



## **Social, Economic and Geographical Differences in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Homes: The Evidence from Inventories**

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# Social, Economic and Geographical Differences in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Homes: The Evidence from Inventories<sup>1</sup>

LESLEY HOSKINS

In 1864 Robert Kerr published his enormous *The Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences from the Parsonage to the Palace*. He explained that he did 'not propose to deal in any way with inferior dwellings, such as Cottages, Farmhouses, and Houses of Business' but that he would deal with the elements of accommodation and arrangement that were 'based, in fact, upon what is in a sense unvarying throughout the British Isles, namely, the domestic habits of refined persons'.<sup>2</sup> At much the same time Atchley & Co. brought out their *Original Designs for English Cottages . . . being Healthy Homes for the Working Man*. Both of these books, and many other advice manuals relating to the house and home, were firmly of the opinion that different social classes (as we would now call them) should have different accommodation and household arrangements. And most histories of nineteenth-century homes also take social status as central. *Family Fortunes*, first published in 1987 by the social and gender historians Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, remains a particularly influential statement of the importance of class to domestic arrangements. It argued that the newly developing middle class of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries based their group identity, in part, on a shared belief about the right way to organise, equip and live in the residence. Linda Young, a social and cultural historian, later took this further in *Middle-Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain*. She argued that people laid claim to middle-class status through having particular household goods. But more than that, she said, using these goods correctly actually conferred middle-class membership and identity.<sup>3</sup> A difficulty, however, with these arguments is that they discuss middle-class domestic goods and habits in isolation, without demonstrating that they were different from those of other classes.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars, notably the architectural and design historian Stefan Muthesius and the social historian John Burnett, used the household budgets offered in contemporary household management guides to look across the classes and to link specific domestic practices with incomes.<sup>5</sup> But the question remains whether these guides reflected or influenced how people actually behaved.

<sup>1</sup> This article draws on PhD research, undertaken at Queen Mary, University of London, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Geffrye Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Kerr (1871), p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Davidoff & Hall (1987), especially chapter 8; Young (2003), especially pp. 173–88.

<sup>4</sup> The same applies, for example, to Daunton (1983) and Rose (1992), who look at working-class arrangements.

<sup>5</sup> Muthesius (1982); Burnett (1978).

It should also be asked whether geographical location made a difference to people's domestic arrangements.<sup>6</sup> Several nineteenth-century writers remarked that different English cities had different standards of housing and home life.<sup>7</sup> More recently, some histories of housing have examined regional diversity in built layout, which perhaps implies geographical variation in how domestic activities were arranged.<sup>8</sup> Economic and social historians and historical geographers investigate the extent of regional distinctiveness at this period, with a suggestion that the increasing national integration of communications and government brought regions into closer contact but, initially and paradoxically, threw their differences into sharper relief.<sup>9</sup> It is claimed that there was increasing provincial resistance at this period to London's pre-eminence.<sup>10</sup> It is argued, for example, that early-Victorian Liverpool defined itself against industrial Manchester and commercial London and that 'an impressive and refined domestic environment' was essential to propagating the social identity of the ruling middle class.<sup>11</sup> There has also been a major debate about whether there were distinct types of wealth (commercial, financial, industrial, landowning) in different parts of the country and whether these were aligned with distinct social and cultural behaviours.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, there has been research which indicates an increasing national homogeneity in domestic furnishings and arrangements at this period. Linda Young, mentioned above, argues that class similarities over-rode geographical differences — right across Britain, North America and Australia.<sup>13</sup> Others have seen a consumer revolution, beginning in the eighteenth century, creating a national market and eroding regional and local cultural forms.<sup>14</sup> Furniture historian Adam Bowett demonstrates that, in the second half of the eighteenth century, developing transport links contributed to minimising geographical differences in the woods used by furniture makers.<sup>15</sup> Historian of the home Margaret Ponsonby notes in *Stories from Home* that from the start of the nineteenth century big 'furnishing drapers', who sold furniture bought in from large manufacturers in London or the provinces, began to undermine local producers. Such stores also produced printed catalogues allowing customers to order from a distance. This, she suggests, supported a move away from vernacular furniture and provincial styles towards an increasing homogeneity.<sup>16</sup> Other new factors, too, might have facilitated the minimisation of geographical differences. Greatly expanded and improved transport networks meant that goods could be shipped round the country, from place of manufacture or import, more easily than ever before.<sup>17</sup> Beginning in the 1860s, large furnishing firms began to advertise in national papers and periodicals.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Some historians have been aware of the possibility of geographical differences but have not pursued the matter; for example, Davidoff and Hall (1987); Gordon and Nair (2003); Ponsonby (2007); Hamlett (2009).

<sup>7</sup> de Tocqueville (1958, written 1830s), pp. 94–117; Porter (1843), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Muthesius (1982); Daunton (1983).

<sup>9</sup> Langton (1984), p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Sweet (1999), pp. 257–64.

<sup>11</sup> Belchem and Hardy (1998), pp. 59 and 67.

<sup>12</sup> Daunton (1989) participates in this debate and provides a bibliography. See also Rubinstein (2000).

<sup>13</sup> Young (2003), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> McKendrick (1982); Berry and Gregson (2004), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Bowett (2008).

<sup>16</sup> Ponsonby (2007), pp. 43–61.

<sup>17</sup> Ville (2004).

<sup>18</sup> Cohen (2006), pp. 59–60.

Many books and articles of advice on furnishing and decorating — usually the product of a centralised, London based, publishing industry — became available to an expanding readership across the country.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly then, there is the need for further investigation of both class and geographical differences in domestic arrangements at this period. There are several questions we might ask: was it the case that social status or geography correlated with differences in the way that people organised their homes? If so, what were these differences and where did the dividing lines lie? Did social and geographical differences moderate each other? The archaeologist and housing historian Maurice Barley wrote that ‘a study of names and their distribution, and comparison of the functions served by different rooms of the same name, or of the differently named rooms with the same domestic purpose, throws light on the distribution patterns of popular culture’.<sup>20</sup> Historians of earlier periods have been able to explore such questions by tracking the ownership of goods in large sets of household inventories.<sup>21</sup> But no such study has been made for the nineteenth century because it was thought that inventories did not exist in any number.<sup>22</sup> Recently, however, an extensive group of these documents has been uncovered in The National Archives at Kew, with the result that it has become possible empirically to investigate social and geographical patterns in the ownership of household spaces and goods for this period too. The rest of this article describes an attempt to address the questions raised above through a quantitative analysis of these inventories. It is able to reveal some differentiated social and geographical patterns of ownership, locating specific fault lines and considering whether geography and social status were inter-related. But it should be stressed that patterns of ownership and room use are not only a reflection of people’s economic ability to acquire goods. Domestic possessions and the way that people organise their homes are also a manifestation of what people think homes ought to be. I am therefore also investigating social and geographical difference in *ideas* of home.

