

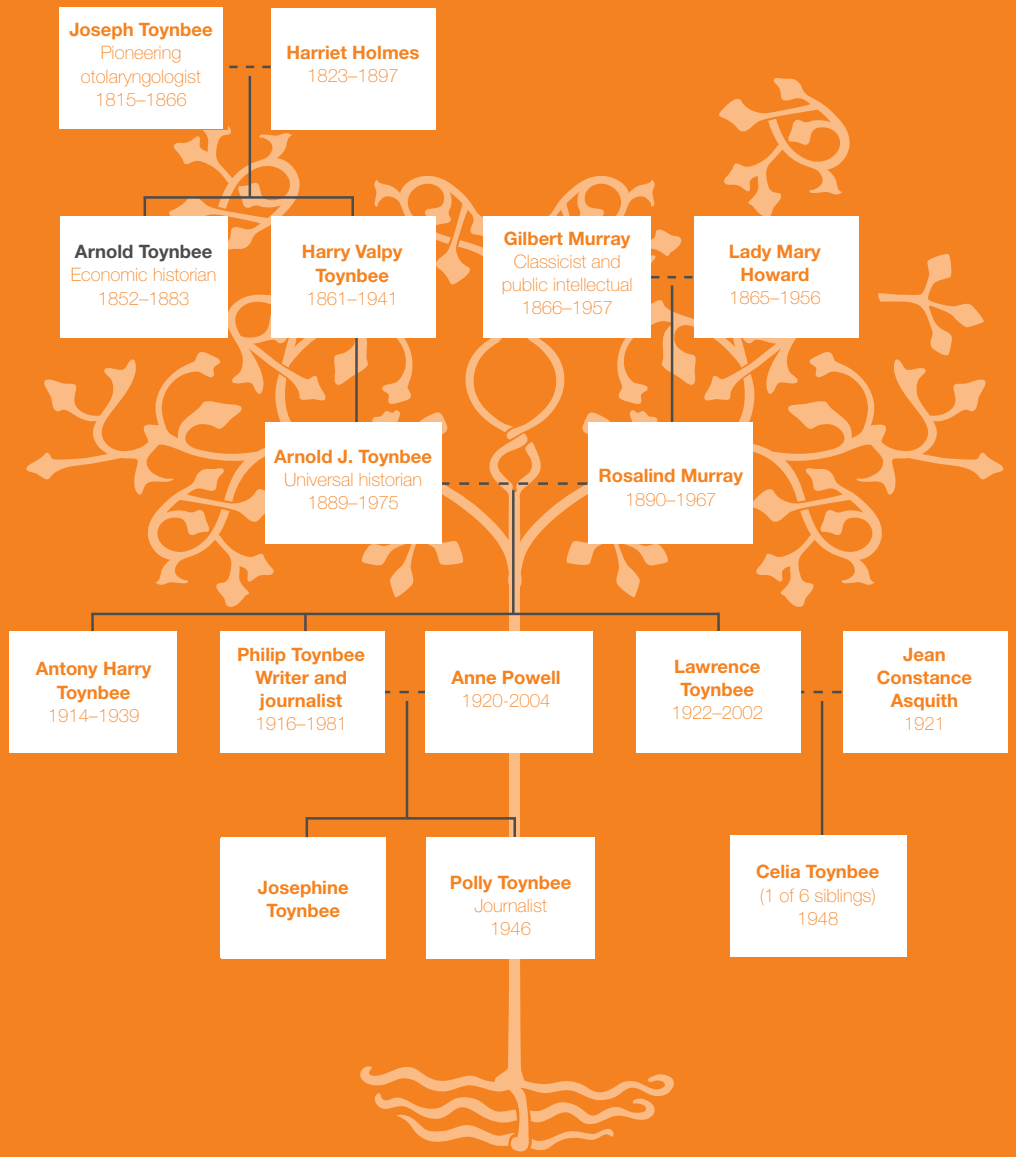
Arnold Toynbee

by Celia Toynbee

TOYNBEE HALL

For a future without poverty

The Toynbee family tree





Arnold Toynbee

Arnold Toynbee

Much is known about iconic figures such as Samuel Barnett, William Beveridge and Clement Attlee who shaped the early years of Toynbee Hall. Less however is known about Arnold Toynbee and his relationship with the Settlement, he had a short but meaningful life and was admired by the founders so much so that Henrietta Barnett suggested it be named after him.

