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# A Flight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen's Clubs of London, 1880–1914

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In 1888 *The Society Herald* described the typical day of a young bachelor: "He breakfasts, lunches, dines, and sups at the club. He is always at billiards, which he doesn't understand, he writes innumerable letters, shakes hands a dozen times a day, drinks coffee by the gallon, and has a nod for everybody. He lives, moves, and has his being within his club. As the clock strikes 1 a.m. his little body descends the stairs and goes out through the big front door like a ray of moonlight, and until the same morning at ten of the o'clock no human being has the slightest knowledge of his existence or his whereabouts."[1] For this man, as for hundreds of other upper-class men in London, clubland constituted an entire world.[2] For thousands more, clubs formed the backdrop of their lives; in the middle of the city, clubs afforded private spaces dedicated to relaxation and camaraderie. Both married and single men regarded their club as a central part of their lives, functioning as a surrogate home. According to contemporary ideals, the family was supposed to act as the space of refuge from the chaos of the hectic modern world, and yet in the late nineteenth century clubs were taking over this essential role.

John Ruskin's classic definition of the home centered on its role as a shelter from the physical and emotional toils of the world.[3] John Tosh notes that in

[1] "Ramblings in Clubland: Ramble No. 3—the Junior Constitutional," *Society Herald: A Weekly Record of Social, Political, Theatrical, Literary and Financial Events*, 14 May 1888, 14.

[2] I use the terms "upper class" and "elite" throughout the article to refer to the membership of gentlemen's clubs. Clubmen were aristocrats, politicians, and men at the top of the business, professional, and military worlds. This would include men from both the landed aristocracy and the upper middle class or the aristocracy of talent. A more detailed exploration of membership can be found in my dissertation, "Clubland: Masculinity, Status, and Community in the Gentlemen's Clubs of London, c. 1880–1914" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, forthcoming).

[3] John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (New Haven, CT, 2002), 77.

everyday life, the domestic ideal was so popular because it addressed the needs of men who were suffering from the rapidly industrializing urban landscape.[4] Family life and the home were perceived as integral to men's identities in the nineteenth century to a degree never before realized, as the home was both a man's possession and where his emotional needs were satisfied.[5] Yet this largely middle-class ideal was not without challenges. The homes of even the most respectable middle classes could never live up to the walled gardens of the poetic imagination. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall demonstrate, the separation of public and private spheres was an ideal that did not change the fact that the family and the home took on many public functions.[6] The gentlemen's clubs, seemingly in the heart of the public sphere, actually provided their members the friendly intimacy and privacy ideally located in the home.

The membership of the gentlemen's clubs was drawn from the political, titled, and social elites whose homes were often at an even greater remove from Ruskian ideals than those of the respectable middle class. For members of "Society," a London house was explicitly a public facade for the social season, providing little privacy or emotional release.[7] The homes both of the established and the ambitious were accessible to strangers visiting for business, pleasure, or politics. In fact, anyone whose family was even on the fringes of Society would have their family dinners, teas, and "at home" gatherings reported in the papers as public events.[8] Thus for elite men, the home might not have been able to provide either privacy or intimacy.[9]

Because of this lack of domesticity in the home, it is perhaps natural to assume that upper-class men were largely immune from the domestic ideal. Historians have explained the popularity of the gentlemen's club in particular as an example of men's escape from the feminized home.[10] Tosh cites the incredible popularity

[4] John Tosh, "New Men? The Bourgeois Cult of Home," *History Today* 46 (1996): 10.

[5] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT, 1999).

[6] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago, 1987).

[7] Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850–1930* (Washington, DC, 1988), 106. The term "Society" was used to describe the social life of London's aristocratic and fashionable elite.

[8] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT, 1998), 291.

[9] Any formalistic domestic ideal also met some resistance from the working classes, who maintained traditions of the open stoop, back garden gossip, and more formal parlor culture; see F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830–1900* (Cambridge, 1988), 192–96. The inability of most working-class men to earn breadwinner wages and the continuing tradition of domestic violence also implied that a working-class home was far from the middle-class domestic ideal, despite its rhetorical popularity; see Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995), 248–63. Martin Hewitt's work on middle-class visitation rituals suggests a modified ideal of domestic privacy among the working classes, along different lines and with different values from the middle classes; see "District Visiting and the Constitution of Domestic Space in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, ed. Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd (Manchester, 1999), 137–38.

[10] Mike Huggins ("More Sinful Pleasures? Leisure, Respectability and the Male Middle Classes in Victorian England," *Journal of Social History* 33 [2000]: 593) points to the club as a center of drink and sociability merely posing as a respectable retreat. Jeff Hearn (*Men in the Public Eye: The Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies* [London, 1992], 224) explains club and pub

of clubs in the late nineteenth century as one example of a more general male "flight from domesticity." Boys who were raised in all-male public schools were thus uncomfortable when thrust into the mixed-sex environment of a family home. As Tosh notes, even later in life these boys would be drawn to male social spaces because they were familiar and congenial.[11] Men's retreat to homosocial spaces and activities thus signaled not only an escape from the tyranny of the Victorian home but also a search for a new form of emotional life.[12] What the gentlemen's clubs of London reveal is that one of the emotional needs being filled within their walls was, in fact, a form of domesticity.

In their luxurious clubhouses, men not only sought out all of the amenities of home but often found the emotional comfort traditionally associated with the family.[13] Although it seems impossible, domesticity as a concept can be separated from the home and family life. Yet the gentlemen's clubs catered to many of both the emotional and practical needs embodied in the idea of a home. Of practical comforts, the clubs provided a private space within the city that functioned as a dining hall, library, entertainment center, sleeping quarter, bathhouse, and study. In fact, the club offered the patterns and habits of leisure life usually reserved for the home.[14] Clubs also provided a number of emotional and even familial comforts.[15] Though they excluded women (an integral part of any home) almost entirely, clubs provided the emotional bonds of friendship as a substitute family. Men could enjoy some of the more public and convivial spaces within a club to strike up conversations with friends and acquaintances or use the back corners and small rooms for more intimate chats.

Clubs were thus the sites of an alternative domestic life for men, and consequently members' relationship to their clubs complicates the perceived late nineteenth-century masculine rejection of domesticity.[16] In examining club life, it would seem that elite men accepted elements of the domestic ideology while rejecting dependence on the home. Tosh even admits that in its most basic sense, domesticity is not constrained by one's residence but rather is embodied both in a space and a state of mind.[17] In examining men's relationship to their clubs it becomes evident that domestic pleasures were their primary attractions, for the primary purpose of clubs was to act as a second home. As one club chronicler put it: "A man's club

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life as examples of "homoerotic self-advertisement." Venetia Murray (*High Society: A Social History of the Regency Period 1788–1830* [London, 1998], 158) points to clubs of the Regency era as escapes from women's social world. Howard Chudacoff's work in the American context is an exception to this trend, as he notes that late nineteenth-century clubs tended to present a cozy and domestic atmosphere; see *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 42.

[11] Tosh, "New Men?" 14.

[12] Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 183, 185, and "What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," *History Workshop Journal* 38 (1994): 188–89.

[13] Witold Rybczyniski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York, 1986), 75.

[14] Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2002), 70.

[15] The fact of many male family members belonging to the same club was common, some even forming dynastic legacies (e.g., the Devonshire family at Brooks's Club); see Anthony Lejeune, *The Gentlemen's Clubs of London* (London, 1979), 8.

[16] It should be noted that Tosh's work on a late nineteenth-century flight from domesticity focuses on the middle classes and does not deal explicitly with the upper middle classes or the elites; see John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2005), 107.

[17] Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 4.

may not be his home, but to a member of old standing it has become something very akin to it."[18] Clubs could be both a substitute for and a complement to the home, depending on a member's personal circumstances.

Clubmen's habits force the historian to reexamine the idea of domesticity. From the physical structure of club buildings, to the purpose of the clubs, to their place in men's hearts, the club functioned as a form of homosocial domesticity. This distinctly male domesticity does not mean that clubs helped to shore up family life, however. Rather, clubland functioned as a rival domestic space, in many ways surpassing what the family could hope to provide. In this way clubs are perhaps the perfect example of Martin Francis's characterization of the deeply ambivalent relationship of men with family life throughout the nineteenth century.[19] The club operated as a peculiar domestic space lacking both a real female presence and a basis in the family. The clubs presented a powerful incentive to leave the family home, yet clubland shared many elements the home was supposed to embody.

