

HISTORY

OF SOCIAL WORK

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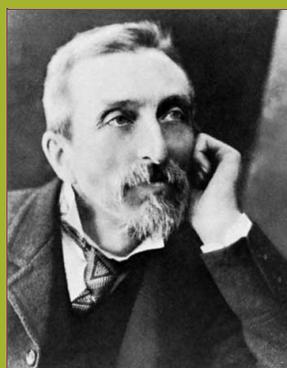
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1884 Arnold Toynbee University Settlement



Arnold Toynbee (1852-1881) died before the age of thirty but nevertheless in his short life as a scholar his thinking did much to change how education could be developed through work in the poorer parts of Britain's cities. He lectured in economic history at Oxford University where he was very critical of the effects of the industrial revolution which he saw emerging all around him. Toynbee observed that: "The effects of the industrial revolution prove that free competition may produce wealth without producing well-being". Large-scale poverty was becoming concentrated in urban slums and he could not remain indifferent to its consequences. He therefore urged his students to show some real engagement in working with the growing population of poor people.

Using the ideas of Edward Denison (1840-1970), Toynbee proposed schemes for 'university extension', a form of outreach and supplementary learning by which students working in the most deprived communities would apply and 'extend' their course material through voluntary work. Students would become more aware of daily living conditions and this confrontation with the harsh reality of social inequality would not only sharpen their sense of social responsibility, but also bridge class divisions. This idea was later labelled Practical Socialism (1888) by Toynbee's ideological ally, the Anglican priest Samuel Barnett. The model received plenty of support in the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, from where it gained international recognition.

After Toynbee's death, Barnett continued to promote the concept of university extension through the establishment of university settlements. These provided accommodation so that students would not only work to enhance the living conditions of the poor, they could also live among them for at least a year. The aim was that this arrangement would strengthen the links between scholars and the residents of urban slums, and achieve better results in terms of social improvement and mutual learning. In 1884 Toynbee Hall opened in East London. Graduate students came to live on the premises, while often working elsewhere. They contributed to local life by studying the lives of their working class neighbours and organising activities that contributed to community building, (informal) education and social solidarity. Students based in the settlements worked to improve the system of benefits for the poor, secure better pension rights and generally enhance living conditions. Among them was the philanthropist [Charles Booth](#), for whom Toynbee Hall served as a base while he worked on Life and Labour of the People in London (1889). This study mapped poverty in London at the end of the 19th century and influenced both social research and the fight against poverty for decades afterwards.

Toynbee Hall quickly became an inspiring example of community development in both the US and Europe. [Jane Addams](#) visited Toynbee Hall in 1888 and became so enthusiastic that she exported the idea to North America.

At the beginning of the 20th century, one of the people to live and work at Toynbee Hall for a short period of time was [William Beveridge](#) and he was followed by a number of students who went on to become prominent social theorists and politicians.

Arnold Toynbee also happens to be an ancestor of Polly Toynbee, currently a leading journalist often writing on social issues in [The Guardian](#). Her book *Hard work* (2003) was based on direct experience of living on poverty wages and made an impressive contribution to describing the difficulties faced every day by people at the bottom of the social ladder, portraying the real life and [\(in\)humanity behind statistics](#).

Extra

Toynbee Hall celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2009. On the 1st of June, there was a party for the volunteers. This was also the launch of the movie ["Celebrating Volunteers at Toynbee Hall"](#).

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This initiative also exists in Dutch, where it covers the history of social work in the Netherlands, in Flanders, and internationally.

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Read more

- [↗ Smith, M. \(1999\), *Settlements and social action centres.*](#)

Additional information

- [↗ Barnett-Rowland, Henrietta \(1913\), *Canon Barnett, his life, work and friends.*](#) Murray, London

Links

- [Wikipedia on Arnold Toynbee](#)
- [Toynbee Hall now](#)
- [Settlements and social action centres](#)
- [Wikipedia on Charles Booth](#)
- [Polly Toynbee @ The Guardian](#)

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- [Toynbee Hall, London, UK](#)

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