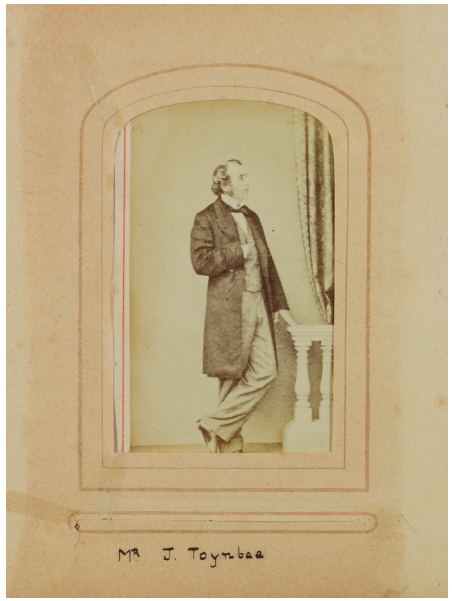
Arnold Toynbee died aged 30 in 1883 and it is ironic that he died without knowing his legacy. It was during a memorial service to him on 10th March 1884 that Henrietta noticed that Balliol Chapel was packed with men who had come in loving memory and she felt were filled by the aspiration to copy Arnold in caring so much for those who had fallen by the wayside.

> “As I sat on that Sunday afternoon among the crowd of strong-brained, clean-living men, the thought flashed to me let us call the Settlement Toynbee Hall…our new Settlement received its name before a brick was laid or the plans concluded…”

Arnold was one of the keenest of a group of like-minded, educated, young men who worked with the Barnetts when they first arrived in Whitechapel at St Jude’s Parish church in 1873. During their vacations they went to learn first-hand how people in the poverty-stricken East End of London lived. As Henrietta Barnett put it:

> “They have come to learn as much as to teach… there is nothing like contact for giving or getting understanding”

Arnold subsequently became a lifelong friend of Samuel and Henrietta Barnett who were the driving force behind the establishment of Toynbee Hall.



Joseph Toynbee



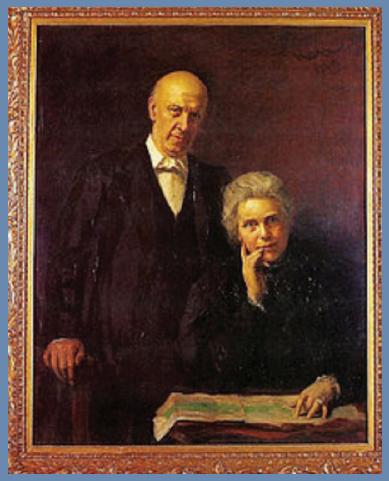
Harriet Holmes, Mrs J Toynbee

Who was Arnold Toynbee?

Arnold Toynbee was born in London in 1852, one of the nine children of Joseph Toynbee, an eminent and pioneering ear surgeon and philanthropist. Tragically Joseph died accidentally while experimenting with chloroform as an anaesthetic when Arnold was just 14. Arnold adored his father and was distraught when he died and subsequently throughout his short life he aimed to carry on the philanthropy and high ideals he learned at his father’s knee.

From a young age he showed himself to be a very different from other boys of his age. His godmother writing to his sister Gertrude observed that:

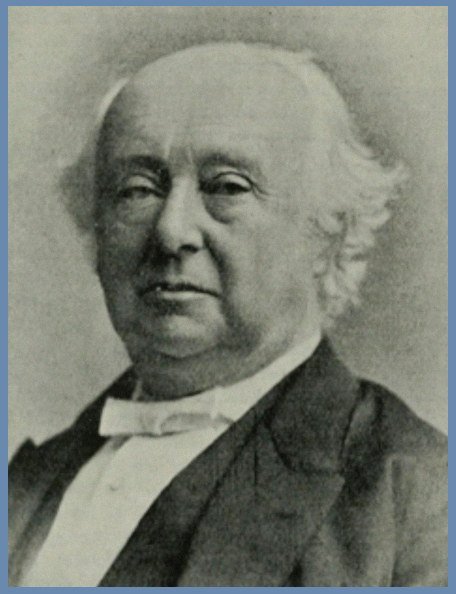
> “There was such an earnestness about him… even then he seemed to take a very serious view of life’s duties. ‘He had a strange introspective youth …, never long in school, although high spirited he did not possess the easy sociability which makes school a happy life”



Samuel and Henrietta Barnett



Joseph Toynbee



Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol

Education

Having been left a sum in his father's will, Arnold went to university in the spring of 1873 and practically never left. Of his ten years at Oxford he spent the first half at Pembroke College teaching political economy and in1878 became a lecturer and tutor at Balliol College. It was his outstanding character rather than any conventional academic achievements that caught the attention of Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol who let him in 'the back door' to study there and eventually, despite only receiving a pass degree, to teach political history at Balliol. 'With his unfailing eye for every kind of excellence, Jowett had taken note of Toynbee almost from the moment of his arrival.'

It was at Oxford too that he first began to make an impression on his contemporaries. It was there he was dubbed, not entirely uncritically 'The Apostle Arnold'. His friend Alfred Milner at Oxford spoke of "the indescribable spirituality of his whole being; another contemporary remarked in awe "Toynbee reads his bible, like any other book, as if he liked it!"