This article examines how the gentlemen's clubs of London took over the form and function of the home and how they both challenged and reinforced the domestic ideal. Looking at club histories and archives, along with clubmen's memoirs and their frequent reflections in the periodical press, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the place clubs held in men's lives. Starting with the clubhouses themselves, it is clear that, both in design and function, clubs were intended to cater to domestic needs. The next section focuses on men's emotional connection to their clubs. Men used their clubs as sanctuaries from the stresses and worries of the world; they also found the restrictive access of clubs granted them an attractive degree of privacy. Finally, men's reaction to their clubs' annual cleanings and their sense of homecoming to a club demonstrate the deep sentimentality and emotion men felt toward their clubs. The domestic overtones of the homosocial culture of the clubs speak to both the pervasiveness of the domestic ideology and its failure to draw upper-class men into the home.

Descended from eighteenth-century coffeehouses, gentlemen's clubs had become a phenomenon by the nineteenth century. The most marked trend of the late nineteenth century was the sheer volume of clubs in London. By the mid-Victorian era, there were nearly two hundred gentlemen's clubs and their imitators, some with waiting lists as long as sixteen years.[20] By the turn of the century, this trend had only increased, with another wave of clubs created after 1870.[21] The decades leading up to the First World War marked the heyday of the West End club as the central institution in many men's lives.[22] The increase in clubs was undeniable, yet to find actual numbers is difficult. The exact definition of what qualified as a gentlemen's club varied, and there was no standard list of clubs existing in London. Observers did agree on the increasing popularity of clubs and

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[18] H. T. Waddy, *The Devonshire Club—and "Crockford's"* (London, 1919), 105.

[19] Martin Francis, "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity," *Historical Journal* 45 (2002): 643.

[20] Lejeune uses the term "gentlemen's club" in its most embracive sense, and thus his numbers are higher; see Lejeune, *White's: The First Three Hundred Years* (London, 1993), 132.

[21] Lejeune, *The Gentlemen's Clubs of London*, 15.

[22] Denys Forrest, *Foursome in St. James's: The Story of the East India, Devonshire, Sports and Public Schools Club* (London, 1982), 106.

that, despite new additions, waiting lists continued to be lengthy.[23] While many of the newer clubs had short life spans, the frequency with which new clubs were being formed speaks to their popularity.

The expansion of club culture was not limited to the upper classes. One reason for this was the extension of London Society and the fact that men who in mid-century would have seen no need for a London club later in the century found it essential.[24] Simon Gunn marks 1870–1914 as the peak of middle-class club culture, epitomizing homosocial leisure life.[25] Middle-class clubs closely paralleled the structure and function of the most elite, and many had a sprinkling of aristocratic names on their membership lists, if not in the clubhouses themselves. Fear that clubland was changing from an "exclusive and limited territory to [an] extensive and densely populated domain, offering hospitality to all who have the slightest claim to that somewhat elastic title of 'gentleman'" was a recurrent theme.[26] The demarcation line between lower-status gentlemen's clubs and thoroughly middle-class clubs is difficult to make, though clubmen of the time would have argued vehemently against any confusion. In general, the growth of the "city" clubs catered to middle-class men, and these clubs were less insistent on rules barring business discussions within the clubhouse.[27] Without a doubt, however, the gentlemen's clubs were heavily populated by at least the upper middle classes.

Almost every type of society had their clubs in the nineteenth century. There was enough interest in club life to stimulate several periodicals aimed at its devotees. While some, such as *Club Chat* (1899) and *Clubland* (1910), were geared to elite clubs, the longest-lasting club journal was *Club Life* (1899–1937), devoted to working-class men. Workingmen's clubs were very popular but shared less in common with the gentlemen's clubs than their middle-class imitators. Unlike upper-class clubs, workingmen's clubs tended to be both purposeful and social in nature. While men were certainly encouraged to relax at their clubs, equally important were benevolent or charity work and a general spirit of self-improvement.[28] The only "clubs" that were fully cross-class in nature were the gambling "hells" that were constantly being raided, with both upper- and lower-class men arrested.[29]

English gentlemen spread clubs as far as their travels took them, though the heart of elite clubland remained the West End of London, where clubs lined Pall Mall, Piccadilly, and St. James's Street (fig. 1). Members were drawn from the

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[23] "Table Talk," *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1884, 519. Baedeker's guide reported eighty-eight social and sporting clubs in London in 1898, rising to ninety-seven by 1915; see Karl Baedeker, *London and Its Environs: Handbook for Travellers*, 11th ed. (Leipzig, 1898), and 17th ed. (Leipzig, 1915).

[24] Arthur Irwin Dasent, *Piccadilly in Three Centuries: With Some Account of Berkeley Square and the Haymarket* (London, 1920), 84.

[25] Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City 1840–1914* (Manchester, 2000), 91.

[26] "Clubs," *Temple Bar, a London Magazine for Town and Country Readers* 51 (1877): 194.

[27] To discuss business of any sort save politics was not only considered bad form but was actually an infringement of the rules at a gentlemen's club. Even the East India United Service, a somewhat lesser status gentlemen's club, was adamant in the fact that no business transactions were to take place at the club; see *The Rules and Regulations of the East India United Service Club* (London, 1890), 32.

[28] "The Club as a Social Organism," *Club News*, 28 January 1911, 3. More work certainly needs to be done on the relationship of workingmen's clubs with the home and family.

[29] See, e.g., "Raids on London Clubs," *New York Times*, 13 May 1889; *Vanity Fair*, 18 May 1889, 355; *The Times*, 28 September 1896.

1. Bath Club
2. Junior Traveller's Club
3. Royal London Yacht Club
4. Devonshire Club
5. White's Club
6. New University Club
7. Boodle's Club
8. Primrose Club
9. Brooks's Club
10. Cocoa Tree Club
11. Junior Army & Navy Club
12. Arthur's Club
13. Conservative Club
14. Thatched House Club
15. Unionist Club
16. Guards' Club
17. Oxford & Cambridge Club

18. Marlborough Club
19. Orleans Club
20. Army & Navy Club
21. Junior Carlton Club
22. East India United Service Club
23. Windham Club
24. Nimrod Club
25. Portland Club
26. Sports Club
27. Carlton Club
28. Reform Club
29. Travellers' Club
30. Athenaeum Club
31. New Conservative Club
32. United Service Club
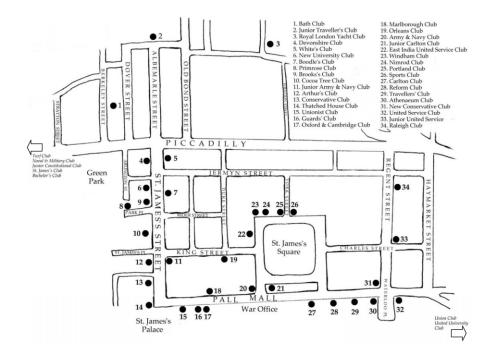33. Junior United Service
34. Raleigh Club

**Figure 1—Distribution of gentlemen's clubs in London's West End, ca. 1900**

upper ranks of society, prominent in terms of pedigree, wealth, business, or talent. To gain access, candidates were nominated and often waited years before coming up to be balloted on by the members of their prospective club. The size of clubs varied from the Cocoa Tree Club, with 350 members, to the National Liberal Club, with 5,400 members.[30]

The most pragmatic reason that gentlemen's clubs functioned as homes is that not all men were in a position to possess a home in London. Even among the most wealthy and established clubmen, the landed aristocracy, one-fifth did not have a fixed London address in 1880; by the early 1900s that proportion had grown to two-fifths.[31] These figures would have necessarily increased among wealthy bachelors, younger sons, and men of talent from the middle classes, many of whom kept only a small set of chambers in the city.[32] By midcentury, when club life was coming into its own, one of its greatest attractions was the luxurious surroundings of the clubhouses at cheap prices.[33] Since all clubs were centrally

[30] The National Liberal Club, with such a soaring membership, was on the border between a middle-class and gentlemen's club.

[31] F. M. L. Thompson, "Moving Frontiers and the Fortunes of the Aristocratic Town House, 1830–1930," *London Journal* 20 (1995): 75.

