

The Buildings of **Toynbee Hall**

by Andrew Counce

TOYNBEE
HALL



For a future without poverty



Toynbee Hall, 1910

The Buildings of Toynbee Hall

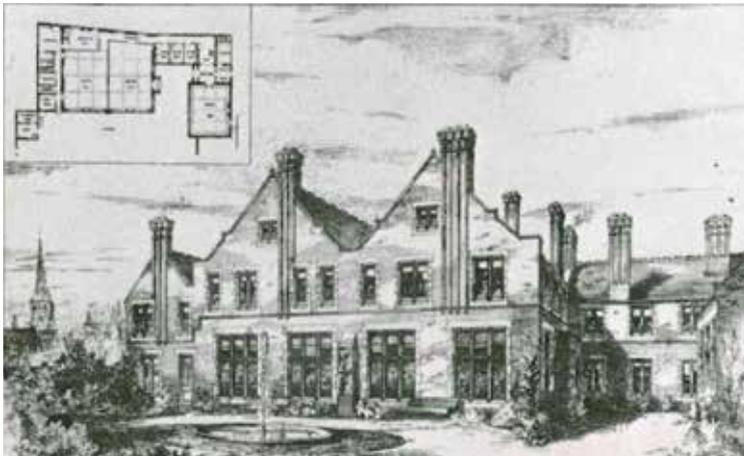
Toynbee Hall began with the purchase of the Boys' Refuge Industrial School on Commercial Street, Whitechapel, described as a "grim disused" building, adjacent to Samuel Barnett's St. Jude's Vicarage. The University Settlements of East London arranged with Samuel Barnett to raise the necessary £6,250 sum for the purchase. The school's half-demolished buildings, were originally surveyed by Elijah Hoole, who had previously designed model dwellings for working people. He "envisaged an edifice like a manorial residence in nineteenth-century Elizabethan style".

The building was in stark contrast to others in an area which was described by the then Bishop of London as "the worst parish... inhabited mostly by a criminal population" consisting of "wretched streets and foul alleys full of houses that are desolation without and squalor within".

As Toynbee Hall's first Annual Report states, the hall contained the Warden's Lodge, library and, "a lecture hall, dining room, drawing room, classroom and common room with thirty rooms capable of receiving seventeen men".

Resembling the colleges of Oxbridge, the original buildings were neo-Tudor in appearance with a small courtyard enclosed, red brick and stone dressings, gothic mouldings and ribbed brickwork complete with gabled roofs and mullioned windows. In line with Hoole's workers' cottages in Southwark, the major rooms were surrounded by sitting rooms and lavatories to the east and a pantry, scullery and larder to the north.

Plan and artist's impression *Builder Magazine*, 1883



“

The building was in stark contrast to others in an area which was described by the then Bishop of London as “the worst parish... inhabited mostly by a criminal population” consisting of “wretched streets and foul alleys full of houses that are desolation without and squalor within”.

On the first floor there were a series of bedrooms, complete with chimneypieces which surrounded a common room with a double height ceiling. Servant's quarters were on the second floor and the bedrooms secreted in the gables.

The architecture presented Hoole's plan for a manorial style residence as almost ostentatious in its grandeur. However, in line with the Settlement Movement's fundamental beliefs, Toynbee Hall's magnificent architecture acted as a tangible reminder of the prevalence of middle class Victorian scholars amongst the impoverished residents of East London.

“

The hall contained the Warden’s Lodge, library and, “a lecture hall, dining room, drawing room, classroom and common room with thirty rooms capable of receiving seventeen men”.

Drawing Room (now Arts Admin cafe)

The drawing room provided an environment for discussion in a less formal setting, ideally bringing together individuals of varying social status. However, Henrietta Barnett’s account suggests that this interaction was not always seamless, with her annoyance at visitors’ “greasy hands leaning against Morris papers and dirty, damp garments ruining furniture covers.”

Contemporary designers of such spaces strove for “especial cheerfulness, refinement of elegance, and what is called lightness as opposed to massiveness”. Pimlott’s 19th century account details a lavish setting, “filled with a strange medley of upholstery”, with walls “hung with Japanese designs of very beautiful execution... but somewhat out of keeping with the substantial stone mullions and lattice panes of the windows, hung with heavy, warm-coloured curtains, and fitted with softly cushioned seats, conveniently low”. In addition, Pimlott notes the “green glazed tiles of rather ecclesiastical pattern” and a “number of eastern rugs... strewn over the floor”, all of which contribute to an image of surprising exoticism and forming an interesting contrast with the exterior manor-house architecture.

