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Settling at Home:

Gender and Class in the Room Biographies of Toynbee Hall, 1883-1914

Lucinda Matthews-Jones



fig 1: Images from Robert A. Woods, "The Social Awakening in London" in Robert A. Woods (ed.), *The Poor in Great Cities: Their Problems and What is Doing to Solve Them* (Charles Scribner's & Son, 1895). Author's own copy.

In 1895, Robert A. Woods, lead proponent of the American settlement movement, published his edited collection *The Poor in Great Cities: Their Problems and What is Being Done to Solve them* (1895). The book included an essay by him on 'The Social Awakening in London' charting the work of the Anglican Church, the Salvation Army, the People's Palace, the Fabian Society, and Charles Booth. It included a dedicated section on the university settlement, Toynbee Hall. Woods maintained that Toynbee was a 'transplant of university life in Whitechapel' and a 'hospitable home' where university men and their East London neighbours 'may breathe' a 'charmed atmosphere' (Woods 20). He included five images of Toynbee by Hugh Thomson, an Irish illustrator famed at the time for his drawings accompanying the works of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. Taken together, these pictures

represented a moment in the everyday life of the settlement. The illustrations, based on photographs, included the Thursday night smoking conference in the lecture hall, two men walking in Toynbee's quad with another man in the background carrying a plank of wood, two domestic servants clearing up in the dining room after dinner, male settlers conversing with middle-class female visitors, and, finally, a group of men with heads bent reading and studying in the library (fig. 1).

Much like these images, in this article I will take the reader on a journey through Toynbee's rooms to demonstrate how a 'room biography' approach can enable us to re-think the settlement. I will centralise the spatial and material dimensions of Toynbee Hall to consider the micro-*wheres* of settling. The 'inversion of perspective,' to borrow Gaston Bachelard's phrase, that I will adopt is not unfamiliar to writers of home (Bachelard 149; Flaunders; Worsley). Zooming in to Toynbee's rooms demonstrates how settlement ideals of renewed cross-class friendship and homosocial relations were lived in practice. Rather than seeing institutional space as a background for where things happened to people, the room biography approach that I develop here interprets space as an active participant in the formation of settlement sociality. Institutional spaces such as university settlements are usually dealt with as part of wider movements and as products of

intellectual rationales rather than as individual lived spaces and as the product of an everyday micro-politics of residing.

I will consider what it meant to *settle* at Toynbee Hall by drawing on autobiographies and institutional records. Jane Hamlett's finding that middle-class men rarely discussed in detail aspects of what it meant to live at home, despite its emotional pull, is the starting point of my analysis (Hamlett, *Materialising Gender* 38). While it is true that settler autobiographies rarely went into Toynbee's everyday details and arrangements, they do offer us tantalising glimpses of what it was like to live in such places. Similarly, institutional records highlight the importance of domestic thinking and practices in the settlement by documenting the goings-on in places like Toynbee. This article will contend that rooms are not just blank spaces. Rather, they are inscribed with meaning through objects, decoration and use (Appaduri 3-65). Pictures and images offer a route into understanding what messages these rooms might have been communicating to others. Objects and room arrangements at Toynbee cultivated specific domestic arrangements and practices that were tied to class but was also part of its founders' belief that luxury should be for all.

It is my contention that it was through their buildings and rooms that settlements were able to be permanent material features in their local communities. Settlement houses enabled wardens and settlers to engage in a long-term project of social

work even if the personnel routinely changed. Settlements were institutional spaces that provided residents with a place to live on condition that they participated in the house's extensive social and educational programme. For Toynbee, this was framed by ideas of home for both the settler and the poorer users. Established by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett in 1884, Toynbee has long been remembered by historians as the foundational settlement house of the university settlement movement. Much of this scholarly work has explored the educational initiatives of the house, on the one hand, or given an overview of the house's history, on the other (Briggs and McCartney; Scotland; Evans). In contrast, this article explores the domestic arrangements of the house and how this led to a distinct imaginary that sought to bring together men of different classes in its rooms. Toynbee should be understood as a hybrid space. Although the phrase 'settlement house' harked back to colonial structures, it was understood at the time to be a manorial residence, club, monastery and college. These imaginings were informed by the development of a settlement house that was domestic, public and homosocial.

Settling in Whitechapel in the late nineteenth century was, I argue here, to inhabit, and to reside. Toynbee Hall encouraged men to settle in the East End. As Werner Picht acknowledged in 1914, '[A] Settlement is a colony of members of the upper classes, formed in a poor neighbourhood, with the double purpose

of getting to know the local conditions of life from personal observation, and of helping where help is needed' (1). Moreover, settling occurred in domestic spaces and buildings that were generally called settlement houses. As such, settling was not necessarily slumming because it encouraged the idea that working-class neighbourhoods were places to inhabit. In his influential study, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, Seth Koven considers Toynbee as part of a programme of 'slumming' and where according to Koven, Toynbee gave young male settlers the opportunity to 'carve out for themselves a social place where, with the approval of society, they could place fraternity before domesticity' (*Slumming* 281). Here, I will argue that settling not only created new ways of living for settlers but also offered a temporary alternative domestic space for less privileged users. Settlement houses should be understood as domestic spaces that created a 'home from home' setting both settlers and the House's guests. The settlement movement was not, as Koven claims, the antithesis of bourgeois domesticity (*Slumming* 3). In order to make this claim, Koven borrows and extends John Tosh's earlier argument that after 1880 there was a 'flight from domesticity' as men increasingly spent their time in the homosocial spaces of the settlement house, club and empire (*Tosh Man's Place* 170-194). Yet, I will propose here that 'home' was never exclusively tied to the familial sphere or simply owned by women as mothers, wives and sisters. I propose that we rethink institutional

spaces such as the settlement as being constitutive of rather than outside the domestic sphere (See Hamlett, *At Home*; Hamlett, Hoskins and Preston; Holly Furneaux; Amy Milne-Smith).