[32] White Sergeant, "Bachelor Ways. And What They Teach the Housewife," *The Queen*, 24 January 1880, 106. To keep up one of the grand London palaces, a man would have needed to be bringing in at least £20,000 per year; see Thompson, "Moving Frontiers," 72.

[33] Peter Thorold, *The London Rich: The Creation of a Great City, from 1666 to the Present* (New York, 1999), 262.

located in the heart of the West End, they were convenient for the politician, the businessman, the professional man, and the man of leisure.

The nineteenth-century gentlemen's clubs were often described as palaces, with architecture aimed at mimicking the home in the grandest sense; a true gentlemen's club had to be situated in a sufficiently distinguished clubhouse. Not only did clubhouses provide a permanent home for members, they bestowed a sense of prestige and distinction. When discussing the various associations of science and literature in the metropolis, one member of the Institute of British Architects felt that his association lacked the prestige that went hand in hand with a sufficiently grand and spacious headquarters. While acknowledging that it might not be fair to judge a group by the space in which they met, he nonetheless believed that "a beautiful building goes a long way in the adornment of a society with the character of respectability and importance."[34] To achieve these palatial buildings, some of the most prominent architects of the day were employed, including Sir Charles Barry, who designed both the Reform and Travellers' Clubs. The erection of a grand clubhouse was one of the defining features of the gentlemen's club.

There was a fine line between luxurious and decadent surroundings. The Military, Naval, and County Service Clubhouse took over the building that was formerly Crockford's in 1849 and continued its tradition of opulence. Each room was furnished in different colors, but the gilt moldings and accessories provided a constant accent throughout the house. The reviewer for the influential *Builder* magazine was overwhelmed by the sight of "gold, gold, gold; so that it might be thought, whether originally or now, that the tradesman, rather than the artist, had been the director of the works."[35] One author warned that while the newer clubs were quickly able to acquire the marble halls, electric lighting, and rich carpets of the most elite clubs, the prestige they sought would be harder to attain.[36] As the clubhouses became larger, and the rooms became grander, clubs opened themselves up to the critiques levied against the houses of the nouveaux riches that they sacrificed comfort and conviviality for display and opulence.[37] With membership numbers increasing throughout the nineteenth century, club committees had to balance the need for space with a desire to retain a comfortable environment.

While clubmen were certainly proud of their beautiful buildings, the best-loved clubs also offered a sense of privacy and homeyness. This was particularly marked at the older clubs, which might have had little architectural grandeur but could boast pleasant and well-planned interiors. One guidebook pointed to Boodle's Club as a club that was somewhat ordinary from without but compensated within with its comfortable and sensible interior design.[38] The fact that few would have been granted access to the interior of Boodle's only added to its sense of private

[34] "Club-House for Literary and Scientific Bodies," *The Builder*, 16 November 1850, 545.

[35] "Military, Naval, and County Service Club-House," *The Builder*, 12 May 1849, 225.

[36] Arthur À Beckett, *London at the End of the Century: A Book of Gossip* (London, 1900), 79.

[37] Sarah Luria, "The Architecture of Manners: Henry James, Edith Wharton and the Mount," in Bryden and Floyd, *Domestic Space*, 187.

[38] The chronicler of Brooks's pointed with pride to its "refined, if somewhat solemn comfort" that did not need the size of the more modern clubhouses; see Alfred Benzon, *Benzon's Black Book. A History of the Clubs of London, Baltimore and Washington* (1891), 12–13; J. F. Wegg-Prosser, *Memorials of Brooks's from the Foundation of the Club 1764 to the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1906), xii.

life. Though in the heart of the city, clubmen hoped to enjoy the intimacy of domestic life.

Clubhouses were certainly beautiful, but they were also functional. In attempting to explain the use of clubs to an American audience, one reporter noted that they were not a luxury but rather a necessity for London life. As he explained, "the custom of practically living in clubs is so widespread and so deeply rooted that it would be a matter of practical impossibility to the average Englishman to follow any other method of passing his time."[39] Clubs had all of the essentials and luxuries a man could desire and thus it was quite possible to spend the greater part of the day at a club as though one were the occupant of a fully staffed mansion. On arriving at the club after nine o'clock, a member could have a complete breakfast and then move on to the writing or drawing room to complete any necessary correspondence and read the newspapers. At lunch a crowd would usually form after one o'clock and thus a man could indulge in a very good and well-priced meal with friends. While the clubs were typically empty between three and four thirty, the arrival of the evening papers brought in a new group of clubmen before dinner time, perhaps the most popular time in the club. After his meal a man could enjoy drinks, cards, or billiards, depending on his particular tastes.[40] And if his club had bedrooms, he could in fact enjoy all of the benefits of home.

It was natural for men to use their club rather than their home as a base. Many clubmen used their club as their main address, both receiving and answering mail there.[41] One etiquette book assumed that military officers having calling cards printed would have their regiment listed on the left-hand corner and their club name printed on the right in lieu of any other address.[42] Mail would often reach a man sooner at his club, as it was there a man first checked in after returning to town. When a friend of Bonar Law returned to London for a quick visit, he asked the Prime Minister to send him a message at the Royal Automobile Club, as it was his most frequent point of call and the most convenient place to reach him.[43] The author Matthew Arnold made it a habit to pop into his club whenever he was in London, and he carried out much of his correspondence from the Athenaeum club.[44] The everyday nature of men's use of their clubs is testimony to its importance in their lives.

Men could also use their clubs as a substitute for what they lacked at home.

[39] "Social Clubs in London: Where Englishmen Pass Their Leisure Time," *New York Times*, 1 August 1885.

[40] W. Bayne Ranken, "Club Land," *Belgravia, a London Magazine*, October 1873, 461–63.

[41] "Social Clubs in London," *New York Times*.

[42] A Member of the Aristocracy, *Manners and Tone of Good Society: Or, Solecisms to Be Avoided*, 2nd ed. (London, n.d., ca. 1880), 4.

[43] Letter from Royal Automobile Club, 11 November 1912, Bonar Law Papers, 27/4/18, House of Lords Record Office. The idea that a man's first point of call was his club was echoed in popular fiction when a young woman awaiting the return of her fiancé assumes he has gone to his club when he does not immediately appear at her door; see Ella Hepworth (Margaret Wynman) Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman* (Peterborough, 2004), 119.

[44] Matthew Arnold to T. H. S. Escott, 15 June c. 1883/4, Arnol. 3, 39; Matthew Arnold to T. H. S. Escott, 2 October c.1883/4, Arnol. 6, Escott Papers, 58774, British Library (BL), 42. Similarly, when J. C. Ardagh returned to London, he went to the Junior United Service Club to write to his friends. His visit was short, however, as he was ill and soon departing for Egypt; see J. C. Ardagh to T. H. S. Escott, 18 August 1883, Ar. 1, Escott papers, 58774, BL, 13.

The most famous fictional member of the Reform Club, Phinneas Fogg, forsook a library at home because his club had two fine libraries specializing in literature, law, and politics.[45] While many clubs had some type of a collection of books, the Reform Club possessed a thoroughly planned out and organized library. In 1841 a library subcommittee was established to create a complete reference library with a specific focus on maps, books, and documents of a political nature.[46] In 1900 there were approximately 60,000 volumes in the club library, with nearly a thousand new accessions every year.[47] The Reform had its greatest competition in the Athenaeum Club, which spent almost £450 every year simply on maintaining and expanding its library. By 1900 it had amassed almost 70,000 volumes.[48] The Travellers' Club library looks almost sparse by comparison, with its 10,000 volumes.[49] No private individual and few libraries could have competed with such collections.