#### THE INVENTORIES

In 1796 a death-duty tax was instigated in England and Wales, remaining in force until 1903. The tax was payable by those who received legacies, including those people — the residuary legatees — who inherited what remained after the specific bequests and debts had been dealt with. In order to calculate the size of this residue and the amount of tax due on it, Residuary Accounts, listing all of a deceased person’s personal property and the outgoings on the estate, were supplied to the Legacy Duty Office (subsequently the Inland Revenue).<sup>23</sup> A sample of about 6,000 of these accounts have been

<sup>19</sup> Attar (1987); Ferry (2007).

<sup>20</sup> Barley (1963), p. 479.

<sup>21</sup> Weatherill (1988); Shamma (1990); Overton et al. (2004).

<sup>22</sup> Hamlett (2009), p. 579, has been able to find about 200 inventories among personal papers in local records offices. Young (2003) and Nenadic (2004) have based their studies on Scottish bankruptcy inventories, which do survive in large numbers.

<sup>23</sup> Owens and Green (2012). It is important to note that ‘personal estate’ refers only to moveable property; it excludes real estate or settled property and so was often less than an individual’s total worth; Mandler (2001), pp. 272–73.

kept at The National Archives at Kew.<sup>24</sup> An estimated 1,000 of them include an inventory that values the deceased's household goods.<sup>25</sup> These inventories have several advantages for the present project: the geographical coverage of England and Wales has no apparent bias and reflects the distribution of the dying population; they are associated with a large amount of personal information, which is both valuable in its own right and which makes record linkage (for example with census records) relatively straightforward; and they provide evidence for the household possessions of people of a broad range of wealth and status. These people were not poor — it was only about 16 per cent of the population who were liable for the Legacy Duty. Nonetheless, they include some whose wealth was largely composed of capital equipment or stock from their businesses and whose household possessions were very meagre. The deceased were occupationally diverse, ranging from agricultural labourers, through clerks in Holy Orders, to those living off unearned income. Some left under £20 of gross personal wealth, while others left more than £20,000.

This article uses a group of 494 of these inventories, for the period from 1841, when census information on individuals became readily available, to 1881, when the supply of detailed inventories dries up. This sample is large enough to support quantifiable, empirically grounded, statistically significant, assertions about what people's houses contained, how they were laid out, and the organising principles of domestic space and domestic life. But while it permits some significant geographical comparisons, it is not large enough to allow for a comprehensive regional analysis since the inventories are spread thinly across all of England and Wales, with a major concentration in London. The geographical investigation is therefore mostly restricted to comparing metropolitan with non-metropolitan households.

There are many, well-documented, problems with using inventories as evidence.<sup>26</sup> Particularly salient issues for the present project are that household inventories do not list all the contents of a dwelling and that there is a problem of distinguishing between items that have been omitted and those that were never there. However we can be confident that the things listed actually were present at the time the appraisal was made.<sup>27</sup> Whether people actually used these items, and how, is another matter.

#### NOTES ON THE METHOD<sup>28</sup>

The main method used here was a cross-tabulation of the presence (or absence) of particular rooms or pieces of furniture with the wealth and social status of the deceased owners and the geographical location of the inventories. The results of the cross-tabulations were statistically tested. Where the word 'significant' is used in discussion

<sup>24</sup> The National Archives, IR 19 and 59.

<sup>25</sup> The inventories were identified as a source for the history of the home in the course of research into nineteenth-century wealth holding; see Owens et al. (2006), p. 390.

<sup>26</sup> Arkell, Evans and Goose (2000); Riello (2003).

<sup>27</sup> The point of these inventories was to value the goods; they generally do not provide much information about the style or type of items. Readers of *Regional Furniture* might be disappointed to find that they are not therefore very forthcoming about regional or vernacular furniture.

<sup>28</sup> For anyone interested in the details of the method and the analysis, see <http://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/jspui/handle/123456789/1261> [Hoskins (2011)], especially chapter 2.

of these results, it indicates that the pattern of ownership was unlikely to have been just a matter of chance.

Personal information about the deceased owner was drawn from the inventories themselves, the Residuary Account paperwork and sources such as the census.<sup>29</sup> For the present analysis, I categorised the owners by their wealth and social status and the inventories were grouped according to their geographical location. There was no available information about people's annual income but it was straightforward to assign each owner to one of four quartiles, according to the amount of their gross personal wealth.<sup>30</sup> It was much more difficult to assign them to social or class groups. The problem of defining, recognising, or even establishing the existence of nineteenth-century classes has long been seen as intractable.<sup>31</sup> Linda Young, in *Middle-Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, summarises the various ways that historians have written about nineteenth-century class divisions, stressing that there is a difference between those who prioritise contemporary nineteenth-century views (which varied greatly according to the context of the discussion) and those who focus on employment, occupation, and the amount and source of income.<sup>32</sup> In the present study I leant towards the latter, socio-economic, approach, setting up a social-status classification based on the available data, assigning people as either 'higher-status' or 'lower-status' (or 'not-known'). There were three criteria. First, I marked as 'higher-status' anyone described in the Legacy Duty Accounts or the census as a gentleman, esquire, dame, or knight.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, anyone described as being of independent financial status (for example, living on unearned income such as annuities) was also classified as 'higher-status'. The third criterion used an existing historical social stratification system which ranks occupations on a scale of 1–99, according to their social networks.<sup>34</sup> The professions are grouped together at the top end of this scale while those at the maximum social distance from them (such as labourers and street vendors) are at the bottom. In the present analysis people whose occupations were marked as 77 or above (such as professionals, managers, working proprietors of wholesale or retail businesses, clerics, teachers and military officers) were included in the 'higher-status' group. People for whom none of these pieces of information were available were assigned to the 'not-known' group; the rest were labelled as 'lower-status'.<sup>35</sup> My 'higher-status' group is not dissimilar to what social and economic historians have categorised as the professional middle and upper middle classes; the 'lower-status' group includes not only the white collar employees and small businessmen, who have been characterised as lower-middle-class, but also manual workers.<sup>36</sup> It must be stressed that the status groups set up here are simply for

<sup>29</sup> I used information only from censuses taken less than three years before the people in question died.

<sup>30</sup> The gross value does not take account of any debts the person owed but in general it correlates well with the net value.

<sup>31</sup> Dennis (1984), pp. 186–99.

<sup>32</sup> Young (2003), pp. 54–68.

<sup>33</sup> The exact meanings of 'gentleman' and 'esquire' at this date are unclear; the terms were often used to describe people who had unearned income but they also had a moral and social significance. See Crossick (1991), pp. 163–64; Morris (2005), p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> This is the HIS-CAM system, version 1.1.GB (an historical version of Cambridge Social Interaction and Stratification), <http://www.camsis.stir.ac.uk/hiscam>.

<sup>35</sup> 152 inventories were coded as 'higher-status', 253 as 'lower-status' and 89 as 'not-known'.