Settling on Homes

The geographical separation of rich and poor had caused a great deal of anxiety in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In response to 'the cry of outcast London', the Rev. Samuel Barnett, vicar of St Jude's church in Whitechapel in the East End, proposed in 1883 that Oxbridge students should reside in one of Britain's poor urban districts (Mearns). Male students were quick to respond to Barnett's suggestion and set about establishing Toynbee, named after the economic historian Arnold Toynbee. It was envisaged as an alternative domestic space that encouraged Oxbridge graduates to reside in the East End to bring the rich into closer contact with the poor, by infusing it with the language of cross-class friendship and sociability. Britain's first purpose-built settlement house officially opened within a year, in January 1885, the first settlers having arrived on Christmas Day, 1884 (Barnett, 'Universities and the Poor'). It was built on Commercial Street, Whitechapel, in Barnett's parish, and cost £6,250. Its architectural design was the material manifestation of Canon Holland's famous claim that the settlement house would allow Oxbridge graduates to become 'squires of East London' and in doing so offer a new type of

paternalism built around friendship and brotherhood (Scotland xii). The settlers were predominantly young men who had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge. During the period 1884-1914 around 210 men lived at Toynbee for at least three months or longer, with one year being the average. They were asked to pay around 22 shillings a week for their board and bedchambers (*Toynbee Recorder*).

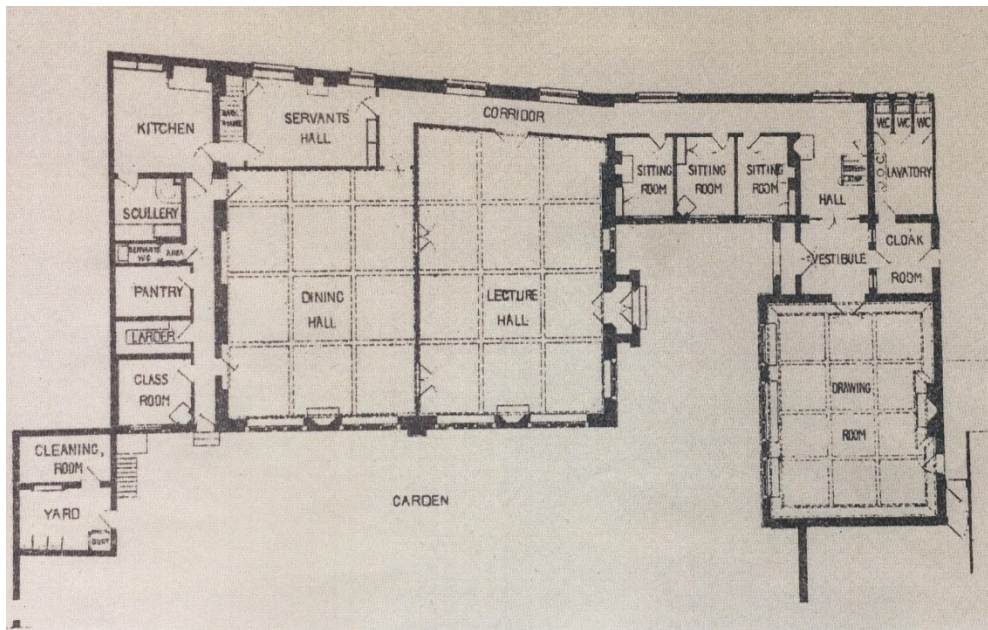


fig. 2: "Architectural Plan of Toynbee Hall" from *The Builder*. 48: February 14 1885. 234. Author's own copy.

Anybody visiting Toynbee would have been struck by the grand appearance of the house. Visitors walked through an imposing front gate and immediately found themselves in an ivy-clad courtyard. From here they were directed to the public rooms of the settlement house. The architectural plan (fig. 2) shows that the entrance opened onto a vestibule with the drawing room on the right-hand side and a cloak room and lavatory facilities straight ahead. To the left was a small hall with a corridor

turning left and passing three single occupancy bed-sitting rooms for visitors staying the evening. Next came the lecture hall, which could accommodate 200 people, and a dining room. Beyond these, the corridor ended at the servants' hall, which gave access to the house's practical domestic spaces: kitchen, scullery, pantry, cleaning room and yard. Despite these final rooms being seemingly hidden from the domestic spaces, there was a classroom at the end of this corridor, suggesting that both settlers and students frequently crossed into this part of the house. Visitors could also visit the Library (built in 1888) or the Warden's Lodge (1892). Upstairs, there were sixteen bedrooms. As an institutional space, this type of domestic presentation would not have been uncommon to settlers who had attended public school or Oxbridge colleges (Hamlett, *At Home*).

Toynbee's intentions to settle in Whitechapel were underpinned by a commitment to reside among their poorer brothers. From the beginning, Barnett was clear that the settlement house needed to be a cross-class home. He argued that philanthropy had previously hidden behind 'talk, isolated action, and officialism' (Barnett, 'University Settlement' 1). In contrast, Toynbee was able to emphasise ideals of comfort, security and sociability because it was a domestic space. Meanwhile, London geographically embodied the separation of the classes: the rich lived in the West End, the poor in the East End. Barnett believed that the settlement house would break down these class barriers. Meeting each other, he argued, would

eradicate mutual ignorance and suspicion. His aims for Toynbee were threefold: first, it provided Oxbridge men with a place to live in Whitechapel; secondly, it provided both the middle and working classes with a place to meet, converse and know one another. Finally, working-class men would be able to broaden their outlook of the world (Barnett, 'Universities and the Poor').