For the gourmand, there were other, more savory club amenities. Perhaps the best-known chef of the nineteenth century, Alexis Soyer, was the cook for the Reform Club from 1837 until 1850. His skills were legendary, and his *côtelettes de mouton à la Reform* put the club kitchen on the map.[50] Men seeking the best food in the city relied on the clubs and the few private homes that employed the best chefs. Restaurants and hotels were scarce and of poor quality at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and it was only at the end of the century that they became fashionable. In 1910 one author still felt that the Carlton Club had the best culinary offerings in town, superior to even the top restaurants.[51] In fact, club services had become so good that many feared that no home could compare. A club was often coveted for its conveniences: "its *chef*, its cellar, its library, and so forth. It provides [a member] cheaply with luxuries and facilities which might otherwise be out of his reach."[52] Clubs managed to balance a top quality of fare with reasonable prices and excellent selection, superior to what most men would have found in their own homes.[53]

While clubs wanted to provide good food, this was not the sole purpose of their existence. Such an approach would render the club little more than an affordable luxury restaurant. Ultimately it was not the dinners but the diners that set a club apart. In describing the many unexpected joys of London at the end of August, Edward Hamilton, civil servant and man about town, noted the abundance of friendly companions as one of clubs' great attractions.[54] Unlike the restaurant, the club had selective access and many men there would be friends, acquaintances, or at least share the same social circle. At Boodle's Club one could seek out com-

[45] To a bachelor, all such amenities were even more appealing; see Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, trans. George M. Towle (New York, 1956), 10.

[46] *Catalogue of the Library of the Reform Club*, 2nd ed. (London, 1894), 11.

[47] George Woodbridge, *The Reform Club, 1836–1978: A History from the Club's Records* (London, 1978), 108.

[48] Francis Gledstances Waugh, *The Athenaeum Club and Its Associations* (London, 1900), 91.

[49] Sir Almeric Fitzroy, *History of the Travellers' Club* (London, 1927), 133.

[50] Woodbridge, *Reform Club*, 125–29.

[51] "In Clubland: The Carlton," *Clubland*, June 1910, 35.

[52] "Club Manners," *The World: A Journal for Men and Women*, 22 June 1892, 14.

[53] "Table Talk," *Gentleman's Magazine*, January–June 1880, 378–79.

[54] "Diary of Edward Hamilton: 3 March 1882 to 23 September 1882," 26 August 1882, Add. MS 48632, BL, 223.

panions at the central round dining table, where newspapers and books were banned and members were explicitly encouraged to socialize.[55] In his later years, and after the death of his wife, the popular civil servant Algernon West lived with his son in a house in Manchester Square, though he preferred not to dine there. Instead he was a frequent visitor to Brooks's Club until his health precluded his attendance. His biographer fondly recalled how "he would walk there and back, and was a diner out to the end of his life."[56] A man left his home for his club with the intent of finding not only a good meal but also familiar faces and friends.[57] Men such as West left their family homes to enjoy the community of a supplementary home.

Not only did men dine informally at their clubs, but they could also use them as a place to entertain. Many men would invite small groups of friends to dine with them at their club even if they had an established home.[58] When ten men who attended Sandhurst together wanted to gather to celebrate after forty years, they chose the United Service Club as a place where they could dine instead of a restaurant or private home. They had official menus printed up, which served as nice mementos when signed by all of the men.[59] Sir Almerick Fitzroy, civil servant and chronicler of the Travellers' Club, similarly chose his club as a venue where his friends could gather for the celebration of his fiftieth birthday.[60] The club provided a grand and ceremonial atmosphere when special occasions warranted, and many clubs had private dining rooms that members could reserve for such occasions.

A club dinner could solve the problem for men who had to entertain high-profile guests but whose homes were not up to the challenge. In 1882 the Prince of Wales gave a dinner at Marlborough house to the leading actors of the day. He repeated the affair at the Marlborough Club a few years later. To respond, leading members of the Garrick Club gave the Prince an invitation to dine with them at their club, which he accepted.[61] For the Prince of Wales in particular, clubs seemed to provide a much needed place to host and be hosted at with less of the pomp and ceremony than would have been required in a private home or public space.[62] Being the feted guest of a club in itself became a mark of social prestige much as the invitations to the homes of the grandes dames of London Society had been in generations past. To be invited to one of the Saturday dinners at the Savage Club warranted a mention in the *Social Register* honors section.[63]

For some members, their club was their home mainly because they actually lived

[55] Roger Fulford, *Boodle's 1762–1962: A Short History* (London, 1962), 43.

[56] Horace G. Hutchinson, ed., *Private Diaries of the Rt. Hon. Sir Algernon West, G.C.B.* (London, 1922), xi.

[57] Sir Charles Biron, *Without Prejudice: Impressions of Life and Law* (London, 1936), 30.

[58] See, e.g., an invitation from Fred Burnay for a small dinner party at the Junior Carlton Club; Fred Burnay to T. H. S. Escott, 29 August 1883, Bur. 3 58776, Escott Papers, BL, 57.

[59] Menu from United Service Club Dinner, ACC/1302/134, Wood Family Papers, London Metropolitan Archives, 1911.

[60] Almeric William Fitzroy, *Memoirs*, 3rd ed. (London, 1925), 63.

[61] Squire Bancroft, *Empty Chairs* (London, 1925), 7.

[62] In the surviving diaries of the Prince of Wales between 1875 and 1877, the prince dined at clubs at least thirty-three times. The Marlborough functioned in that capacity most often: twenty-three times; see "Indexes to diary of King Edward VII," EVII/D, Royal Archives, Windsor.

[63] Matthew Norgate and Alan Wykes, *Not So Savage* (London, 1976), 23.

there. The provision of bedrooms originated in provincial clubs but soon became a valuable attraction for London clubland as well.[64] The American author Henry James divided his time between a residence in London and a house in Rye, but he quickly left his flat when the opportunity to live in a room at the Reform Club came up. In a letter to a friend he rejoiced that this new accommodation "seems to solve the problem of town on easy terms. They are let by the year only, and one waits one's turn long—(for years;) but when mine the other day came round I went it blind instead of letting it pass. One has to furnish and do all one's self— but the results, and conditions, generally, repay. My cell is spacious, southern, looking over Carlton Gardens: and tranquil, utterly, and singularly well-serviced; and I find I can work there."[65] For a writer and lover of London like James, there was no greater situation than an affordable home in the center of the city where he could work. And by providing rooms by the year that members could decorate to their own tastes, the Reform Club was explicitly offering a space that men could make their own.

Like James, bachelors in particular appreciated the domestic charms of club life, but such a way of life also appealed to a variety of men: Young officers found the allure of clubland appealing. Guardsmen stationed in London almost always lived at the Guards' Club, though they had the option of living elsewhere. A man could live quite frugally and in good style at the Guards' for £20 a month.[66] Walter Besant, in his survey of London life, found that the club had an enduring appeal, for "those whose work is of a solitary character, will always want a club: those who want to meet old friends will belong to an exclusive club, such as a service or a university club, where they are likely to meet them: those who have retired from active life and want a place where they may escape monotony and solitude will always belong to a club."[67] Clubs served a vital purpose for a variety of men— whether they lived there or simply used them as a frequent point of call—who found no other venue that quite suited their needs.

The club certainly offered a convenient home base in the center of London. As a space to read, write, eat, and meet with and entertain friends, it provided many of the trappings of domestic life. The homeyness of English clubs was often pointed out as the characteristic that separated them from other male venues and even from their international copies. Writing to an American audience, a journalist had to explain: "To an Englishman, if he is a bachelor, his club is his home. It is there that he sees his friends, writes his letters, dines, and spends the greater part of the day."[68] Clubs lent a sense of familiarity, brought back pleasant memories, and provided a good opportunity to catch up with old friends.[69] While clubmen occasionally enjoyed some wild nights, for the most part clubland was a quiet and

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[64] T. H. S. Escott, *Club Makers and Club Members* (London, 1914), 233.

[65] Henry James to W. E. Norris, 23 December 1900, Correspondence of Notable Club Figures, B47, Reform Club Archive.

[66] A British Officer, *Social Life in the British Army* (New York, 1899), 14–15.

[67] Walter Besant, *London in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1909), 264.

[68] "London Clubs," *New York Times*, 18 June 1871, 3.

[69] John Galsworthy, *The Island Pharisees* (London, 1921), 59–60.

decorous center of male life, not unlike the peaceful everyday of the ideal home.[70] To point to the gentlemen's clubs as an example of a wholesale flight from domesticity, therefore, does not fit with how men perceived these spaces.

While men certainly enjoyed the function of clubs, it was the personal and sentimental attachments that explained why clubland became such a widespread phenomenon in the late nineteenth century. Men referred to their clubs with a great degree of emotion, and the gender segregation only enhanced the feeling of community. While club friendships may not have all been the most intimate, they were nonetheless important. These centers of male life fit into a larger pattern of elite homosociality that included public schools, the armed forces, the universities, and the professions, all of which fostered strong ties.[71] But above all other institutions, it was the club that functioned as a home away from home.