<sup>36</sup> Crossick (1977); Rubinstein (1988); Muthesius (1982), pp. 44–45.

the purpose of this analysis — they do not represent nineteenth-century usage. Unsurprisingly, the wealthier people in the sample were significantly often of ‘higher status’ while the poorer people were often of ‘lower status’.

Each inventory provides an address (sometimes only approximate) for the premises but it was problematic to group those addresses into meaningful geographical areas. I allocated the inventories to the eleven contemporary registration divisions for England and Wales, outlined in the Registrar-Generals’ reports.<sup>37</sup> However, the numbers in each division (apart from London) were often too small to allow for statistical comparisons so, for working purposes, pairs of divisions were sometimes combined. It has to be recognised that nineteenth-century administrative regions or divisions were not necessarily culturally, socially, or economically cohesive, and the same caveat applies to the groupings used in this article.<sup>38</sup>

#### DAY-ROOMS

This part of the investigation used only those inventories in which room names were given. Appraisers listed goods by room where it was helpful in making a systematic valuation; this was not necessary where there were very few rooms or very few goods. This criterion therefore disproportionately excludes inventories relating to the poorer deceased. I also excluded inventories where the premises appear to have been arranged primarily to meet the needs of a business, rather than familial domesticity; in practice, this cut out most of the inns. The result is a sub-sample of 337 inventories.

A variety of day-room names were in use at this period. As Table 1 shows, the most commonly used terms in the present sample were ‘parlour’ (appearing in 45.4 per cent of the inventories), ‘drawing-room’ (25.8 per cent), ‘sitting-room’ (24.6 per cent) and ‘dining-room’ (21.7 per cent). These room names are the basis of the following analysis. In most cases we cannot know whether the names that appeared in the inventories were used by the occupants themselves or were assigned by the appraiser but, either way, they reflect contemporary local usage since almost all of the appraisers were from the same area as the premises they were valuing.

After establishing the most usual types of day-room furniture and equipment, I compared the contents of these room types. Table 2 shows the percentage of each of the four named rooms that contained at least one of these common items. The contents of the rooms give clues as to their functions. None of them were equipped for full-scale cooking, laundry or cleaning; they were all free of messy household work.

#### DRAWING-ROOMS AND DINING-ROOMS

Drawing-rooms and dining-rooms significantly often appeared together in the same house but they were furnished rather differently from each other, indicating their different functions.<sup>39</sup> It can be seen from Table 2 that many more drawing-rooms than dining-rooms had sofas, couches or settees, mirrors and ornaments. Dining-rooms, on

<sup>37</sup> *Census of England and Wales*, Preliminary Report, (1871), pp. iv–xx. This also gives a detailed definition of London, which includes some addresses in Middlesex, Surrey and Kent.

<sup>38</sup> Berry and Gregson (2004); Stobart (2001); pp. 1305–09, gives an overview of recent work on the varied nature and scale of regions in the nineteenth century.

<sup>39</sup> 82.2% of the 73 inventories with a dining-room also included a drawing-room.

Table 1 Day-rooms appearing in the inventories  
 Total number of inventories=337; total number of day rooms=776

Named room	Number of such rooms	As % of all day-rooms (n=776)	Number of inventories including such rooms	As % of all inventories (n=337)
<i>Kitchen-living-room</i>	188	24.2	183	54.3
Parlour	186	24.0	153	45.4
Drawing-room	91	11.7	87	25.8
Sitting-room	89	11.5	83	24.6
Dining-room	75	9.7	73	21.7
<i>Other day-room</i>	43	5.5	32	9.5
House	33	4.3	32	9.5
Library	23	3.0	22	6.5
Breakfast room	21	2.7	21	6.2
Study	9	1.2	9	2.7
Keeping-room	6	0.8	6	1.8
<i>Hall (as day-room)</i>	3	0.4	3	0.9
Morning-room	2	0.3	2	0.6
Conservatory	2	0.3	2	0.6
Living-room	2	0.3	2	0.6
Boudoir	1	0.1	1	0.3
Smoking-room	1	0.1	1	0.3
Billiard-room	1	0.1	1	0.3
All day-rooms	776	100.0		

Notes:

- i) The highlighted rooms are the focus of the analysis.
- ii) Rooms shown in italics are coded terms, not those given in the inventories. 'Other day-rooms' indicates an indeterminate name, such as 'front room', which included typical day-room items. A 'Kitchen-living-room' (which was not a term in use at the time) was named in the inventories as a kitchen and included some living-room furniture.

the other hand, more often had sideboards, dining-tables and eating and drinking equipment. This conforms to the advice literature of the time, which presented drawing- and dining-rooms as a unit, together providing space for formal hospitality and family leisure but with each room having its own functions: the drawing-room was for sitting, talking, sewing, music and so on, while the dining-room was for eating. Table 2 indicates, however, that the drawing-rooms in this sample were more specialised than the dining-rooms: the former only rarely included goods and furniture related to dining whereas some dining-rooms included equipment such as musical instruments, sewing goods and sofas. This supports the observation in a mid-century architectural



Table 2 Percentage of named day-rooms containing particular types of furniture and equipment  
Total sample is 441 rooms in 337 inventories

Type of item	% of drawing-rooms containing item. n=89	% of dining-rooms containing item. n=91	% of parlours containing item. n=75	% of sitting-rooms containing item. n=186
Table	97	95	94	96
Chair	92	91	93	94
Fire Goods e.g. irons	96	92	88	89
Carpet	89	89	64	67
Rug	75	75	60	60
Window Covering e.g. curtains and blinds	85	89	47	46
Mirror	73	48	52	55
Ornament	79	64	61	54
Sofa/Couch/Settee	80	44	45	58
Picture	58	68	58	48
Easy Chair	57	39	23	22
Reading/Writing item e.g. desk or bookcase	54	59	44	55
Cheffonier	36	16	8	21
Ottoman	26	5	2	2
Music equipment e.g. piano or music stool	26	20	13	17
Eating/Drinking item e.g. wine glasses or dinner service	23	52	56	48
Sideboard	7	61	10	3
Wagon/Buffer/Dumb Waiter	4	27	3	3
Colour code	0–24% of rooms	25–50% of rooms	51–69% of rooms	70–100% of rooms

Note: see <http://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/jspui/handle/123456789/1261> (Hoskins, (2011), Appendix 1, pp. 326–28, for criteria for coding of items.