At the heart of these ideas was a commitment to create a cross-class space that reunited rich and poor. The classes needed somewhere to meet; Toynbee would provide for these needs. Working-class housing had long attracted interest from social reformers and philanthropists (Burnett; Gauldie). Henrietta Barnett, wife of Samuel and driving force at Toynbee Hall, reveals in her writings that she understood working-class domestic lives to be problematic. She recognized that much of this was down to poor housing stock and conditions. In her biography of her husband, she complained that the domestic arrangements of their parishioners were pitiful (Koven, 'Henrietta Barnett'). She noted that many lived in lodging houses which were ill-kept, with broken windows, peeling wallpaper hanging from the walls and infested with vermin (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 68-9). In contrast, Samuel Barnett was concerned with how working men interacted with their homes. For him, working-class domestic arrangements sterilized home-based leisure for adult men. This leisure privileged the body rather than recognizing the tripartite importance of the body, mind and soul

(Barnett, 'The Recreation' 53-69). For him, Toynbee was a site of active domestic space that encouraged sociability, learning and friendship in comfortable and well-decorated rooms.

The domestic arrangements of Oxbridge students and graduates who lived at Toynbee were also discussed (Matthews-Jones, 'St Francis'). Like working men, Oxbridge graduates were thought to have sterile leisure activities that saw them, according to Canon Scott Holland, sitting 'idly in their clubs or mooning around the West End' (*The Oxford House* 9). They had abandoned their civic responsibilities by living separately from their poor brothers. The settlement house corrected this by reuniting the leisured gentleman with his true higher purpose. Philip Lyttelton Gell, a Toynbee supporter and the Secretary (Chief Executive) to Oxford University Press, maintained that the settlement house provided Oxbridge graduates with the 'opportunity to meet with the poor, of being reminded of their existence and their necessities: made by their neighbours for health, or convenience, or recreation'. University graduates were thought to be well suited to the task of reuniting the two classes because they were 'still free from the responsibilities of later life' (Gell unpaginated). Settlement living was thus conceived as an activity for young, unmarried men. Married men were not necessarily excluded from the movement, however. They were instead encouraged to become Toynbee associates by paying a small fee to become members (Nevinson).

Peering into Toynbee Hall's Rooms

Turning our attention to the rooms at Toynbee allows us to see how important the domestic ideals of comfort, security and peace were to its initial conception. As the journalist and politician George Peabody Gooch remarked in 1958, Toynbee was a 'living institution' served by the 'human touch' (Gooch 62). Settlers were encouraged to identify appropriate men from settlement activities who would be entertained in either the drawing room or settler bedrooms. The drawing room served as a backdrop in which it was hoped that meaningful friendships would emerge because of the intimate arrangement of space and the activities that took place there. In particular, conversation was privileged by Samuel Barnett as a means of breaking down class barriers and ignorance, as it provided both the middle-class settler and the working-class guest with greater understanding and knowledge of one another.

Reception rooms were designed to provide the spaces needed to entertain and build these friendships. Decorating Toynbee initially fell to Henrietta Barnett. Even though Koven has argued that Henrietta's biography 'deliberately destabilised accepted gender categories', her account of managing and decorating the House suggests that she did engage in certain activities ascribed to Victorian women (Koven, 'Henrietta Barnett' 42). This was most evident in the drawing room, which was the site of many informal receptions. Henrietta's

centralising of the drawing room reflects the importance of this space in middle-class hospitality and the role that women played in this space. Thad Logan has argued that this room was a highly feminized space in its decoration and in how it was used in middle-class households (Logan). Toynbee's domestic arrangements question this assumption, showing that institutional space was not necessarily divided along gender lines. The drawing room was conceived instead to be a cross-class space that would 'weld the classes together' through conversation and entertainment, while passing references show that both working-class men and women used this room (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 307). It was always referred to as the 'drawing room' in institutional papers and in personal testimony. The term 'common room' was never used. As a consequence, it was firmly aligned with domestic space. As in any middle-class home, it was a public space that was open to calling visitors.

The commitment to making the drawing room a space for cross-class friendships was reflected by the type of chairs chosen to furnish it. The chairs needed to be moveable if they were to facilitate group discussions or smaller tête-à-têtes. As fig. 3 shows, the lounge chairs were on wheels. There were several wooden chairs that would not necessarily have furnished middle-class drawing rooms: folding and bentwood chairs did not adhere to middle-class notions of comfort and relaxation. Instead, they highlight the institutional dynamics of the space, which jar with the ornamentation and design of the room. They also underpin

Samuel Barnett's assumption that the working man would be more comfortable conversing in groups rather than in one-to-one interactions.



fig. 3: Toynbee Hall's drawing room by an unidentified artist. Social Settlements: Great Britain, England. London. "Toynbee Hall": Toynbee Hall: Drawing Room, c. 1903. Gelatin silver print; 15.3 x 20.5 cm (6.02 x 8.07 in). Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Transfer from the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Social Museum. Collection 3.2002.3577.5. Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Yet an emphasis on the ideals of cross-class friendship can obscure how it was experienced by both settlers and their guests. Toynbee's homelike practices did not ultimately dissolve class identities but reinforced them. Scholars of material culture have argued that objects reinforce specific social identities (Grassby; Woodward). The drawing room was arguably a space where a household's personality was staged (Cohen). As fig. 3 shows, the style and taste of the Toynbee drawing room imitated the typical middle-class decorative scheme: a dark wood sideboard and mantelpiece filled with ornaments; walls covered with