One reason some men sought the refuge of their clubs is that many upper-class homes were not, in fact, their own. While men were the head of the household in theory, in practice women had at least an equal claim to rule the roost. The hero of one tale learned this lesson quite abruptly when he was turned out of the house while his wife entertained. When he attempted to complain she rejoined: "A man's house is his Club, Sir; a woman's house is her boudoir. The castle idea is exploded."[72] Some men sought the recourse of their clubs as homes because they were alienated from their own homes. Even when their wives were absent, one author doubted men held much sway in the home. In a house emptied of wives and children, the servants knew a man was not the master and thus would not obey.[73] The only solution was to flee the house and enjoy the rest of London life.

Such a feeling was particularly recognized among young men. Bachelors still living under their parents' roof or in lodgings enjoyed almost no elements of patriarchal authority. One mother with a daughter of marriageable age noted that such men simply escaped the social world of their elders for other enjoyments. The main competition for men's attention was "the wicked Clubs—which have lately been largely increased for the express purpose of providing the Young Man with an evening resort." The clubs were not wicked for any wild antics but rather for luring men to a quiet male community where "the Young Man of the Day finds that true enjoyment which in vain he would seek in the deserted halls of the

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[70] A detailed account of one such "wild night" survives from the Caledonian Club. Mr. A. H. Connell entered the club with some friends at one in the morning, and they proceeded to a small smoking room where they ordered refreshments. Included in the list were numerous orders of brandy and soda and six bottles of lager beer. The waiter attested that the group was very loud, not only shouting and singing, but also jumping around on the furniture. The men proceeded to throw beer at one another, the walls, and the carpet. They knocked over a glass table and the list of members from the mantelpiece, they damaged two settees, three armchairs, and a lampshade, and broke several glasses. The total estimate for damages was at least £20–25. Such behavior was considered far too rowdy for a gentlemen's club, and it was not typical—Connell resigned and was asked to pay for the damages; see the entries October 13 and October 20, 1909, in the "Committee Minute Book, December 6 1905–November 20 1917," Caledonian Club Archives.

[71] Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990), 195.

[72] R. D. Stordale, "Clare, Lord Bayswater: A Tale of the Times," *Vanity Fair*, 1 January 1881, 7.

[73] "The Homeless Husband," *The World: A Journal for Men and Women*, 15 August 1883, 8–9.

Mothers."[74] Rather than participate in the official London social world of balls and soirees ruled by women, many men fled to their palatial clubs.[75]

When the family home became too frantic or too busy, the club could function as a sanctuary away from the stresses of life. In one *Punch* cartoon titled "Getting Out of It," a husband uses the ruse of business at his club as a means to escape the chaos of his brood of children as they prepare for a holiday. While his wife and the female servants struggle with six children, a mountain of luggage, and even a barking dog, the husband tells his fretful wife: "Don't trouble about me— I'll get down by a later train, in time for supper."[76] With his hand on the door, the husband is clearly making an escape. In this case surely the home is not providing a center of rest and comfort for anyone. Instead, the club was to be the husband's recourse for quiet.

The ability for men to escape to a club could actually undermine a wife's control of the home. In one story of a henpecked husband, who could not move a pillow without his wife's consent, his son suggests joining a club where one could enjoy both comfort and autonomy. The son attempts to convince his father that: "You only need belong to it for a year, and by then mother will have surely given in all along the line, and will be making concessions by the hundred to induce you to throw it up."[77] In this case a man contemplated setting up an alternative domestic sphere in order to shift the balance of power within his own home.

Club life embodied the promise of a space free from both the worries of family life and the worries of the world. Club staff were coached in keeping the troubles of the larger world away from members. The hall porter was explicitly charged with barring moneylenders, inquiring attorneys, or solicitors from access to any member.[78] The committee at Brooks's Club decided that the hall porter should attempt to refuse a summons being delivered and, only on insistence, take it and place it for the member to pick up later.[79] At the Arts Club the committee expressly forbade giving out a member's address or any information as to their location or resources to inquirers.[80] When the actor Weedon Grossmith was facing some financial difficulties, he headed toward the intimacy of the Beefsteak Club with the purpose of forgetting his troubles. He was quickly relieved to see a group of friends enjoying themselves: "On entering I heard loud laughter from a merry set of about a dozen "bloods" . . . all assembled and in the best spirits. If I felt depressed, that feeling soon vanished in such cheerful company. Sir George pushed me into a chair at the top of the table, and requested me to be 'merry and wise,' at the same time chanting the chorus of a famous old song of the past."[81] Grossmith

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[74] "The Wail of the Mothers," *Vanity Fair*, 21 June 1884, 361.

[75] Alice Oldcastle, "Our Husbands' Clubs," *The Queen*, 11 September 1880, 229.

[76] *Punch*, 27 August 1887, 90.

[77] "In Home Politics," *Vanity Fair*, 17 July 1902, 45.

[78] T. H. S. Escott, "Concerning Club Servants," *Belgravia, a London Magazine*, November 1874, 207.

[79] Miscellaneous letter, Brooks's Club, ACC/2371/BC/03/131, London Metropolitan Archives.

[80] "Arts Club Committee Minute Book: 1 October 1878 to January 1891," entries for 4 February 1879 and 6 October 1885, Arts Club Archive, London.

[81] Weedon Grossmith, *From Studio to Stage: Reminiscences of Weedon Grossmith, Written by Himself*, 3rd ed. (London, 1913), 263.

was able to find refuge from his personal finances at his club, which granted him the emotional relief traditionally associated with the home.

The hall porter acted as a barrier against the outside world, and this often included even a man's wife and family. As one chronicler of White's noted: "if [a member] tells the hall porter he is not in the club if anyone—even his wife—calls, well, he is as inaccessible as the Grand Lama of Tibet."[82] *Punch* published a cartoon that specifically detailed the possibility of a wife contacting her husband at his club. In the cartoon, the hall porter receives a call from a wife of a member who is quickly told that her husband is not in the club. She protests that she has not yet even given her name. The porter with a smile replies: "Quite unnecessary, Madam. Nobody's husband is ever here by any chance."[83] The fact that no man is ever in the club by chance has a double meaning: both that husbands need not admit to being in the club, and that it is not by chance that a man secures the privacy of his club. Men sought out their clubs to enjoy ultimate anonymity and solitude, guarded by the hall porter.

In many ways, clubs offered a more private space than the home. From the wealthy middle classes to the most elite families, the home was always filled not only with the nuclear family but also with all of the servants necessary for such a lifestyle, family members visiting for short or extended periods, and a constant flow of visitors and callers throughout the day. While a servant was supposed to announce each visitor and seek permission for them to enter, not all guests waited on such formalities, and many visitors could not be turned away for fear of offense.[84] Unlike the restrictive access at the club, the private home was regularly open for public display and entertainment. The reality of home life for the elites was a constant tension between the desire for privacy and the need to present a respectable household to the world.[85]

At first glance, clubs that accepted hundreds of members would not seem a space for a man to seek privacy. And yet, by the nineteenth century, the open conviviality of the early clubs had been trumped by the desire for quiet and solitude. While men certainly met friends at their clubs, and enjoyed some high spirits at the bohemian clubs, for the most part men enjoyed their clubs for the luxury of not being disturbed.[86] The desire to belong to a prestigious club and be conspicuous as one of its members did not exclude the desire to enjoy a very private space. The ability to enjoy privacy among a group of men is perhaps best demonstrated by the "Silence Room" at the Devonshire Club, where a member was guaranteed an undisturbed space.[87]

Clubs were able to provide both privacy and sociability based on a member's whims. The chronicler of the Oriental Club explained the enormous popularity of clubs by their ability to cater perfectly to the character of Englishmen. He begins the history of the club by stating that the English are defined by both a

[82] Percy Colson, *White's, 1693–1950* (London, 1951), 123.

[83] *Punch*, 27 November 1912, 433.

[84] Moira Donald, "Tranquil Havens? Critiquing the Idea of Home as the Middle-Class Sanctuary," in Bryden and Floyd, *Domestic Space*, 105.