Table 3 Percentage of named day-rooms containing particular materials

Type of material	% of drawing-rooms containing material n=91	% of dining-rooms containing material n=75	% of parlours containing material n=186	% of sitting-rooms containing material n=89
Mahogany	59	80	65	57
Gilt	47	43	19	16
Brussels carpet	54	36	11	12
Rosewood	54	24	10	9
Damask	34	27	6	8
Lustres	22	7	5	4
Horsehair	15	25	19	16
Leather	8	28	8	9

  

Colour code	0–18% of rooms	19–30% of rooms	31–45% of rooms	46–64% of rooms	65%+ of rooms
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Note: Total sample is 441 rooms in 337 inventories

guide that in ‘smaller houses, and indeed in many of considerable size, the Dining-room is used as a family sitting-room . . .’.<sup>40</sup>

Domestic advice and decorating manuals throughout the period also presented these two rooms as symbolically and practically gendered. The drawing-room was to be a feminine domain, where the women of the family spent much of their time and where hosting was predominantly female. The ambience was to be ‘elegant’, ‘glittering’, ‘gay’, ‘cheerful’, ‘light’ and ‘delicate’ and there should be plenty of ornaments, textiles and light-looking furniture. The dining-room, by contrast, was to be serious, dignified and masculine in tone, with darker colours, heavy and durable furniture, and few ornaments beyond the display on the sideboard.<sup>41</sup> Table 3 suggests that the furnishing of these rooms was indeed gendered in the way advised. The drawing-rooms were more ‘feminine’, with their ornaments, lustres and mirrors (light and sparkle), rosewood (exotic glossiness), damask (shine) and Brussels carpets (patterning) than the dining-rooms; the latter, with their mahogany, horse-hair, leather and pictures (considered a more serious form of decorative art), were less colourful and more ‘masculine’.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Kerr (1871), p. 99. See Hamlett (2009), p. 583, for corroboratory findings.

<sup>41</sup> Kinchin (1996).

<sup>42</sup> Gordon and Nair’s (2003) study of the middle classes of Edinburgh and Glasgow in the later nineteenth century did not find evidence for this practice, unlike Hamlett’s (2009) investigation of English dining rooms.

Table 4 Contents of Thomas Woodall's sitting-room, parlour and kitchen, Netherton, Dudley, 1858

SITTING ROOM	PARLOUR	KITCHEN
1 Sofa	1 Fender & fire irons	1 Round table
1 Mahogany Pembroke table	1 Carpet	1 Sofa
6 Windsor chairs	1 Hearth rug	1 Deal leaf table
1 8 day clock	1 Mahogany sofa	1 Copper tea kettle
1 Carpeting	1 Mahogany stand table	1 Italian iron
1 Pier glass	6 Mahogany chairs	1 Coffee mill
1 Barometer	2 Elbow chairs	1 Desk
1 Mahogany dining table & cover	1 Mahogany centre table	3 Windsor chairs
Lot of Books	1 Stand table	1 Fender & fire irons
1 Fender	1 Square piano forte	[Some] Tin ware
1 Set of fire irons	1 Mahogany side board	[Some] Cullinary articles
	Lot of Glass	1 Tea service
	[Some] Decanters	[Some] Earthenware
	[Some] &c	
	1 Oil painting	

Source: The National Archives, IR 19/113/2056  
The original spelling has been kept.

#### PARLOURS AND SITTING-ROOMS

It is apparent from Table 2 that parlours and sitting-rooms were rather similar to each other in their contents but different from drawing-rooms and dining-rooms. Fewer parlours and sitting-rooms had the carpets, rugs and window coverings (curtains, valances and blinds) seen in both drawing- and dining-rooms and very few had expensive feminine 'drawing-room' items such as rosewood, lustres and damask. This may well have been partly due to parlour and sitting-room owners being generally less well-off than the people with drawing- or dining-rooms (as will be discussed shortly). But some of the differences can be related to a different way of using space. Parlours and sitting-rooms appear to have been more multi-functional than drawing-rooms. They were perhaps more similar to dining-rooms, which as suggested above, sometimes had a family sitting-room element to them. Although parlours and sitting-rooms rarely included expensive specialised dining furniture, such as named dining-tables or sideboards, many of them did include eating and drinking equipment. This must be partly attributable to the fact that a single parlour was often the only living-room apart from a kitchen; this was the case in 57.4 per cent of the 153 houses with a parlour. In these circumstances the parlour would have to be multi-purpose on at least those occasions when it was not acceptable to eat or sit in the kitchen.

Even where there was more than one parlour or sitting-room it was usually the case that they were not functionally differentiated in the way that drawing- and dining-rooms were. Only five of the 23 residences with more than one parlour reveal them as being furnished for different functions. In at least thirteen of the 23, both (or all) parlours were equipped to combine dining and 'sitting'. Instead of specialisation and

gendered ambience, there appears to have been hierarchical differentiation — one of the rooms having more, and better quality, furnishings than another. This is illustrated by the 1858 inventory of Mr Thomas Woodall of Netherton, near Dudley, in the West Midlands (Table 4). Here, the sitting-room, parlour and kitchen were each equipped as living-rooms; unusually, even the kitchen included a sofa. The kitchen was markedly inferior and was where the cooking and ironing took place but the sitting-room and parlour were differentiated more by hierarchy than function. The parlour, with the most mahogany (including eight matching chairs), a hearth rug, an oil painting and a piano, was undoubtedly the ‘best’ room. The chairs in the sitting-room were the less formal Windsor type. However, both rooms were furnished for eating as well as ‘sitting’, with a sideboard in the parlour and a dining-table in the sitting-room. Parlours, then, were multi-purpose rooms, which allowed for more flexibility of social use than the formulaic specialisation of space in paired drawing- and dining-rooms.

#### THE ASSOCIATION OF THE DIFFERENT ROOMS WITH WEALTH AND STATUS

The next question under consideration is whether the people who had drawing- and dining-rooms were different from those with parlours or sitting-rooms. Tables 5 and 6 show that drawing- and dining-rooms appeared largely in the inventories of people in the topmost wealth quartile and in the ‘higher-status’ group. They were infrequent amongst inventories belonging to people in wealth quartiles 1–3 and of ‘lower status’. This appears, at first glance, to conform to the common understanding of class difference in Victorian homes. Generally speaking, especially in books for a popular readership, it is asserted that the middle classes had a pair of day-rooms — a drawing-room and a dining-room — plus, if they could afford it, one or more subsidiary rooms.<sup>43</sup> In the present sample, these two rooms were indeed often paired: about 70 per cent of the drawing-room inventories also included a dining-room; more than 80 per cent of those with a dining-room had a drawing-room as well. Linda Young sees the drawing-room, its particular contents, and its associated social practices as essential to nineteenth-century middle- and upper-class life.<sup>44</sup> She acknowledges that the middle class was not homogenous but she stresses that ‘the totality can be identified as all those sharing the basic menu of ideals and actions’.<sup>45</sup> However, the present analysis suggests that the drawing-room did not reach as far as the *lower-middle-class* home. Although it is not possible to match the inventory group with incomes, the social distribution of these rooms appears to be more in line with Stefan Muthesius’s account of the middle and later century. In *The English Terraced House* he suggested that drawing- and dining-rooms were the province of the very wealthy (judges, knights, merchants, peers with an annual income of £3,000–5,000), the rich (lawyers, merchants and upper civil servants), the upper professionals (such as successful lawyers and doctors) and the lower-paid professionals (such as higher clerks earning about £350 per annum).<sup>46</sup> The drawing-rooms in the present inventory group were largely confined

<sup>43</sup> Banham et al. (1991), pp. 38 and 35; Flanders (2003), p. 137.

