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## **Labour Colonies for Gentlemen: Philanthropic Settlements and the Making of the Social Reformer in London, 1884-1914**

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[Duthie, Emily Nora](#)

### **Description**

This thesis examines a program of reform that was directed at the gentlemanly philanthropists of London's first two university settlements, Toynbee Hall and Oxford House. Shifting the focus of previous scholarship on the role of the settlements in promoting moral and cultural improvement amongst East London's poor, this study analyses the ways in which Toynbee Hall and Oxford House also sought to shape the social reformers who came to live and work in the...[\[Show more\]](#) urban slums. Residency in London's East End was intended to be a transformative experience that could regenerate Oxbridge men and their West End counterparts, while also providing opportunities and networks for personal development and career advancement. Both Toynbee Hall and Oxford House embraced a two-fold agenda. This included a systematic effort to elevate the urban poor and to redress social problems in surrounding neighbourhoods, and a more introspective program that was concerned with the improvement or advancement of the 'settlers' themselves. While mainstream historiography on these settlements has focused primarily on their attempts to study, transform and 'improve' East End communities, this study shifts attention away from the campaign aimed directly at the poor in order to explore the 'making' of the social reformer as it occurred within these institutions. This component of the settlements' mission was widely recognised during the era of their creation. Popular representations of Toynbee Hall and Oxford House as 'settlements', 'colonies' or 'labour refuges' for gentlemen drew upon reformist discourses and practices that were typically directed at the urban poor and colonial subjects during this period. The labour colony was advocated in philanthropic circles as a training centre where the unemployed could reside and receive practical education and moral guidance before finding work in Britain or abroad. Drawing upon the image of a labour colony, this thesis argues that Toynbee Hall and Oxford House settlers became the subjects of a parallel educational and vocational project, though the nature of that project varied between the settlements in ways that reflected differences between the ethos of each institution. The chapters that follow consider the settlements as sites for the cultivation, training and networking of gentlemen. This thesis, unlike much of the historiography upon this topic, does not cast Toynbee Hall and Oxford House men primarily as agents of reform. It treats them as the targets of a settlement program. The task of producing social reformers may appear at first glance to be an auxiliary aspect of the settlement houses, but it was inextricably linked both to the goal of redressing problems in the East End and to a wider project designed to form a new generation of leaders and bureaucrats for Britain and its empire.

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And the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer provided an intellectual argument for the laissez-faire mood of the times, advocating the 'survival of the fittest' in society as in nature. But in the Social Gospel movement, which spread through American churches of all denominations during the later 19th century, a reform-minded ethic took hold. The first attempts to put the settlement idea into practice were made by young Englishmen of privilege and education. In 1867 an Oxford graduate named Edward Denison, the son of a bishop

and nephew of a Speaker of the House of Commons, took lodgings in the slum district of Stepney. He came to know his neighbors, offered classes for children, and worked to improve housing and sanitation conditions in the area. However, a number of socially conscious writers, social investigators, moral reformers, preachers and journalists, who sought solution to this urban malady in the second half of the nineteenth century, argued convincingly that the growth of slums was caused by poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and homelessness. The Slums of East London. Two of Phil May's depictions of life in the East End: East End Loafers and A Street-Row in the East End. In the last decades of the Victorian era East London was inhabited predominantly by the Many philanthropic institutions were active in Spitalfields in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1860, Fr. Daniel Gilbert and the Sisters of Mercy opened a night refuge for destitute women and children in Providence Row. And the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer provided an intellectual argument for the laissez-faire mood of the times, advocating the 'survival of the fittest' in society as in nature. But in the Social Gospel movement, which spread through American churches of all denominations during the later 19th century, a reform-minded ethic took hold. The first attempts to put the settlement idea into practice were made by young Englishmen of privilege and education. In 1867 an Oxford graduate named Edward Denison, the son of a bishop and nephew of a Speaker of the House of Commons, took lodgings in the slum district of Stepney. He came to know his neighbors, offered classes for children, and worked to improve housing and sanitation conditions in the area. However, a number of socially conscious writers, social investigators, moral reformers, preachers and journalists, who sought solution to this urban malady in the second half of the nineteenth century, argued convincingly that the growth of slums was caused by poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and homelessness. The Slums of East London. Two of Phil May's depictions of life in the East End: East End Loafers and A Street-Row in the East End. In the last decades of the Victorian era East London was inhabited predominantly by the Many philanthropic institutions were active in Spitalfields in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1860, Fr. Daniel Gilbert and the Sisters of Mercy opened a night refuge for destitute women and children in Providence Row.