Japanese and Pre-Raphaelite art; a screen and side tables. Together with the dining room, the drawing room represented Samuel Barnett's commitment to sharing middle-class luxury with the urban working classes. Together with his wife, Samuel Barnett wanted it to be grand and well-presented. As Henrietta Barnett noted, 'we finally decided to make it exactly like a West-end drawing-room, erring, if at all, on the side of gorgeousness'. The wallpaper was initially noted by Francis Fletcher Vane to be a 'very-yellowish green' (Vane 110); when the room was redecorated in 1891 it was replaced by 'a very beautiful Japanese paper' ('The Drawing Room'). Bright colours were thought to offset the bleak, dark and mundane appearance of Whitechapel's streets and homes.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume that Toynbee was simply displaying middle-class wealth. Rather, Samuel and Henrietta Barnett imbued these objects with religious significance. Deborah Cohen has argued that artefacts increasingly gained moral currency in the nineteenth century as Protestants bought and displayed household goods (Cohen). Objects and furnishings had transformative potential. For the Barnetts, pictures were especially privileged for this task (Matthews-Jones 'Lessons in Seeing'; Matthews-Jones 'Sanctifying'). Lining the walls of Toynbee's drawing room with pictures hallowed the room as well as their philanthropic intentions. Drawing-room pictures, as the *Toynbee Record* reported in 1891, preached sermons which 'warm hearts by their

colour, and suggest thoughts which cannot be put into words' ('The Drawing Room' 50). This was greatly helped by the temporary loan of ten pictures by the artist George Frederic Watts, a favourite of the Barnetts. The religious significance of the drawing room was further heightened by Samuel Barnetts' conviction that 'religion underlies the duty of entertaining those unable to entertain...because through intercourse comes friendship, through friendship comes love of men, and through love of men comes love of God' (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 156).

Even if settlers did not share the Barnetts' conviction that religion was materially infused in their public rooms, they were still building friendships in spaces that cemented their class identity, as the use, layout and material culture of the drawing room gave the sense of it being an upper-middle-class space. This may go some way to explaining why visual sources of Toynbee's drawing room are not populated. Toynbee was, after all, famed for being a manor house in the slum; fig. 3 reproduces the style of country-house photography. As a staged environment, it demonstrates the importance of the fixtures, furniture and appearance of the drawing room and not the people who populated it. This image was published in the *Toynbee Record* and then sent to the Harvard Social Sciences Fair, to be made into five boards showing educational and social activities (Martin Kao and Lamunière). The only photographs populated by users of the settlement house were the football club, the ambulance brigade, the Thursday smoking lecture and the book-keeping class. In

contrast, the drawing room, together with the library and the quad, was shown empty. While such an arrangement confirmed Toynbee's status as a manor house, it is interesting that, given the importance of cross-class conversation and friendship in settlement rhetoric, this aspect of the movement's work was not depicted in the official visual sources. Instead the style confirmed Toynbee's country house appearance. After all, including lower-class people in the images would have detracted from the splendour of the rooms.

Even though Toynbee guests were not visually depicted in the drawing room, they are not absent from written sources. In fact, for Henrietta Barnett, they were a source of amusement. She recounted how working-class guests struggled to understand that they were announced at formal parties. On one occasion, the Barnetts' tall manservant Dormer found that to prevent 'some of our saddest parishioners' from storming into the drawing room he had to place his arms across the door. While many were held back, 'Mrs. Leary ducked under his arm with a "That's all right, mum; I'm safely in"', to which, Henrietta reports, 'no one could help laughing' (Barnett, *Canon Barnett*, 480). This incident not only served to reinforce class differences between the Barnetts and their working-class guests, but implies that the readers of Henrietta's account would have found Mrs Leary's and her contemporaries' lack of understanding of social customs amusing. At a time when rules and social etiquette served to create class divisions, Henrietta Barnett never considered that her poorer

guests would have to adhere to a new social language or that this would be difficult or alien for them. We may never know whether Mrs Leary was aware of her social *faux pas* or how she might have felt when she realized that her privileged friends were laughing at her. It reminds us, however, that, while Henrietta Barnett saw these activities as classless, the behaviours and customs they expected their guests to follow were not (Bourdieu).

Far from building solid friendships, drawing-room hospitalities could, as Emily K. Abel argues, be stiff and uncomfortable (Abel, 'Middle-Class Culture' 609). As Koven has demonstrated in his recent monograph, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, cross-class friendships were more likely to be 'unequal and asymmetrical' (Koven, *Matchstick Girl* 11; see also Matthews-Jones 'I still remain'). Settler autobiographies suggest that those who passed through Toynbee's doors were not always 'at home' in the house. The drawing room, as the primary site of hospitality, was continually mentioned in these accounts. The games of charades and spelling bees were noted to be tense affairs. According to Francis Fletcher Vane, working-class guests rarely spoke or looked comfortable during the spelling bees. This is perhaps not surprising: guests might not have had either the confidence or the skill to spell aloud words. Similarly, they might not have been interested in partaking in an educational game. Thus, rather than creating an inclusive atmosphere, these drawing-room games served to highlight

educational and leisure differences. Interestingly, Vane never thought to ask his 'poorer guests' how they felt about the spelling bees or other parlour games implying that conversations did not necessarily flow between settler and guest. He found that the strained atmosphere after one spelling competition was only broke when, with another settler, Ingram Brooke, at the piano, danced the polka with 'the prettiest girl' (Vane, *Agin the Governments* 111).

Vane's experiences were confirmed by Margaret Nevinson, then a tutor in French at Toynbee and the wife of the Toynbee associate Henry Nevinson. After dining, lecturers and rich visitors would retire, as was the standard custom of middle-class domestic parties, to the drawing room for coffee. Here they were encouraged to converse with invited guests. Yet Nevinson found that working-class guests were silent during these conversations (Nevinson, *Life's Fitful Fever*). Far from attempting to get to know their neighbours, settlers continually struggled to engage with them, and relationships were strained. As Diana Maltz contends, 'while the Barnetts and their associates were attempting to bridge the classes by forging friendships with the urban poor, these friendships tended to be inegalitarian in practice' (Maltz 207). We are also left to wonder how these conversations were directed. Were settlers - or visitors, for that matter - interested in learning about their guests' lives, or simply in hearing their own voices? As we have already seen, Toynbee rooms privileged upper-middle-

class domestic arrangements and specific material culture, which projected a social identity with which guests might not have been familiar. Vane's spelling bees might have been more successful had they not been held in Toynbee's artistic drawing room.