Henrietta Barnett describes the Drawing Room as “high, and hung with paintings by Walter Crane or GF Watts” with walls “of aesthetic tint, adorned with panels and designs... a product in part of the manual and artistic training”. As such, Arts and Crafts features did not seem restricted to the classes taught by Ashbee, rather, it was a movement which seemed to saturate the very building, shaping the experiences of those who resided there.

Dining Room (now Ashbee Hall)

The dining room was to be “in almost every way one of contrast” to the drawing room’s design, with an interior described as hearkening back to the Medieval Revival. C. R. Ashbee supervised the school of handicraft in the decoration of the hall, following his 1887 lectures on John Ruskin, a major forerunner of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The associated ideas of naturally hand-crafting and traditional craftsmanship were reflected in the intertwining leaves and branches, which formed a frieze along one wall of the Lecture Hall.

The current Toynbee Hall logo is based on the ‘tree of life’ motifs that can be seen as raised features on the Ashbee Hall walls.



Dining Room



Archibald Zeigler painting the murals in the Lecture Hall, circa 1920

Lecture Hall

Archibald Zeigler, who studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts between 1927 and 1930, can also be credited with the decoration of this feature. Unfortunately, the murals were painted over and, until a full refurbishment is conducted, the condition of this feature is unknown. Also, in similar fashion to the drawing room decoration, there is a record of a painting of Watts' entitled "Chaos", hanging in the dining-room.

The wood panelling was added in 1897 by the husband of Catherine Eyre Woods in her memory along with the doors that join the Ashbee Hall donated at the same time by Mr J Widdowson.

Wadam House and College Buildings.

Purchased by Samuel Barnett on behalf of the Settlement in 1886, Wadham House – now the corner of Attlee House backing onto Wentworth Street- was opened in 1887 and named after the college that Samuel Barnett attended where each resident had a private room, "small, but not afflicting to the artistic soul" and use of a common room. Classes sought to propagate an "atmosphere" of study, in contrast to the elitist educational system advocated by "the shadow of our old Universities". Classes included Latin Grammar and the poetical works of Virgil.

“

Also, in similar fashion to the drawing room decoration, there is a record of a painting of Watts' entitled "Chaos", hanging in the dining-room.

Balliol House and St Georges House

Following the success of Wadham House, arrangements were made to replicate the programme at Balliol House, where nine rooms were furnished. Though functioning identically, the two institutions were to be kept independent, in the hope of instilling “something of the friendly inter-collegiate rivalry which adds so much to the salt of life at a... university.”

Balliol was built on neighbouring George Yard Buildings, land that was bought in 1889 by a Toynbee Hall residential volunteer, Bolton –King. Lying along what is now known as Gunthorpe Street, these new spaces were used for schoolmasters, clerks and artisans to experience collegiate life whilst preparing for exams in such areas as medicine and architecture.

Balliol house was later renamed Charles Booth House, both were pulled down in the early 1970's and rebuilt as Sunley House, opened by The Queen Mother in 1976, which provided both residential and office space.

“

Though functioning identically, the two institutions were to be kept independent, in the hope of instilling “something of the friendly inter-collegiate rivalry which adds so much to the salt of life at a... university.”



College buildings common room



The New Education Building from the rear, circa 1960????

‘New Building’

In 1938, a new building was constructed in order to satisfy “the important and far-reaching work of Toynbee Hall” which demands “up-to-date and simple buildings [which are] scientifically planned and well proportioned”. Lying on the site previously occupied by the demolished St. Jude’s Schools and Exhibition Buildings, the new building was laid on a series of older brick foundations which had “stood the test of time”. The building was described as “a practical expression of the work that goes on in Toynbee Hall” by the architect Alister G. MacDonald, eldest son of the first Labour Party Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald.

With an exterior of light-coloured brickwork, the building’s ground floor was occupied by a theatre auditorium and stage, capable of seating four-hundred, for use of lectures, meetings and concerts. Basement rooms contained actors’ design workshops, storage rooms, a boiler-house and photographic dark room.