<sup>44</sup> Young (2003), pp. 176–77.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> Muthesius (1982), pp. 38–48.

Table 5 Number and percentage of inventories in each wealth quartile with one or more of the named day-rooms  
Total number of inventories = 337. Wealth quartile 1 is lowest; 4 is highest

Wealth quartile	Drawing-room present	% of inventories per wealth quartile having drawing-room	Dining-room present	% of inventories per wealth quartile having dining-room	Parlour present	% of inventories per wealth quartile having parlour	Sitting-room present	% of inventories per wealth quartile having sitting-room
1 n=67	6	9.0	2	3.0	30	44.8	13	19.4
2 n=67	9	13.4	6	9.0	34	50.7	15	22.4
3 n=89	11	12.4	10	11.2	50	56.2	28	31.5
4 n=114	61	53.5	55	48.2	39	34.2	27	23.7
All n=337	87	25.8	73	21.7	153	45.4	83	24.6
Statistically different difference		Yes		Yes		Marginally		No

Notes:

i) All 494 inventories were assigned to equally sized wealth quartiles. The 337 inventories with named rooms related to the wealthier decedents; this accounts for the different numbers in each quartile in this table.

Table 6 Number and percentage of inventories in each social status group with one or more of the named day-rooms  
 Total number of inventories = 337.

Status group	Drawing-room present	% of inventories per status group having drawing-room	Dining-room present	% of inventories per status group having dining-room	Parlour present	% of inventories per status group having parlour	Sitting-room present	% of inventories per status group having sitting-room
Not known n=49	13	26.5	9	18.4	18	36.7	15	30.6
Lower status n=162	12	7.4	12	7.4	84	51.9	46	28.4
Higher status n=126	62	49.2	52	41.3	51	40.5	22	17.5
All n=337	87	25.8	73	21.7	153	45.4	83	24.6
Statistically significant difference		Yes		Yes		No		No

to the topmost wealth quartile of what was already the wealthiest part of the population. This is a nice reminder that, although books about Victorian domestic arrangements focus mostly on the middle-classes, this particular type of drawing-room-home belonged to only a small proportion of the population in the mid nineteenth century.

Many historical accounts suggest that while the middle classes had drawing-rooms, the working class had a parlour or parlours.<sup>47</sup> Muthesius, again, has a more complicated account.<sup>48</sup> He located parlours in the household arrangements of those earning less than about £200, whether manual or non-manual workers. This placed the drawing-room/parlour divide, not between the middle and the working classes, but between the upper and middle-middle classes on the one hand and the lower-middle and better-off working classes on the other. The inventory sample tends to bear out Muthesius's narrative. The parlour owners were undoubtedly, on the whole, less wealthy than the drawing-room owners: the median gross wealth of the former was £568, compared with £3,804 for the latter. And parlours were much more frequent in houses with only one or two day-rooms than in larger houses: 59.6 per cent of the 228 inventories with only one or two day-rooms (leaving aside kitchens) had a parlour, compared with 27.9 per cent of those inventories with three or more day-rooms.

An additional new finding, differing from all previous accounts, also emerges from Table 6: a large minority — 40.5 per cent — of the 'higher-status' inventories had parlours. This is not far off the 49.2 per cent that had a drawing-room. And it was not significantly less than the 51.9 per cent of lower-status cases. Thus, while drawing- and dining-rooms were indeed largely restricted to individuals of high status and wealth, the possession of these rooms was not, as has been suggested, a necessary marker of middle-class status.

#### GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES IN THE INCIDENCE OF DRAWING-ROOMS AND PARLOURS

Parlours and sitting-rooms, drawing-rooms and dining-rooms, were by and large furnished in a reasonably standard manner across the country. But Table 7 shows a significant geographical variation in their incidence. The clearest and most important difference is between London and the rest of the country. Significantly more London inventories included drawing- or dining-rooms than those in the rest of England and Wales. This can partly be accounted for by the London segment of the sample having somewhat more 'high-status' and wealthy people and slightly fewer of the least wealthy than elsewhere. As the economic and social historian William D. Rubinstein has shown, in the mid nineteenth century there were, absolutely and proportionally, more wealthy and middle-class people in London than in other cities.<sup>49</sup> But Rubinstein further proposes that the middle class in London differed from its provincial counterpart because of the influence of the culture of 'old money' and the aristocratic elite on the metropolis. Leonore Davidoff, too, in *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season*, pointed out the impact of the manners of elite society on the broader middle-class in

<sup>47</sup> Daunton (1983), pp. 277–82; Banham et al. (1991), pp. 35 and 38.

<sup>48</sup> Muthesius (1982), pp. 44–48.

<sup>49</sup> Rubinstein (1988); Rubinstein (2000), p. 138.

Table 7 Incidence of different day-rooms in London, Wales, the West Midlands, and the rest of England and Wales  
Total number of inventories = 337.

Location of inventories	Number of inventories in region with drawing- or dining-room present	% of inventories in region with drawing- or dining-room present	Number of inventories in region with parlour present	% of inventories in region with parlour present	Number of inventories in region with sitting-room present	% of inventories in region with sitting-room present
London n=58	27	46.6	26	44.8	6	10.3
Not London n=279	73	26.2	127	45.5	77	27.6
All inventories n=337	100	33.7	153	45.4	83	24.6
Statistically significant		Yes		No		Yes
Wales n=17	3	17.6	13	76.5	1	5.9
West Midlands n=31	3	9.7	21	67.7	13	41.9
Elsewhere n=289	94	32.5	119	41.2	69	23.9
All inventories n=337	100	33.7	153	45.4	83	24.6
Statistically significant		Marginally		Yes		Numbers too small for testing



London.<sup>50</sup> The influence of this upper-class culture might account for the very high proportion (around 78.3 per cent) of the wealthiest Londoners in the present sample having the drawing-rooms and/or dining-rooms that Davidoff describes as essential to elite social life and the rather lower proportion (54.9 per cent) outside London. But, additionally, even amongst those in the bottom three wealth quartiles there were relatively higher rates of dining- and drawing-room ownership (25.7 per cent) in London than in the rest of the country (12.2 per cent). This suggests that London was more broadly suffused by an elite-related middle-class 'drawing-room' domestic culture than the rest of the country.