[85] Mike Hepworth, "Privacy, Security and Respectability: The Ideal Victorian Home," in *Ideal Homes? Social Change and Domestic Life*, ed. Tony Chapman and Jennifer Lorna Hockey (London, 1999), 19.

[86] Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, 92.

[87] Waddy, *The Devonshire Club—and "Crockford's,"* 42.

love of privacy and a love of company: "They will, whenever possible, surround themselves with a high wall, but inside the enclosure there must be a few chosen spirits. A club is thus a typically British institution."[88] Many clubrooms thus would have presented a rather somber feeling to an outside observer, with each man in his own private world. In such instances members tolerated one another's presence because of their shared desire for privacy.[89]

Privacy might sometimes evolve into secrecy, and even illicit behavior. While it is obviously difficult to find concrete evidence of specific indiscretions, there are enough references to suspect that some men used their clubs as a means to plan and facilitate shameful acts. One member of Brooks's Club was caught entertaining a lady within the club itself, quite a shocking prospect in the all-male preserve. The carefully worded Club Minute Book records that a member had been habitually entertaining a woman in the lower dressing room.[90] Such behavior was highly improper, and one can assume it was hardly the man's wife who would consent to such a compromising situation. The club might have also formed a convenient site for homosexual liaisons. George Ives, poet and essayist, met a man on the street who propositioned him and then asked him to dine at the Army and Navy Club; the man's club membership helped ease Ives's suspicions of blackmail.[91] While it is unlikely that men ever used their clubs as actual sites of sexual intercourse, the privacy and secrecy that the clubs guaranteed would have made them a logical place to arrange for future sexual encounters.

In the popular imagination, a club was an ideal place for private or secret correspondence. While at home a nosy aunt or suspicious spouse could access communications, letters and telephone calls received at a club were inviolate. While obviously no such letters survive in the club archives, the frequent references in fiction suggest that they existed. In one piece of Victorian pornography about a photographic "club" where various dissolutes gathered to take nude photographs and engage in sexual acts, the ringleader made contact with her financier by way of telegraphs to his legitimate gentlemen's club.[92] Most wives knew that their husbands' most interesting letters, and those of which they were not supposed to know, would all have been sent through his club.[93] In another work of fiction, a suspicious husband uses his club as a center for reports from his detective about his wife's activities. It is only later revealed that, while he was attempting to be unfaithful with a chorus girl, his wife had never strayed.[94] Whatever the frequency with which men actually used their clubs for illicit contact or correspondence, there was certainly a popular belief that men could use the privacy of their clubs for unscrupulous ends.

The desire for privacy meant that the admission of visitors was a serious issue. The connection between the feeling of home and the exclusion of nonmembers

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[88] P. J. Griffiths, "Foreword," in *The Oriental: Life Story of a West End Club*, ed. Denys Mostyn Forrest (London, 1979), 5.

[89] "New Clubs," *The World: A Journal for Men and Women*, 23 April 1884, 10.

[90] "Brooks's Club Minute Book: 12 June 1880 to 29 May 1894," 8 November 1882, ACC/2371/BC/02/007, London Metropolitan Archives.

[91] Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914* (Cambridge, 2003), 31.

[92] *Maudie: Revelations of Life in London and an Unforeseen Denouement* (London, 1909), 62.

[93] Oldcastle, "Our Husbands' Clubs," 229; "Zakouska," *Vanity Fair*, 29 March 1894, 201.

[94] "Gloves," *The World*, 3 July 1895, 40.

was made explicitly in one overview of clubland: "An Englishman's club for the time being is his private house. The members represent his family and friends. Strangers excluded from the club-rooms proper are relegated to apartments which have little or no communication with the members' rooms."[95] Any ambiguity as to the position of visitors was answered by the fact that throughout the nineteenth century, guests were referred to as "strangers."[96] Over the years, each club struggled with the degree to which their institution should be accessible to nonmembers. Up until the nineteenth century, clubs granted access only to members and staff. In the 1850s more sizable strangers' rooms with dining facilities were introduced into clubland, though it took many years for this to become a common practice.[97]

Starting with small alcoves off the main hall where members could briefly chat with visitors dropping by, clubs gradually began to allow guests into different rooms of the house and to enjoy different entertainments. The early reception rooms were far from glamorous, if the Oriental Club is any indication; in July of 1843 when the club agreed to the need for such a room, the committee decided the urinal adjoining the foyer would be converted for such a purpose.[98] While not all strangers' rooms were converted toilets, many were rather Spartan. When one of the characters in the novel *Mammon and Co.* waited for his lunch date at White's, he became all the more anxious for his membership at the club to be successful: "he had to solace his waiting moments with the inspection of the room set aside for the reception of strangers. It was furnished with a table, on which stood an empty inkstand and a carafe of stale-looking water, two horsehair chairs, a weighing-machine, and a row of hat pegs hung up inside a shelfless bookcase."[99] The lackluster surroundings of the waiting room did not discourage the man but only made him more anxious to see the delights of the interior. It was only for those men lucky enough to secure membership that the true delights of each club would be revealed.

Visitors who were allowed access were greeted by their hosts, signed their names in a book, and were then allowed only restricted access to the club. At the Travellers' Club, the committee kept a record of admitted visitors in order to monitor their numbers.[100] By the turn of the century most clubs had relaxed their rules of access, though the Carlton Club provided admittance only to their hall, and at the Athenaeum strangers were confined to a small apartment near the front door.[101] The service clubs in particular were known for their inaccessibility, and while the Army and Navy prided itself on being the first military club to accept guests, until 1901, the Guards' Club was adamant that no outsider

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[95] Joseph Hatton, *Club-Land, London and Provincial* (London, 1890), iii.

[96] At many clubs to this day a "strangers' room" exists in some form.

[97] Robert Thorne, "Places of Refreshment in the Nineteenth-Century City," in *Buildings and Society: Essays on the Social Development of the Built Environment*, ed. Anthony D. King (London, 1980), 232.

[98] Griffiths, "The Oriental," 73.

[99] E. F. Benson, *Mammon and Co.* (New York, 1899), 98.

[100] "Travellers' Club Committee Minute Book: 19 February 1863 to 31 January 1867," Travellers' Club Archive, London.

[101] Major Arthur Griffiths, *Clubs and Clubmen* (London, 1907), 189.

could enter its doors.[102] Nor was the extension of rights a straightforward process of inclusion; rights were sometimes granted and then taken away. After previously allowing guests use of the reception room, the Oriental Club later relegated them to the outer hall to carry on any correspondence they might need to conduct.[103] Each club had its own evolution of rights for visitors, and there was a constant redefinition of "public" spaces.

The issue of extending the rights of strangers was always contentious. At the Athenaeum Club, members wrote to the committee when the subject was being discussed, vehemently arguing the merits and drawbacks to any alterations. The question of opening the coffee room of the club to guests led one member to protest: "Our Club, from the sense of quiet which pervades it, is and always has been—as those of use who have had the privilege of being Members of it, and have frequented it for many years, well know—valued by men in every walk of public life as a safe retreat; and we appeal to our Fellow-Members not to adopt any measure tending to destroy the privacy which has thus, now for nearly three-quarters of a century, formed one of the greatest charms of the Athenaeum."[104] Tradition was one way of framing any objection to a rule change, but it was more the sense of intrusion to which this member objected. The Travellers' Club regulated not only the rooms to which members could admit guests but also how outsiders could access these spaces. By the twentieth century there was a well-established strangers' room where guests could be served with dinner, but they had to enter this space by way of the coffee room lavatory. It was only in 1906 that the committee allowed guests to be met in the hall and conducted through the morning room into dinner.[105] While privacy was a prized possession, the convenience of entertaining guests ultimately triumphed as a necessary requisite of any second home.

Despite the stringent rules and the army of servants guarding the sanctity of clubs, some unwanted guests also managed to gain access. One member of Brooks's was chastised for "certain irregularities committed by you in the admission to the Club of a person not authorized to be admitted."[106] There are no details on why this guest was unacceptable, but the committee took the intrusion quite seriously. This interloper at least had the introduction of a member. Even more surprising was an incident at the Guards' Club in 1882 when a well-dressed young man gained access to the club twice, enjoyed a luncheon and dinner, and cashed two bad checks. The waiters had not recognized the

[102] *The Guards' Club List of the Trustees, the Committee and the Honorary Members, and the Rules and Regulations of the Club* (London, 1889), 7; *The Rules and Regulations, with an Alphabetical List of the Members of the Army and Navy Club* (London, 1868), 4; John Bernard Thole, *The Oxford and Cambridge Clubs in London* (London, 1992), 149.