The drawing room was never, in fact, used exclusively as a space for relaxing and socializing. From the beginning, it was obvious that the provision of educational rooms was far from adequate. To fulfil the demands for more space, the drawing room, dining room and bed-sitting rooms were all given over to additional activities. The dining room was also the library, while bedrooms were used for small classes and reading groups. On Sunday afternoons, Barnett held his bible class in the drawing room, extending a practice that he had started in the vicarage drawing room ('Notes' 59). For members of the bible class, the drawing room was therefore a place where they went to learn and talk about religion. These students were not treated like guests, and no refreshments appear to have been offered during or after this class. Instead, from 1889, bible scholars were sent to have tea in St Jude's schoolroom, when it was realized that some in the class also attended evening classes or clubs and did not necessarily have the time to return to their own homes.

Even when Toynbee did provide food and drink, this could be done in such a way as to reinforce class hierarchies. While hospitality can display many characteristics such as generosity,

kindness and sharing, it can also reinforce a sense of indebtedness between host and guests (Waithe). This was especially the case when settlers paid for specific hospitalities. The letters 'EC', to denote Entertainment Committee, were written on a piece of paper and placed under the wine glasses of guests invited to dine at the house. This act served to remind guests that they were dependent on the generosity of their hosts for their food. Settlers were encouraged to invite particular working men to dinner and to drawing-room hospitalities. It therefore seems unlikely that these guests would have included 'all sorts of conditions of men'. It is more likely that they would have been men who shared a specific outlook or interests with their middle-class hosts. Settlement discourse tended to imply that its users were from the working class and from the surrounding area but we need to recognize that class was stratified and that good transport links to Whitechapel meant that the settlement house was open to a wider community, including the lower middle classes (Pellegrino Sutcliffe 138). Thus it cannot be assumed that guests would not have been uncomfortable or daunted by meeting leading figures, and unfamiliar with the setting or practices of Toynbee's middle-class hospitalities.

Not all the guests used the settlement house as a home. Some working-class visitors to Toynbee saw it more as an institutional space, overlooking the more domestic functions. Guests to the Monday evening fireside chats on religion did not

enter the building through the designated front door but through the lecture hall directly opposite. By walking straight into the lecture hall, these guests would have avoided both the drawing and dining rooms. The lecture hall was less imposing and more institutional-looking than the other two rooms. Guests may also have been familiar with this room from attending the Thursday evening smoking lectures, as depicted in fig. 1, or from receiving outdoor relief when Toynbee opened its doors in the winter of 1886-7. The appearance of these Monday evening guests was described by Henrietta Barnett as being 'unshorn, shabby', while these working men 'pronounced the names inaccurately' (Barnett, *Canon Barnett*, 102). These comments are unusual. Henrietta Barnett rarely discussed the appearance of those who entered the settlement house as guests, which suggests that they must have been different in appearance from the typical users, who appear to have been from the upper working or lower middle classes.

Nevertheless, friendships were made between settlers and their visitors. A letter from Fred Hubbard to Charles Ashbee is unusual in that it shows both the possibilities and domestic strains in making cross-class friendships for poorer guests. It highlights a tension within settlement thinking: that of how settlement activities competed with the familial domestic lives of guests. At a time when the sanctity of the family home was being emphasized for all classes, it must have been hard for some working-class and lower-middle-class wives to witness their

husbands take flight from their familial home to the settlement house (Hammerton; Strange). Hubbard was a stationer's clerk living in Upton Park, Newham, with his wife, Ellen. From Hubbard's response, it seems that Ashbee had sent him an invitation to dinner and asked him to assist with one of his art classes. He declined both invitations: 'I am afraid you are quite mistaken in me in consequence of me having been egotistical and boastful [of his drawing skills] that evening we were alone at Toynbee'. Hubbard asks Ashbee not to think him 'stupid, you are like a friend to me that I do not wish you to be deceived in me'.

Having left school at fourteen with a 'very poor education', Hubbard found work as an office boy, at which point he nearly became a 'Whitechapel Rough' when he fell in with the wrong crowd. The experience left him 'feeling the want of a quiet home' and led him to marry a childhood friend who was 'now the dearest little wife a poor man could have - patient, industrious and loving'. It was because of his wife that he felt he could not take up Ashbee's invitation to help him with his class. Ellen, he wrote, would not be interested in attending Ashbee's drawing class nor would she be prepared for her husband to spend another evening away from home. Instead, Hubbard asked Ashbee to join him for dinner the following night so that they might be able to talk and persuade his wife to spare him. We do not know whether Ashbee went for dinner at the Hubbards, but Fred did become, alongside Ashbee, one of the founding members

of the Guild of Handicraft, responsible for 'decorative painting and general administration' (Crawford 32). Hubbard's decision to visit Toynbee and engage with its activities involved him making the active choice to cross the house's threshold and not be put off by its domestic arrangements.

Settling at Home

Settlement houses were, as Alison Blunt reminds us, 'designed' and 'adapted to house resident workers' (567). This section considers how residents made themselves at home. It thus offers historians the chance to reassess the relationship that upper- and middle-class men had with home-like institutions in the late Victorian period. Toynbee's architectural design privileged a specific vision that understood that young middle-class men would be residing amongst the poor but not necessarily *with* them. Designed by Elijah Hoole in the Queen Anne style, on the site of a former reformatory school for boys, Toynbee architecturally restored traditional relationships between squire and community. Its sense of pastness was further strengthened by its architectural appearance and use of the Queen Anne style, which embedded Toynbee in a local history and in turn rejected the flight of the middle classes to the West End and suburbs. As Richard Irvine has argued, 'the appeal of the past [in architectural design] does not give a sense of fixity through time, but is a rejection of present errors' (35).

Such an explanation repudiates Deborah Weiner's assertion that the settlement movement was 'backward looking' and nostalgic 'for a lost feudal world' to suggest that Toynbee Hall was not attempting to rewrite history but introducing middle-class settlers to their natural sphere of duty (161, 165). This was reinforced by the spatial configuration of the settlement house and the parish church: the settlement's proximity to St Jude's reunited the church with the natural authority figure of the squire.