London was not, however, different in the matter of parlours. In London, as in the country as a whole, parlours appeared in about 45 per cent of the inventories. But both Wales and the West Midlands stood out as having a significantly strong preference for parlours, with 76.5 per cent of the inventories in the former and 67.7 per cent in the latter containing at least one such room. There was also a lack of drawing- and dining-rooms. In this inventory group, the deceased from Wales and the West Midlands were not poorer than those elsewhere and, even amongst the inventories belonging to the wealthiest people in these areas, about 67 per cent included a parlour, whereas only 25 per cent included a drawing- or dining-room. Of the fifteen people classified as of 'higher status', only four had a drawing-room while ten had a parlour. This is the reverse of the situation in the rest of the country. The numbers involved here are small but they do suggest that the economically and occupationally well-to-do of these areas deliberately held to their parlours, rejecting the elite-oriented drawing-room culture mentioned with regard to London. Mr Thomas Woodall, whose living-rooms were discussed above, was a reasonably wealthy man (quartile 3); he was a retired boiler-maker and landlord of a number of properties; by the time of his death he was styled as a gentleman, and is therefore classified in this analysis as being of 'higher status'. Had he lived in London, it is possible that his domestic arrangements would have included a drawing-room, but in Netherton, a new industrial town in the West Midlands with hardly any middle-class inhabitants, to have had such a room would probably have been out of keeping.<sup>51</sup>

Although the small numbers mean that it is not possible at this stage to make a definitive claim for the distinctiveness of Wales or the West Midlands, the evidence of these inventories does point decisively to London's difference from the rest of the country. It would not be correct to say that, at this stage in the century, there was a nationally homogenous domestic culture.

#### BEDROOM FURNITURE AND THE STANDARD OF LIVING

This section pursues metropolitan distinctiveness into the bedroom, by looking at all of the 1098 bedrooms in the 337 inventories with named rooms.<sup>52</sup> I first established a list of the most frequent items of bedroom equipment and furniture and then marked

<sup>50</sup> Davidoff (1973).

<sup>51</sup> Field (1986) argues that in Portsmouth the middle class in plebeian areas moderated their behaviour in conformity with that of their neighbours.

<sup>52</sup> I marked every room that included a bedstead as a 'bedroom'.

each of the bedrooms by whether or not they included at least one of those items. This made it possible to assess whether, in general, particular items were significantly associated with the wealth and social status of the owners and the metropolitan or provincial location of the premises.<sup>53</sup> An additional factor considered here is change over time and the differentiated take up of new or old types of goods. See Table 8 for a list of the items and the results of the analysis.

Alongside bedsteads and bedding, the basic equipment, not moderated by wealth, would seem to have been chests of drawers, tables, pictures and, to a lesser extent, chamber ware and chamber pots or conveniences such as commodes. As is to be expected, many of the other items were more common as wealth increased. This was the case for chairs, floor coverings (carpeting, rugs, matting, floorcloth and so on), washstands, bed-hangings, towel rails, fire-related goods (such as fire irons and fenders), window coverings (curtains, valances, blinds), wardrobes and baths. It applied to a lesser extent with metal bedsteads, mirrors, bidets and ornaments. There was a similar association of these goods with people of 'higher status'.

Table 8 also shows that a higher percentage of London bedrooms were equipped with almost all of the items than their counterparts elsewhere in the country. The Londoners in this sample can be seen, then, as generally enjoying a higher standard of living. There were slightly more 'high-status', and fewer less wealthy, bedrooms in London than elsewhere but, on closer examination, London's dominance in ownership was generally also seen *within* each of the status and wealth groups except, in some cases, the bottom-most level.<sup>54</sup> While London bedrooms were the best furnished, there was not, however, one single geographical division which was always, or even predominantly, the worst equipped. Even dividing the country into North and South did not result in a clear case of haves and have-nots.

#### THE TAKE-UP OF NEW ITEMS

The present group of inventories covers too short a period (1841–1881) effectively to reveal many changes in domestic equipment but analysis of the bedrooms does suggest that London was also distinctive in adopting new goods earlier than elsewhere.

Metal bedsteads were new items.<sup>55</sup> At this period most bedsteads were made of wood but the mass manufacture of metal versions had begun in the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> By 1850, 5,000–6,000 were being produced in Birmingham (the centre of production) each week.<sup>57</sup> They were not especially common items in these inventories, appearing in only a quarter of all the 494 inventories and in 19.3 per cent of the

<sup>53</sup> I did not take into account that different bedrooms in the same dwelling were furnished to different standards. This is better dealt with in case studies, as for example in my article 'Household inventories re-assessed: a "new" source for investigating nineteenth-century domestic culture in England and Wales', presently under review.

<sup>54</sup> Only 6.7% of London bedrooms were in the lowest wealth quartile, compared with 13.6% elsewhere; 60% of London bedrooms are classified as 'higher-status', compared with 44.2% elsewhere.

<sup>55</sup> Any bedstead that was described as 'iron', 'brass' or 'japanned' is counted as a 'metal bedstead'. The appraisers did not note the material of most of the bedsteads and it is likely that some of the unspecified items were metal; the incidence of metal bedsteads recorded here is therefore likely to be an underestimate.

<sup>56</sup> Himmelheber (1996), p. 18; Loudon (*c.* 1865), p. 329.

<sup>57</sup> Himmelheber (1996), p. 21.

Table 8 Common items of bedroom equipment or furniture and their association with wealth, status, metropolitan location, and change over time

Total number of bedrooms = 1098 in the 337 domestic inventories with named rooms.

Presence of at least one of:	Number of bedrooms containing the item n=1098	Percentage of bedrooms containing the item	Incidence increases with wealth quartile	Incidence increases with higher status	Percentage of London bedrooms containing	Percentage of non-London bedrooms containing	Significance of metropolitan/non-metropolitan difference	Change over time
Chair	885	80.6	Dark Green	Dark Green	86.2	79.4	Light Green	Light Green
Carpet/rug/floor covering	758	69.0	Dark Green	Dark Green	80.5	66.6	Dark Green	Dark Green
Mirror	732	66.7	Light Green	Light Green	80.5	63.7	Dark Green	Light Green
Washstand	688	62.7	Dark Green	Dark Green	74.4	60.1	Dark Green	Light Green
Chest of drawers	652	59.4	Light Green	Light Green	70.3	57.0	Light Green	Light Green
Dressing table	490	44.6	Light Green	Light Green	46.2	44.3	Light Green	Light Green
Bedhangings	481	43.8	Dark Green	Dark Green	41.5	44.3	Dark Green	Dark Green
Towel rail	416	37.9	Dark Green	Dark Green	50.8	35.1	Dark Green	Dark Green
Window coverings e.g. curtains or blinds	406	37.0	Light Green	Light Green	46.7	34.9	Light Green	Light Green
Fire goods e.g. fire irons or fender	399	36.3	Dark Green	Dark Green	56.4	32.0	Dark Green	Dark Green
Table	359	32.7	Light Green	Light Green	36.4	31.9	Light Green	Light Green
Chamber ware or chamber pot	269	24.5	Dark Green	Dark Green	19.5	25.6	Dark Green	Dark Green

Convenience e.g. commode	228	20.8		21.0	19.5
Metal bedstead	212	19.3		43.1	14.2
Picture	210	19.1		33.8	15.9
Ornament	172	15.7		25.1	13.6
Reading/writing equipment e.g. bookcase or desk	160	14.6		19.5	13.5
Wardrobe	131	11.9		17.4	10.7
Chest	114	10.4		3.1	12.0
Bath	104	9.5		17.9	7.6
Clock	96	8.7		11.3	8.2
Bidet	43	3.9		9.2	2.8

COLOUR CODE

Statistically significant positive association	Strong	Yes	Marginal	Not significant
Statistically significant negative association	Strong	Yes	Marginal	Not significant

Note: Each of bedrooms was marked according to whether or not it contained at least one of each of the items listed; quantity, quality and value were not taken into account. The table is shaded to show where the differences are significant.