The juvenile Court Room in the New Building, also used as a music room.

The Juvenile Court suite was found on the first floor. It encompassed a waiting-room, officers’ room and remand room, with the dual purpose of hosting events such as music evenings and class discussions.

The second floor housed a series of classrooms, a science laboratory and two art studios with a sloping roof feature leading towards the top floor, containing a dining room and recreation room. In addition to an adjoining kitchen, the two larger rooms were fitted with removable partitions, allowing the conversion into a large dancing room. It was possible to access this building from the old quadrangle, with an entrance hall paved with Travertine stone, finished in warm, quiet colours.

This building is currently occupied by Arts Adminan arts based charity.



Left to right: Before and after the bomb damage to Toynbee Hall from Commercial Street, 1941

Bomb damage

In March 1941 a large bomb narrowly missed the 'new building,' damaging doors and windows and wrecking the adjoining school. In May 1941 the Wardens lodge, the library and several bedrooms were destroyed by fire caused by incendiary and high explosive bombs. The Warden moved on to Booth House which was slightly damaged and the housekeeper grew tomatoes and lettuces on the floor of the bombed out library. Unsafe walls were pulled down and windows were reinstated.

In addition, the warehouses which screened Toynbee Hall from the bustle of Commercial Street were lost, owing to their stock of flammable merchandise, leading to the hard landscaping of Mallon Gardens in the 1970s, which allowed Londoners a full view of the building from the road.

Initially using the war damage compensation funds Toynbee Hall embarked upon a programme of construction throughout the 20th century. The warden and his family were living in the cramped students accommodation and were moved to a spacious three bedroomed flat in the Gate House (renamed Profumo House) upon its completion in 1965-67.

In addition, a series of extensions were built on the existing tennis court in the 1960s alongside the north and east sides of the original building comprising of a library, archive and increased student accommodation, Attlee House was completed in 1971 and was opened by the Queen.

In 1984 further flats were made available on the redeveloped Booth House site and were known as College East.

The buildings today

In early 2016 Toynbee Hall embarked on a regeneration of the estate and buildings. The regeneration will work to conserve the crumbling Halls and courtyard, reconfigure Mallon Gardens onto one level thus increasing visibility and accessibility and will see the demolition of Profumo, Attlee and Sunley House. Profumo House will be rebuilt as contemporary office space and will provide purpose built spaces for the advice services. The Halls will provide space to showcase the heritage of Toynbee Hall and Attlee and Sunley Houses (including College East) will be rebuilt as private residential apartments.

References

Books

Briggs, Asa and Macartney, Anne, Toynbee Hall: *The First Hundred Years*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1984)

Pimlott, J.A.R. Toynbee Hall: *Fifty Years of Social Progress 1884-1934*, (London: Dent, 1935)

Kerr, Robert, *The Gentleman's House: Or, How to Plan English Residences*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Barnett, Henrietta, Canon Barnett: *His Life, Work and Friends, Volumes 1 & 2*, (Boston & New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919)

Meacham, Standish, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform, 1880-1914: The Search for Community*, (Yale University Press, 1987)

Toynbee Hall Annual Reports and Records (various)

Articles

Cummings, Edward, *The Quarterly Journal of Eco-nomics: University Settlements*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Apr., 1892), pp. 257-279, (Oxford University Press) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1882459>

Szuberla, Guy, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society: Three Chicago Settlements: Their Architectural Form and Social Meaning*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (May, 1977), pp. 114-129, (University of Illinois Press) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40194543>

White, Gleeson, *The Decorator and Furnisher: The Arts and Crafts Guild of London*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Jan., 1892), pp. 135-136 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25586501>

Broer, Wendy, *Architecture of Victorian London A203: Toynbee Hall*, (Toynbee Hall Archive, Oct. 1995)

Help us create a future without poverty

Toynbee Hall
The Community Centre
52 Old Castle Street
London E1 7AJ
Tel: +44 (0)20 7247 6943
Email: info@toynbeehall.org.uk
www.toynbeehall.org.uk

 Find us on Facebook
 Follow @Toynbee Hall
Sign up to our e-news online: bitly/THenews

Registered Charity No. 211850. A company limited by guarantee.
Registered Office as shown.
Registered Number. 20080 England

Copyright © Toynbee Hall. All rights reserved.