Balliol College, Oxford

Campaigning for social reform

During his time as a regular visitor to the vicarage in Whitechapel Arnold was inspired by the Barnett's passionate mission to improve the lot of the poor through education, sport, art and social reform. Like his father Arnold believed strongly that conditions for the poor should be improved.

He gave lectures to large gatherings in London and all over the country. His lectures aimed to educate the country to be alert to the problems of the day. His great achievement was to bring together seemingly disparate theories, technical changes and social trends and his lectures included titles such as: The Condition of Wage Earners, the Growth of Pauperism, the Wage Fund Theory, the Future of the Working Class, Agriculture and Population. His lectures given to working men on the implications of the industrial revolution proved to be hugely influential. He was a passionate speaker on the subject, he is credited for popularising the term 'Industrial Revolution' and he wrote his pioneering book on the subject before he was 30.

Alfred Milner remarked in Arnolds powers of oratory

> "Nothing he has ever written gives any idea of his power of expressing himself by word of mouth,… when he spoke with fire, the directness of his glance, the fine carriage of his head fettered attention. His language, when thus moved, was of extraordinary eloquence-indeed he was the most eloquent man, I have ever met."

The reach of his social commitment was significant. By 1880 he was working for the spread of Trade Unions and Co-operatives, he became a Poor Law Guardian, read for workers in large industrial centres and stood as a liberal candidate for Oxford Town Council. He visited Ireland to study the land question and acted as a visitor for the Charity Organisational Society. During the last years of his life he became increasingly concerned with Old Age Pensions and the duty of the state long before his contemporaries. He had the idea of an outline of a scheme 6-8 years prior to it becoming a matter for discussion.

Personal life

Arnold married Charlotte Atwood (cousin of the notorious Rector of Stiffkey). She was 12 years older than Arnold and described their marriage as both 'tasteful and beautiful'. They didn't have any children and lived in Oxford where Arnold involved himself in a variety of good works and continued his arduous round of travelling and lecturing.'The intense activity of his later years would probably not have lasted as long as it did if he had not had the support of a happy home life-a life….in the companionship of a wife who sympathized deeply with all his ideals.'

It was on one of his many tours that he was taken ill and never recovered. Although his death certificate described 'brain fever' as the cause of death it was widely felt that overwork had played a part and that this combined with migraines and insomnia, following a fall from a pony as a 10 year old, contributed to his early death.

Charlotte outlived Arnold by fifty years and along with his friends was instrumental in getting his book on the Industrial Revolution published.

His legacy

It's difficult to fully pin down and quantify the good that Arnold was able to achieve before his early death, however his qualities were obvious. His nephew, the historian Arnold J Toynbee, canvassed descriptions from his contemporaries put it like this:

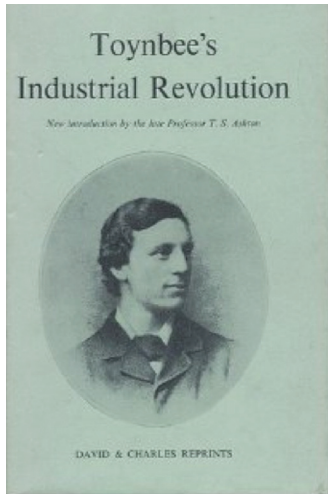
> "The vision that I caught was one of simplicity, sincerity, and ardour; and these qualities combined to strike an unmistakable note of greatness."

Arnold Toynbee would have made his name simply by virtue of what he achieved. To have produced a book, and to have inspired the foundation of Toynbee Hall, were notable achievements for a man who died at thirty. But it was evident that his surviving contemporaries revered and loved him for being what he was, even more for doing what he did.

He seems to have had presence, he seems to have emanated a kind of otherworldly spirituality, a secular saintliness which set him apart, even from childhood. 'When he spoke, and especially when he spoke with fire, the directness of his glance, the fine carriage of his head fettered attention. His language, when thus moved, was of extraordinary eloquence.

In his brief life Toynbee campaigned relentlessly for worker housing, parks, and free libraries. Later he became a Guardian under the Poor Law and a supporter of co-operatives: all this alongside a punishing programme of lecture tours around the UK. 'Large audiences of working men listened with rapt attention to his addresses, strange mixtures as they were of dry economic discussion with fervent appeals to the higher instincts of the audiences.'

It is easy to see why it was generally acknowledged that his tireless devotion to the good of others contributed to his untimely death.



Arnold Toynbee's book,
Toynbee's Industrial Revolution

Sadly the Toynbee burial plot in St Mary's Church in Wimbledon is now grassed over and no trace remains of the 'Apostle Arnold'. His own words from notes and jottings are perhaps an apt epitaph:

> "Man lifts his head for one moment above the waves, gives one wild glance around, and perishes. But that glance, was it for nothing?"

Toynbee Hall itself stands as his answer.

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Help us create a future without poverty

Toynbee Hall
The Community Centre
52 Old Castle Street
London E1 7AJ
Tel: +44 (0)20 7392 2953
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