53). Strangely, at the top left of *The Cinder Path*, Gore has painted some structure on top of trees, despite the fact that spatially they are located behind them, making them seem as if they are essentially floating around the vegetation. The red roofs of the houses clash against the green, further emphasizing them intensely. While other people may assume that this clash might be an error, it is evident in both versions of the painting, implying that perhaps Gore sought to resolve the manner in which the structures were visible amongst the leaves, probably as the plants moved in the wind.

Location, Interpretation, and the Uncertainty of the Painted Scene

There is uncertainty regarding the specific location of the scene depicted in *The Cinder Path*. While Morgan et al. maintained that the scene was at some region on the region that extends from the extreme end of Works Road in Letchworth all the way across the field close to Baldock, the subsequent structures on the painting alter the entire area (48). According to Baker, this was undoubtedly a path that was conventionally referred to locally as 'the cinder path,' which followed the direction of the railway (67). However, the ridges mounting to the horizon in *The Cinder Path* do not seem to be completely borne out by the actual topography of the alleged part of the town. While Gore depicts a big, Georgian-style structure towards the left side of the ridge, bearing some sort of similarity to the convent located on the Baldock verge of Letchworth, the building is made of natural brick, unlike the grey version presented in the painting. As such, the location of the scene covered in the painting appears to be discounted.

However, a possible identification is offered by Upstone, who argues that the scene was the path they often took when going to town, dismissing the possibility of the path being the path between Letchworth and Baldock (29). To support his claim, the author enclosed a plan of the town aimed at illustrating their argument. He argues that the path from Wilbury Road to town would not assume a path along the railway, adding that there is a path that is marked on the map that could as well have been captured in the painting, running across Norton Common. The scholar also contends that Cowslip Hill Road, as well as many other roads on that side of the town, was constructed later, indicating that going to town using Wilbury Road would have entailed crossing open fields, inviting the possibility of a severe network of footpaths. Additionally, he notes that before building the present bridge, there was a footbridge that was slightly in line with this path across the railway. Undoubtedly, a region nearer to Wilbury Road would back Gore's typical practice of choosing landscapes that were very close to her area of residence.

Overall, through his paintings, particularly *The Cinder Path*, Gore distinguished himself as an accurate topographer and a profound observer who assumed a vitally naturalistic technique to landscape painting. Whatever the exact location of the place captured in *The Cinder Path*, through the painting, Gore portrayed an extra view from the place at which the footpath in the painting turns sharply towards the left. *The Cinder Path* includes an individual walking along the path clad in a hooded blue cowl or cloak, probably a nun or just an individual in an unconventional costume. It is believed that Gore was inspired to model his stylistically more inventive and advanced works of art by the environment of Letchworth, coupled with its intense idealism. To paint *The Cinder Pat*, he made use of the simple but tremendously effective compositional convenience of a straight path leading right away from the standpoint of the viewer. Such a device served to strongly improve the pattern-making as well as the geometric effects of the painting.

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