[103] "Oriental Club Minute Book: 7 January 1890 to 20 December 1892," 22 December 1891, LMA/4452/01/03/018, London Metropolitan Archives, 197.

[104] "Athenaeum Club Minute Book: 11 January 1887 to 19 March 1897," 14 June 1892, Athenaeum Club Archive.

[105] "Travellers' Club Minute Book: 18 November 1903 to 18 December 1907," 4 February 1906, Travellers' Club Archive, 205.

[106] Secretary to the Hon. R. Lawley, 9 November 1882, in Brooks's Club Letter Book: 29 January 1881 to 24 January 1890, ACC/2371/BC/03/003, London Metropolitan Archives, 137.

man, but when questioned he asserted with confidence that he was a new addition to the Coldstream Guards, and he was accepted as such.[107] Such insolence was especially daring at the Guards' Club, which was small and did not allow guests.[108] Generally, such lapses were rare, and clubs put great efforts into maintaining their exclusivity. Guests needed to be strictly regulated in order to maintain the privacy of the members and to avoid the open access men were fleeing at home.

Because men relied on their clubs as a home base, it was quite inconvenient when they underwent their yearly closures. In the late summer and throughout the fall, almost every club had to close its doors for a short time for a thorough cleaning or for a longer period for renovations. Most of the landed elite fled to the countryside to escape the heat, and much of London was under construction. While many clubs staggered their closings, the numbers affected could be quite high. In August of 1902, the *Pall Mall Gazette* estimated that twenty-one West End clubs were closed, with a total of 28,000 members turned out.[109]

Not all clubmen were able to leave the city, and many felt the loss of their club as acutely as the loss of their home. An article detailing the annual cleanings notes: "The regular London *habitué* is lost without his club; he misses his favorite corners, his familiar friends, the particular armchair in which he studies the journals or tranquilly snores."[110] It was not only the amenities of their clubs that members missed but also the club's familiarity and routine. The "homeless and clubless" man depicted in figure 2 was rendered pitiable not because there was actually nowhere to dine in the city but because he was without a place to call his own. By the 1890s a man could easily eat at a tavern, a hotel, or even a restaurant, but this fellow lacked a place where he could effortlessly enjoy his meal in the company of friends and familiar faces. This is why his sign asks not for funds but for invitations to dinner.

Though closures happened every year, the consistency with which they were reported is remarkable. Each year, without fail, they were mentioned in the society press. And while details of the exact dates of closure may have been useful, it was also common to find articles explaining the losses clubmen felt. In *Vanity Fair* the ritual of club cleaning was used as an example of the change of seasons, and the upheaval caused by the cleaning and repairs was described as a scene of trauma: "The belongings of the late possessors are rudely turned about, the precincts of the most holy places are disregarded; even the household gods are treated with

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[107] *Vanity Fair*, 30 December 1882, 381.

[108] The reticence of the staff to question the intruder too closely is not to be wondered at, however. To not know a member by sight was considered a huge failing, even if the man had been absent many years or had changed his appearance—or even if he had been disfigured, which was not uncommon in service clubs; see An Old Fogey [pseud.], "The Club Staff," chap. 5 of "Clubs and Clubmen," serial, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 February 1903, 2.

[109] This did not necessarily entail that 28,000 men were without a club; some would have been members of several clubs; see "The Deserted West-End: Twenty-One Clubs Closed," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 August 1902, 6. The same journal a few years later compared the desertion of the residential districts with the empty palaces of Pall Mall; "London Clubland: Signs of Awakening," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 September 1905, 6.

[110] "Club-Cleaning," *The World: A Journal for Men and Women*, 27 August 1884, 9.

## AN OBJECT OF COMPASSION.

PITY AN UNFORTUNATE MAN, DETAINED IN LONDON BY UNINTERESTING CIRCUMSTANCES OVER WHICH HE HAS NO CONTROL, WHOSE FAMILY ARE ALL OUT OF TOWN, WHOSE ESTABLISHMENT IS REPRESENTED BY A CARETAKER, AND WHOSE CLUB IS CLOSED FOR ALTERATIONS AND REPAIRS.

Figure 2—From *Punch*, 23 August 1890. Reprinted with permission of Robarts Library.

irreverence."[111] Routine club cleaning is transformed in this description into an invasion of a sacred space, and it was not an isolated occurrence.[112] Closures represented disruption and imposed change, two things that clubmen did not relish.

Closures were so unpalatable that a few clubs never closed. The Windham and Garrick Clubs prided themselves on never closing, and the Oxford and Cambridge only closed every seven years.[113] While such devotion to their membership was admirable, it must have been at one such club that a poet wrote the following verse:

[111] "Autumn in London," *Vanity Fair*, 5 October 1893, 220.

[112] Articles typically focus on either the intrusion of outsiders or the desertion of the once full buildings; see *Vanity Fair*, 2 October 1880, 192; "Across the Puddle," chap. 1, *Vanity Fair*, 27 September 1884, 209; "Club-Cleaning," 9; "The Dying Season," *The World*, 27 July 1887, 8.

[113] "Club-Cleaning," 9.

> I've whitewash on my head
> And whitewash down my back,
> The paint is neat upon my seat,
> Nor graining do I lack.
> I'm glazed and scrubbed and cleaned,
> My hair is thick with size;
> If I don't go, this beastly show
> Will really damn my eyes.[114]

The cleaning and refurbishing of clubs was a necessary evil, and most clubs chose to close down rather than subject their membership to the troubles of construction and cleaning.

The solution for such inconvenience was a system of mutual hospitality. Some clubs had a system whereby they would exchange hospitalities with a club with similar membership year after year. For example, the members of the East India United Service and the Oriental Clubs would have likely found some commonality between members.[115] One year, the Bachelor's Club did not set up a system of mutual exchange when it closed, as it found so many of its members were also members of the St. James's Club that they could be "thrown on the world" and not suffer greatly.[116] The writer Matthew Arnold used the United Service Club as a convenient place to meet while his beloved Athenaeum was being cleaned.[117] Another clubman actually liked the change of scene during club closures and enjoyed meeting new people at his host club.[118] His views were almost certainly in the minority, however; most clubmen did not adapt happily to new surroundings.

Clubmen forced to reside in London after the end of the season found the situation distinctly unpleasant, as they missed their own clubs and found their host clubs strange. In one man's poem about the loneliness of London in the fall, club life is prominent among the losses he feels most keenly:

> I miss the chair I always chose,
> The corner where at times I doze,
> The table kept for me at eight,
> The rubber I anticipate. . . . [119]

Though the host club would have offered all of the luxuries and amenities of his club, the sense of loss and disorientation remained because of the emotional connection to a man's home club. Members typically spoke of the inability to relax,

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[114] "The Cry of the Club Man," *Vanity Fair*, 24 August 1889, 116.

[115] Most clubs typically had to resort to a wider group of clubs, however. While the East India United Service was the most common host for the members of the Oriental Club, they also exchanged with the Union, Windham, Conservative, Junior United Service, Arts, Caledonian, Naval and Military, and Garrick Clubs; see "Oriental Club Minute Books, 1879–1915," LMA/4452/01/03/015–023, London Metropolitan Archives.

[116] *Vanity Fair*, 17 August 1889, 102.

[117] Matthew Arnold to T. H. S. Escott, 2 October c. 1883/4, Arnol. 6, Escott Papers, 58774, BL, 42.

[118] George W. E. Russell, *A Londoner's Log-Book 1901–1902* (London, 1902), 154.

[119] Cotsford Dick, "The Lonely Londoner," *The World: A Journal for Men and Women*, 2 September 1896, 13.

of not knowing the routines or customs of their new "homes."[120] What men missed the most was the sense of belonging that their own clubs provided. The system whereby members were at the same time part of their host clubs and guests did not lend itself to a sense of ease and relaxation. When hosted by another club, members could have enjoyed the decor, location, and amenities of the other club, but they lacked the intangible sense of home.