1098 bedrooms. However, their incidence increased significantly over time: only 4.5 per cent of the bedrooms for people who died between 1841 and 1860 contained an iron bedstead; for the period 1861–1881 the percentage rose to 28.3. Their increasing popularity probably owed something to falling prices.<sup>58</sup> It is difficult to compare the value of metal and wooden bedsteads since much depended on size, quality and finish but simple iron models were cheap.<sup>59</sup> And — because they were easier than wood to keep clean and free from insects — they were recommended for institutional use and for servants' rooms. However, they were also made in more elaborate, and expensive, formats for 'genteel families'.<sup>60</sup> After all, even the most careful middle-class family could suffer from bed-bugs.<sup>61</sup>

Bedrooms with metal bedsteads in them belonged disproportionately to wealthier people and to those of 'higher status'. Of course, higher wealth gives greater opportunities for acquisition and, at this point in the century there would not have been such a good supply of inherited or second-hand (and therefore cheap) metal bedsteads as of the wooden versions.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, metal bedsteads were modern, novel, items, advertised for their hygienic properties at a time when matters of domestic and public health featured large on the national agenda.<sup>63</sup> The incidence of metal bedsteads was much higher in London bedrooms than elsewhere in the country; this applied even at the lower wealth levels. The geographical difference, however, declined as time went on: ownership rose everywhere during the period, but increased more steeply outside London.<sup>64</sup> Londoners, in this case, fit into a narrative of the metropolitan early take-up of novel goods that historians have identified from at least the early eighteenth century.<sup>65</sup> Some of those narratives have suggested that this was due to London's position as a manufacturer (for example of pianos) or as a port receiving exotic goods (such as tea ware).<sup>66</sup> But metal bedsteads were mostly made in Birmingham, where local manufacture did not appear to result in higher consumption — only 14.3 per cent of the inventories from the West Midlands included such an item, hardly higher than the 12.5 per cent in the non-metropolitan country as a whole. Instead the bedsteads were transported to London, which was the centre of the trade (and the intra-national railway network) and of consumption.<sup>67</sup>

A reverse pattern can be seen in relation to chests. Household manuals of the early and mid century asserted that chests had been replaced by the much more useful chests of drawers.<sup>68</sup> The inventory sample certainly shows the incidence of chests in bedrooms

<sup>58</sup> Loudon (c. 1865), p. 329, had noted that in the 1830s a simple iron bedstead cost 23s.; a reader annotating the book sometime after 1878 costed it at about 12s. 6d.

<sup>59</sup> Walsh (1856), pp. 203–08.

<sup>60</sup> See advertisement for Frederick Sutton's Iron Bedstead Depot, Hull, in *The Hull Packet and East Riding Times*, Friday May 18, 1849; Peyton & Peyton (c. 1856); Room and Morton (1854); Walsh (1856), p. 203.

<sup>61</sup> Flanders (2003), pp. 12–14.

<sup>62</sup> Thanks to Jon Stobart for this point.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Bashford (1998), chapter 1; Smith (2007), pp. 264–306.

<sup>64</sup> The rise between 1841–61 and 1862–82 in London was from 42% to 83%; in the rest of the country it was from only 5% to 38%.

<sup>65</sup> Weatherill (1988), pp. 50–51; Borsay (2001).

<sup>66</sup> Ehrlich (1990); Weatherill (1988), pp. 50–51.

<sup>67</sup> Himmelheber (1996), pp. 36–37.

<sup>68</sup> For example, *How to Furnish a House ...* (c. 1855), pp. 44–45.

declining significantly, from 13.8 per cent in the period 1841–1860 to only 6 per cent in 1861–1881. The numbers are everywhere quite low but it is in London that they were significantly lowest, throughout the period.<sup>69</sup>

#### IDEAS OF GENTILITY

When, as quoted at the beginning of this article, Robert Kerr wrote of the ‘domestic habits of refined persons’ he was referring to gentility. London with its fondness for drawing-rooms was more permeated by genteel culture than elsewhere. And this was also apparent in its bedrooms. For example, proportionally more London bedrooms included a washstand than those in the rest of the country. Personal cleanliness had always been a marker of respectability and higher social status but in earlier periods it was achieved, not by bathing, but by frequent changes of linen, which absorbed dirt. By the early nineteenth century, however, washing the skin had become the accepted method.<sup>70</sup> A bedroom washstand (they were hardly ever found in other rooms) was one means of managing this. But using a washstand required easy access to clean fresh water, a private bedroom, and someone — ideally a servant — to carry the water. These things were much more readily available to people of wealth and status; others made do with alternatives such as public baths, the barber’s shop, and the scullery tap.<sup>71</sup> So, the predominance of washstands in London bedrooms, even in rooms belonging to people in the ‘lower-status’ group, suggests that genteel domestic practices were more prevalent there than elsewhere.<sup>72</sup>

The equipment and furniture of the bedrooms in this sample therefore implies that, even at a time of increasing mass manufacture, of mass distribution through markedly improved transport networks, of the growth of provincial towns and cities, and of the mass availability of goods at all levels of the market (new and second-hand), London took so much of a lead in consumption, innovation and genteel fashionability that national homogeneity was not evident.

#### CONCLUSIONS

This study brings empirical evidence to bear on questions of status, wealth and geographical difference in mid-nineteenth-century domestic cultures. Looking at a substantial group of inventories relating to ordinary people, we can see that drawing-rooms and dining-rooms were largely confined to wealthier people and those of ‘higher status’ — the equivalent of the more elevated sections of the middle classes. Drawing-room ownership did not, on the whole, extend into what historians have called the lower middle classes. This was not just a matter of terminology; drawing- and dining-rooms do appear to indicate a formal and functionally specific use of domestic space, different from the more flexible approach seen in parlours and sitting-rooms. And drawing-room culture was actually confined to only about 26 per cent of that relatively

<sup>69</sup> This needs further investigation. Chests remained positively significantly associated with farming households, where they may have continued to have functional advantages, for example as containers of farm produce.

<sup>70</sup> Vigarello (1988); Smith (2007), p. 288–89.

<sup>71</sup> Wright (1867).