Settlers invested in the everyday and material realities of living in, and working at, Toynbee. *The Graphic* opined that 'A pleasanter place [than Toynbee] to live in, a young man who is modest in his demands could scarcely hope to find' ('Topic of the Week' 446). Indeed the country-house appearance contrasted with the warehouses, shops and tenement buildings which surrounded it, while the gated entrance would have isolated the Hall from the immediate community. As the *Pall Mall Gazette* noted, the effect of walking into the quad was to lead the visitor to 'another world' and shut the house off from the surrounding area (3). For social commentators, Toynbee's tranquil and quiet atmosphere contrasted sharply with the hustle and bustle of Whitechapel.

Oxbridge graduates' flight to the settlement house should not be assumed to be a permanent break from the familial home or a rejection of middle-class familial domestic lives that the Toynbee rhetoric never undermined. Rather, Toynbee created an

alternative domestic space for young Oxbridge graduates distracted by the overtly homosocial clubs, hostels and hotels. Hence settlers were encouraged to invite their families and friends to visit them at Toynbee. For example, Annette Beveridge's diary recorded her afternoon visit to her son William, a famed settler at Toynbee, on 9 November 1904 (Beveridge MSS.EUR.C 176/80). By extending Toynbee hospitalities to include their friends and families settlers did not have to worry about whether there was enough space for them, about cleaning or about the food for parties: this was all taken care of (although Beveridge's sister, Jeanette, found Toynbee's domestic arrangements to be 'somewhat appalling' and 'disgustingly luxurious') (Pakenham 253).

Much like decorating the drawing room, entertainment enabled Henrietta Barnett to demonstrate her skills as a household manager when receiving settler families: 'I felt - and I hope, pardonable - pride in well-coached servants, daintily decorated tables and properly cooked food' (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 440). Home-making was for middle-class women and they needed this to be recognized by their peers. Even Samuel Barnett would get into the spirit by sitting on the floor and arranging slips of paper with guest names on them into a horseshoe shape. For Sir John Gorst, a Conservative MP, Toynbee was the ideal place to reside when his wife, Mary, went to New Zealand. He found it to be a 'home from home', so much so that he would return every Monday when the House was sitting once his wife

returned (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 440). Elsewhere, the Barnetts reinforced the importance of familial domestic life by including their make-shift family. Dorothy Noel Woods, Henrietta Barnett's charge, visited Toynbee when her health allowed her to leave St Jude's Cottage Hospital in Hampstead. She enjoyed playing hide-and-peek with willing settlers. On one occasion, Dorothy and Samuel (known fondly by her as 'Pater') struggled to find one settler, G. L. Bruce, because he had concealed himself in the drawing-room ottoman (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 535). Thus, fun in the drawing room was clearly possible but it largely depended on audience and activity



fig. 4: "Drawing Room, Toynbee Hall," from Robert A. Woods, *The Poor in Great Cities*, p. 22. Author's own copy.

At the same time, Samuel Barnett emphasized matrimony as the next life stage of life for settlers, and as such implied that Toynbee was a temporary domestic space for young men. On one occasion, Thomas Nunn and Herbert Aitkens became overexcited when planning their annual walking tour holiday. Barnett gently rebuked them with the statement 'You had better both get married' (Marshall 49). Far from being the antithesis of a heterosexual space, Toynbee functioned as home for transition into marriage. This was reinforced by the image included in Robert A. Woods's *The Poor in Great Cities* (1895) of male settlers conversing with female guests, while Samuel and Henrietta Barnett looked on (fig. 4). Seth Koven noted in a figure caption that this image 'exposes some of the internal contradiction of the institution's class-bridge aspirations' (Koven, *Slumming* 246). Male settlers appear to be in intimate conversations with women of the same class, not their poorer male friends. By pairing each male settler with a woman, it can be assumed that Woods and the artist were responding to social commentators who were critical of what they perceived as the homosocial nature of the settlement house and were fearful that settlers were not going to make their own homes with wives and families (Matthews-Jones, 'St Francis' 294-8). The settlement house's all-male domestic arrangements were perceived to be unnatural and artificial by some. Fig. 4 visually opposes such assertions by illustrating its cross-gender

conversations that look by their body positions to be intimate if somewhat flirty, especially the woman with the fan.

Even with the appearance of upper-middle-class domestic arrangements, the settlement house was not a straightforward domestic idyll for male settlers. Few were the truly leisured gentlemen discussed by Gell above. Many combined their residencies with jobs. For instance, during their time at Toynbee the Spender brothers were both establishing careers as journalists, Vane was in the army, Ashbee was training to become an architect and Beveridge was forging a career in social investigation. A compulsory component of living at Toynbee was assisting with the house's various classes and clubs. This created a double burden for many settlers who, after a long and exhausting day at work, then had to socialize or run classes and activities for their neighbours.

It was because of settler demands that it was decided to build a library. The library was initially housed in the dining room but settlers objected to the fact that they did not have a space in which to relax, since the dining room was given over to library matters from 8.00 p.m. when a regime of silence took over the room. This not only implies the difficulties of having multifunctional rooms but also that settlers did not necessarily feel that the drawing room was a space of comfort and relaxation for them. Tosh has argued that men took 'a kind of "internal flight"' in their familial homes when the pressure of home life interfered with their comfort and peace' (Tosh, 'Home and Away'

567). Settlers confirm this by turning to the dining room, arguably a more masculine and middle-class space, with its sober colours and oak tables, to have 'supper, clean air and talk' and to rest 'after long evenings spent in crowded rooms' (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 394; Hamlett, 'The Dining Room').