The club functioned as a home not only for the men constantly making use of its facilities but even for those away from London for extended periods of time. Many clubmen were absent due to business, diplomatic, or military obligations, and clubs accommodated them by reducing or waiving annual fees.[121] When they returned, some after many years, "naturally, the first place to visit on arrival was the Club."[122] For men of the empire, their London club represented a center of familiarity and a place to get reacquainted with life at home. The Oriental Club was formed in 1824 specifically to deal with easing the transition of expatriates back to their homeland, and by the late nineteenth century several clubs were serving this need.[123] Other members of a club could find such imperial travelers useful, as their firsthand knowledge of distant lands could be helpful in their own travels.[124] Adventurers and imperialists could thus be drawn to the club, which served as both a center of discussion and a transition back to domestic life.

This process of integration was seen as so vital and so successful that the setting up of clubs went both ways. The Bengal Club was founded in Calcutta in 1827 along the lines of the Oriental Club, in an attempt to bring a little bit of England to India. The historian of the club notes that, in the empire, the idea of a club had a special appeal to men. For those who were divided from their families by thousands of miles, a club could "afford some consolation for the pains of exile and loneliness."[125] Historian Mrinalini Sinha has demonstrated that, in India in particular, clubs had an explicit function in replicating the civil society of the British

[120] Beckett, *London at the End of the Century*, 85–86.

[121] At the Marlborough, Guards', Gresham, Carlton, and Brooks's Clubs, members absent from England for the year were exempt from all fees. At the Reform, Windham, Army and Navy, East India United Service, Thatched House, Union, and United University Clubs members had to pay a reduced subscription of two guineas or less. See *Brooks's List of Members, and Rules* (London, 1889), 42; *The Guards' Club List of the Trustees, the Committee and the Honorary Members, and the Rules and Regulations of the Club* (London, 1889), 6; *Rules and Regulations and List of Members of the Thatched House Club* (London, 1889), 10; *The Rules and Regulations of the East India United Service Club, as Revised at the Second Annual General Meeting, May 26th* (London, 1890), 15–16; *Rules and Regulations of the Gresham Club, with a List of Members* (London, 1867), 4; *Rules and Regulations of the Marlborough Club* (London, 1887), 20; *The Rules and Regulations of the Union Club: With a List of the Members* (London, 1868), 11; *Rules and Regulations of the Windham Club, with a List of the Members* (London, 1890), 13; *The Rules and Regulations, with an Alphabetical List of the Members of the Army and Navy Club* (London, 1889), 25; *Rules, Regulations, and List of Members of the Carlton Club* (London, 1890), 9; *United University Club, Rules and Regulations, List of Members* (London, 1888), 10.

[122] "A Popular Dramatist," no. 495 of "Vain Tales," series, *Vanity Fair*, 12 July 1900, 28.

[123] Denys Mostyn Forrest, *The Oriental: Life Story of a West End Club*, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), 21–22.

[124] "Home from Madagascar: A Chat with Three Englishmen," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 April 1895, 3.

[125] H. R. Panckridge, *A Short History of the Bengal Club* (Calcutta, 1927), 1.

metropolis.[126] Many of the top London clubs also had privileges at clubs overseas. A guide produced in 1880 pointed out the opportunities of reciprocity clubmen had both on the continent and throughout the British Empire.[127] The global club network helped ensure that clubmen had a place to call home in almost every outpost of the globe.

After years abroad exploring the farthest reaches of the empire, clubmen sought out their London clubs upon return for sentimental reasons as well as practical ones. The caricaturist and writer Max Beerbohm encountered one such Australian adventurer who had the misfortune to return only to find his club had recently closed and the building had been torn down. The poor man's pathos was almost palpable: "The one thing which enabled him to endure those ten years of un- pleasant exile was the knowledge that he was a member of a London club. Year by year, it was a keen pleasure to him to send his annual subscription. It kept him in touch with civilisation, in touch with Home."[128] The destruction of his club was in many ways as devastating as the destruction of a family home. Especially for imperial travelers and bachelors, gentlemen's clubs could function as their only permanent connection.

Deep emotional attachment is perhaps the best proof of all that men viewed their clubs as homes. Many long-standing clubmen had trouble resigning when age or infirmity made attendance at their club impossible. The Reform Club has an impressive repertory of letters of resignation in its archive from regretful club- men. While most tend to be short and direct, some members could not resist reminiscing about their many years of membership. Joseph Sykes resigned in 1892 after a membership of fifty-four years because he no longer traveled into the city.[129] While E. Lees was a member for only seventeen years, his pathos was no less great when he wrote: "Owing to increased years and failing health which prevents me leaving the House, I very reluctantly tender my resignation of membership at the Reform Club."[130] The sheer longevity of many men's membership, and the fact of their frequenting the club so often, made their clubs a more permanent home than any domicile.

Some men ensured their presence in their beloved club even after death by bestowing legacies. The author A. A. Milne gave the Garrick Club 25 percent of the profits of his books upon the death of his widow, while playwright and com- poser Noel Coward donated his visitors' book to the club, which was a favorite of actors.[131] Members donated portraits, money, and accessories to the clubs they

[126] Mrinalini Sinha, "Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India," *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 499. The formation of clubs would be a good example of what David Cannadine sees as imperialists replicating the familiarity and domesticity of England throughout the world; see *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (New York, 2001), xix.

[127] Imperial clubland is a topic that requires greater research but is beyond the scope of this project; see George James Ivey, *Clubs of the World: A General Guide or Index to the London and County Clubs and Those of Scotland, Wales, Ireland, United Kingdom Yacht Clubs, and British Colonial Possessions, Together with the English and Other Clubs in Europe, the United States, and Elsewhere throughout the World*, 2nd ed. (London, 1880), iii.

[128] Max Beerbohm, "A Club in Ruins," in *Yet Again* (London, 1909), 60–61.

[129] Joseph Sykes to Committee, 8 October 1892, B 173, Reform Club Archive.

[130] E. Lees to Committee, 20 November 1890, B 172, Reform Club Archive.

[131] Richard Alexander Hough, *The Ace of Clubs: A History of the Garrick* (London, 1986), 52.

loved so dearly. Another way to keep a connection was to ensure the membership through future generations. Weedon Grossmith's favorite club was the Beefsteak, and it was one of his greatest desires to have his son elected as a member. By a strange coincidence, on the day of the father's death, the son was elected a member.[132] Either through donations or through genes, clubmen ensured that a little part of them survived at their clubs even after death. Such legacies helped contribute to a sense of family at many clubs and reinforced the domestic spirit.

Clubs formed a comfortable haven for upper-class men of the late Victorian era. Many men routinely left their homes to spend time at a club. Yet as this article has demonstrated, this flight was from the family home in particular rather than from domestic habits and comforts per se. The luxurious clubhouses and their staff aimed to make men feel as comfortable and domesticated as possible. Men used their clubs as they would a home—to read, write, dine, and meet with friends. Most importantly, the emotional ties men felt for their clubs went far beyond the convenient location and a gourmet menu; for many members, a club conjured up all of the images and sensations of home. Domestic impulses were strong even among men who sought comfort in their clubs rather than in their family homes. Thus any threat to family life from clubs was because they functioned as a rival homosocial domestic space, not because their spirit was antithetical to domesticity.

Many upper- and upper-middle-class homes were far from being domestic havens of quiet reflection and withdrawal from the world. As the center of women's social lives, the home served the function of showpiece and entertainment center, and men's dominion there was limited and selective, their place often redundant. Many men found their home lacking in comfort, privacy, and intimacy, and thus sought out these qualities in their clubs. Continued work needs to be done to understand men's place within the home, as the existing research on middle-class homes and middle-class men does not always apply to the upper classes or to the many bachelors of all classes.

What men's use of their clubs does show is the incredible popularity of male-only activities and institutions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This need for homosociality underlay men's determination to create, through clubs, an exclusively masculine domestic space. The deep desire for male affiliation implies a need to be separate from women that persisted until the early twentieth century with the resurgence of mixed-sex society. Instead of a flight from domesticity, the gentlemen's clubs may well be considered a flight from women and their social events. Nineteenth-century clubmen embraced the concept of domesticity in such a way as to provide for their own comforts while undermining the influence of the home.

[132] George (Junior) Grossmith, *G. G.* (London, 1933), 6.