As a direct response to the demands of settlement work, it is not surprising to find that settlers escaped from Toynbee at weekends. They visited their family and friends, revealing that middle-class men could utilize a variety of domestic spaces at the turn of the twentieth century (Cannadine 63). Again, the pocket diaries of Annette Beveridge show that her son William frequently returned home during his time in the East End where he worked as a club manager. His visits only diminished when he became sub-warden of Toynbee in 1904 (Beveridge). The practice of weekend visiting changed the atmosphere of the house for settlers left behind. For Humphrey Burton, resident from October 1911 to July 1912, weekends at Toynbee were 'dull', which encouraged him to visit the country homes of his friends (Burton 64). While some settlers returned to family-led domestic spaces, others sought out their own idylls away from their families. Francis Gordon Shirreff noted in his obituary of Gilbert Anderson that his health was 'never robust', showing the 'signs of suffering under the double strain of working all the day in Whitechapel [as assistant curator of the Whitechapel Art Gallery], and then all evening, too'. As a consequence, Anderson took to spending his weekends in Little Baddow, Essex, renting

Cow Cottage. He frequently took Toynbee friends with him. He and Gilbert Ramsey, for example, spent many a Saturday and Sunday 'in delightful, intimate talks, while Ramsey cooked chops for both, an accomplishment of which he became rather proud' implying that Cow Cottage offered a more intimate, personal domestic space (10-11). Anderson's experience highlights a real tension in the practices of settling in this period and that being at ease in a settlement house was difficult for settlers who were involved in a full timetable of activities and work. Alternative homes for rest and relaxation were therefore often sought.

Within Toynbee, bedchambers became a space of relaxation and tranquillity, used by settlers as somewhere to retreat to not only from guests but also from other settlers. An unknown Toynbee settler recollected that Thomas Nunn would 'shut himself up in his room ... for hours when he would see no one'. Nunn was a highly respected and liked member of the Toynbee household but, as this friend remarks, 'we used to chaff him about many things' but not for his custom of spending time away in his bedroom, 'For we knew those hours were sacred and served to form a dedicated life' (Unknown, quoted in Marshall 43.) The idea that the settlers' bedchambers were their own personal spaces was reinforced by the fact that they had direct input in their decoration, choosing colour scheme, wallpaper, curtains and carpets. While some settlers were happy to defer to Henrietta Barnett in this matter, the fact that most had clear ideas about

how their bedrooms should be fitted out illustrates the importance of these spaces to individual settlers (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 434). These forms of active home-making reveal that settlers were invested in making themselves feel at home in Toynbee, while also carving out their own personalized space in an institution that continually used its public rooms for educational and social purposes.

Arguably, bedrooms were the most private of any settlement's domestic spaces (Koven, 'The "Sticky Sediment"' 44). But their use at Toynbee reveals that they were demarcated by layers of intimacy and privacy depending on relationships and time of day. For H. F. Wilson, writing for the *Cambridge Review*, the settler's bedroom 'differs in no essential respect from an ordinary college room' (214). As in their college rooms, settlers entertained fellow residents, cementing specific intimacies between individuals and friendship groups. Ashbee, for instance, would visit his good friend Arthur Laurie when he wanted a more private space in which to converse (Ashbee CRA 1/3 1887-1892, Monday January 1887, f.11.). Despite Koven's assertion that 'no East Londoner had access' to Toynbee bedrooms, snippets from autobiographies suggest otherwise (Koven, *Slumming* 245). I have found that settlers were happy to entertain poorer guests in bedrooms, especially in small reading groups or for more intimate conversations. This form of intimate hospitality was not welcomed by all at Toynbee, however. Mrs Warwick, the housekeeper, objected to finding guests wandering

upstairs and settlers moving furniture, such as chairs, into settler bedrooms to accommodate extra guests. She was also frustrated by the extra wash that was needed to clean settlers' bedsheets, implying that the bed was being used as an additional sitting area (Barnett, *Canon Barnett*, 433). On a practical level, this highlighted the strain that was placed on domestic staff when another floor of the settlement house was opened to the public. It could also suggest that the cross-class friendships that had developed between settlers and their guests were of a sexual nature. Matt Cook has argued that the settlement worker in this period was identified as a specific kind of urban homosexual, while Koven suggests that settlement houses enabled young men to construct a particular homoerotic identity (Cook, *London* 39; Koven, *Slumming*).

However, there is no indication that the bedchamber was an erotically charged or sexualized space. Settler autobiographies do not mention improper relations between male settlers or between settlers and male guests. This could be explained in part by the fact that same-sex relationships between men were illegal at the end of the nineteenth century and were still so at the time when many were writing their memoirs. But it also invites historians to consider more fully the relationship that homosocial culture had with heterosexuality in this period. Settlements should not be equated solely with homosexuality simply because they were largely homosocial spaces. Indeed, the only reference to possible sexual impropriety I have found

relates to a female domestic servant. Arthur Pillians Laurie noted that, on visiting his sick friend, he found Arnold Spender's bed obscured by large screens, which Mrs Warwick had placed there in order that the female servant could lay the fire; "Better for you and better for her, Mr. Spender," she had said'. As a result, 'Poor Spender speechless with fury, meekly submitted to the isolation and the innuendo' (Laurie 79). At the same time, settlers were warned that chivalric offers to carry heavy trays or fetch coals for female servants had the potential to be misconstrued or, in Henrietta Barnett's words, to 'generate mistaken notions, by these girls' (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 433). From these two examples, it can be argued that the danger of homosocial domestic arrangements was the possibility of improper relations between settler and servant and that this was an issue that would have been widespread in the minds of those who, like Mrs Warwick, believed that young middle-class men had the potential to seduce female servants.

Bedrooms were not simply a space for relaxation or entertaining. For other settlers, issues emerged when they were forced to use their bed-sitting rooms or the library as a workspace. The settlement house was sometimes the settlers' place of paid work. Harold Spender, brother of Alfred Spender mentioned above, rarely found his bedroom to be a haven or a retreat from the outside world or from what was happening in the house itself when he was working as an itinerant journalist. The noise at night meant that the Hall was not suitable for quiet

work in the evenings, while the communal aspects meant that he rarely found time to be by himself. During the day, he was continually disrupted by the ringing of the house's doorbell. This was exacerbated by the fact that his bedroom was immediately above the front door and by the fact that he sometimes had to interrupt his work to answer it (Spender 70). Koven has noted that Toynbee was at the nucleus of fashionable slumming at the end of the nineteenth century (Koven, *Slumming* 7). Yet, for settlers, these daytime slumming visitors were not only frustrating but a negative result of the house's international success. In an article for the *Toynbee Record*, one unnamed American settler - probably Woods - bemoaned the behaviour of his fellow countrywomen who visited Toynbee simply so that they could tick it off their sightseeing list. He complained that they would run around the settlement, cooing over the rooms and then leaving as quickly as they arrived, with little idea of what went on in the house. The Baedeker guide misrepresented Toynbee, he claimed, whilst the tourist gaze prevented them from fully taking in what they were seeing (Baedeker 171). Toynbee, rather than stamping out slumming, had thus enabled it to continue, though in a different guise.

Domestic arrangements were therefore dependent on how other people experienced them, a point reinforced when religion and politics divided settlers from one another or from the Barnetts. While the Barnetts wanted Toynbee to be remembered as largely harmonious, this was not always the case and there were moments

when the atmosphere was not as friendly as they might have hoped. Henrietta recalled that the Boer War divided Toynbee so much that 'On some evenings we deemed it better not to dine in the Hall.' The Barnetts' pro-Boer views were apparently not shared by the majority of settlers (Barnett, *Canon Barnett* 431). The dining room not only offered settlers the chance to consume the Empire through their stomachs (de Groot), but also to discuss and argue about what was going on within it. Far from being removed from the Empire, this incident shows how it was a part of Toynbee's everyday landscapes: it illustrates how fraught imperial politics could be and how diverging opinions made the settler feel less at home in the settlement as people divided themselves into opposing groups. In making a home in the East End, these settlers had not isolated themselves from the world beyond. On one occasion, Henrietta herself was the cause of upset. The Jewish settler Basil Henriques, for instance, noted that the only directly anti-Semitic attack he ever experienced was at Toynbee and from Henrietta Barnett. On arriving at Toynbee, Henrietta asked him 'Why don't you go to your own country?' to which he replied 'But I am in my own.' Her response was 'No. Palestine, I mean.' Henriques excused her comments by the fact that Whitechapel had changed drastically with the migration of Eastern European Jews, but such an introduction to Toynbee must have unsettled him. His 1937 autobiography, *The Indiscretions of a Warden*, shows how he struggled to feel at home in the House. The effect was that he ended up treating the

settlement more as a hotel. For him this was exacerbated by the fact that he did not see or engage with other settlers. Ironically, his settlement work meant that he could not commit to the communal life of the house. Having moved from Oxford House, another university settlement house in Bethnal Green, to establish the St George Boys Club, he was too busy in the evenings to dine with his fellow settlers and found himself dependent on meeting them at breakfast and lunch. Yet the practice of sitting on one's own during breakfast meant that he was only greeted with nods over newspapers, while the dining room was generally empty at lunchtime, with settlers away at their day jobs (Henriques 95; 38). These examples reveal an interesting irony with the settlement's hopes to reconnect the rich and poor together. They failed to acknowledge that these groups were themselves divided.

Conclusion

Rooms were at the heart of Toynbee's everyday life. By centralising them in my analysis I have demonstrated how they were used and experienced by settlers and their poorer guests. By pausing in a room, or peering at a threshold, I show how scholars can be better placed to see how ideas were actioned and lived in an institutional context. Studies of the settlement movement have largely been interested in how ideas were explained or theorised (Koven *Slumming*). But, by privileging

what advocates and supporters have said, scholars run the risk of making the settlement an abstract, discursive space, not a lived everyday space of engagement. Institutions were embodied spaces that were experienced day by day. This article confirms what scholars of nineteenth-century gender have long asserted: ideological images are destabilised by the realities of lived experience. Being 'at home' in the settlement was not incompatible with, nor straightforwardly a 'flight' from, familial life, but complementary to it. Settlements were different to familial homes, but nevertheless still primarily domestic spaces for settlers and visitors alike. Settling at Toynbee offered male settlers the chance to be at home amongst, but not necessarily with, the people of Whitechapel. It gave them the opportunity to get to know and understand those poorer than themselves.

Similarly, a consideration of how Toynbee's rooms were used and experienced by both settlers and guests reveals specific weaknesses in their dedication to the House's domestic ideals and cross-class friendship. As Emily Abel has contended 'difficulties plagued attempts by the residents to put Barnett's ideology into practice' (Abel 617). After all settlement homes were never straightforwardly homely for either the settler or the guest. Settling at home had unsettling potentials. Middle-class settlers combined settlement work with paid jobs, while also undertaking work in the settlement. Settler autobiographies and writings thus reveal moments of discomposure in settlement

living. At the same time, public rooms were used not so much for the comfort and enjoyment of the settlers, but to host their poorer brothers. How enjoyable this experience was for settlers is difficult for scholars of Toynbee to discover. Settler anecdotes evidence discomposure when recounting cross-class interaction in the more domestic spaces of the settlement, challenging Samuel Barnett's belief that cross-class friendships were achieved through interaction. Thus by examining the micro-*wheres* of settling I have demonstrated moving between and into Toynbee's rooms was curtailed by who you were and what your social status was. Far from creating a classless institution, Toynbee functioned materially and spatially within a domestic prism that might have been unknown to working class visitors to the house. Toynbee's cross-class friendships were hierarchical and where class power and relations were played out in the settlement house through its artefacts and spatial configuration. Scrutinizing these rooms has provided a further reading of residential life not only for Toynbee's settlers, but also for its users.

Notes

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