<sup>72</sup> Amongst ‘lower-status’ bedrooms the rate was 69.8% in London and 30.2% elsewhere.

privileged portion of the whole population whose estates were sufficiently large to qualify for death duties. This study therefore highlights the rather narrow social focus of the history of nineteenth-century interiors, which has largely concentrated on drawing-room owners. In addition, the present findings show that parlours were, contrary to previous accounts, found not only amongst the lower-middle and working classes but extended across almost all of the social range. It was not necessary to have a drawing-room to be middle-class, nor did having a parlour prevent it. This is a useful corrective to histories which have been convinced of social differentiation but have not been unanimous over the positioning of the difference.

The relatively small size of this inventory sample means that it has not been possible to establish the existence or otherwise of distinctive regional domestic cultures. There are in any case theoretical concerns about how such an analysis might be undertaken: what kind of geographical categories would be justifiable and viable?<sup>73</sup> Would we expect domestic cultures to be associated with, for example, administrative regions? Might other categories of location, such as town size, rural/urban setting and relationship to transport networks be more relevant?<sup>74</sup> It would not be a simple matter to classify inventories in this way but the process, as well as the results, would be likely to add significantly to on-going debates about regionalism. However, the inventories did reveal some local differences, which might be starting points in further investigations. There was some use of regional terminology. For example, 'house-places' or 'houses' (furnished as kitchen-living-rooms), which occurred in only 32 of the 337 inventories, clustered markedly in Lancashire, the West Riding, Staffordshire and Derbyshire. 'Winter hedges' (clothes horses) were a feature of a similar area. 'Chamber' was an alternative to 'bedroom' and was most common in Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Suffolk and Norfolk. Dwellings with house-places significantly often had chambers.<sup>75</sup> Although chambers and house-places do not seem to have been functionally different from bedrooms and kitchens, might these terms have had other specific meanings? They were both older words, perhaps reflecting the importance of continuing traditions in the areas in which they appeared. Dressers appear in about half of the inventories from Wales and the North West but in only about 5 per cent of those in London.<sup>76</sup> In addition, there is a possible glimpse of a distinctive parlour culture in the West Midlands and in Wales, but further investigation is called for to substantiate this.

Much work is still needed on geographical differences. However this study does show that a national domestic culture had not been completely achieved at this date. The material circumstances of the Londoners in the sample were, generally speaking, rather different from those of people in the rest of England and Wales. London maintained its long-standing distinctiveness in domestic material culture even though, at this

<sup>73</sup> Stobart (2001), pp. 1305–09.

<sup>74</sup> Weatherill (1988) found significant differences in consumption between rural and urban households in the early modern period.

<sup>75</sup> Chambers occurred in 37.5 per cent of the inventories with a house-place and in only 15.1 per cent of the rest.

<sup>76</sup> However, this applies only to free-standing dressers. Fixed items, which belonged to the landlord, did not show up in a tenant's inventory. And this was a period when most people rented, rather than owned, their place of residence.

period, increased communications of all sorts facilitated the interchange of goods and ideas between different parts of the country, with the potential for nationwide homogenisation. This distinctiveness is visible not only in the possessions of the elite but also in the household belongings of people of lesser wealth and status.

The findings relating to both class and London's difference contribute to a discussion, which has been running for the past ten years, about how historians can use domestic advice literature.<sup>77</sup> Direct advice concerning the house and home was produced in various forms: books and articles relating to architectural planning, domestic economy, etiquette, cookery, household management, furnishing and interior decoration; furnishing advertisements and catalogues; and, from the 1870s onwards the new practice of displaying goods at exhibitions or in shops in 'room sets'.<sup>78</sup> The amount of such literature increased during the course of the century and there was a shift in the balance of the types produced. Books for professionals, such as architects and decorators, dominated in the first decades; in the mid-century there were manuals of domestic management and domestic economy; both of these forms continued but from the late 1860s a new genre appeared that concentrated specifically on the aesthetics of furnishing and decorating.<sup>79</sup> There is, however, a more or less explicit anxiety about the extent to which this kind of material represented what people were actually doing.<sup>80</sup> Much of the concern relates to class: have we taken these published representations, avowedly relating to a broad middle-class domestic culture, as applying to a wider social group than they did in fact?<sup>81</sup>

The present analysis suggests that some types of these books are more closely related to actual practice than others. The books for professionals and the mid-century domestic economy manuals, such as Webster's *Encyclopaedia of Domestic Economy* (1844) and Walsh's *Manual of Domestic Economy* (1856 and 1879), were often specific about the social and economic positioning of drawing-rooms, dining-rooms, sitting-rooms and parlours and their furnishings. While the discriminations of these manuals cannot be precisely aligned with the empirical findings in the current study, there is sufficient similarity to suggest that their recommendations do have a useful relationship to differences in the way that people actually equipped and furnished. The later group of decorating and furnishing texts, however, such as Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste* of the late 1860s and the *Art at Home* series of the 1870s and early '80s, were less concerned with management and budgets. Instead they presented socially and financially undifferentiated visions of the arrangement of the house that was to include, as a matter of course, a drawing-room, a dining-room (sometimes doubling up as a family sitting-room or parlour) and generally a third subsidiary day-room.<sup>82</sup> They offered detailed suggestions about furnishing and decoration as well as very forceful supporting arguments, framed in terms of morality, aesthetics and taste. Some of the books went

<sup>77</sup> Lees-Maffei (2003).

<sup>78</sup> Attar (1987); Aynsley and Berry (2005); Cohen (2006); Edwards (2005); Lees-Maffei (2003); McLaugherty (1983).

<sup>79</sup> Attar (1987), pp. 1–3; Ferry (2007); Neiswander (2008), pp. 11–22.

<sup>80</sup> Lees-Maffei (2003).

<sup>81</sup> Ferry (2007); Neiswander (2008).

<sup>82</sup> See Neiswander (2008), pp. 11–22, for a discussion of this change.



into multiple editions suggesting an extensive readership.<sup>83</sup> They are therefore very rich texts and have been a source for much writing about the Victorian interior. The ownership patterns in the inventories, however, suggest that, at least for the middle part of the century, the lower middle classes and a good proportion of the wealthier middle class did not espouse the drawing-room practices proposed by this kind of advice literature. This conclusion supports the recent work of design historian Emma Ferry, who has investigated the *Art at Home* series and found that, although aimed at a lower-middle-class public, their contents reflect the attitudes and habits of their elite middle-class authors, constrained by the requirements of the publisher.<sup>84</sup> It is not tenable, then, to suggest that the later decorating advice — although interesting and useful in other ways — is a reliable source for actual practice, except perhaps for a narrow segment of the middle class.

Further, these domestic and architectural manuals and furnishing advice books were published in London, written mostly by London-based authors, recommending London goods and referring to London prices. It is a London-based literature which dominates our view of nineteenth-century homes, blinding us to the geographical difference between the metropolis and the rest of the country. This is a long-reaching example of the cultural dominance of London, which urban and social historian Peter Borsay sees as operating in the early nineteenth century.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps it was the case that the later publications, of the 1870s onwards, contributed to a subsequent national spread of those London-based tastes and practices, but the evidence here shows that, for the middle of the century, significant social and geographical differences remained.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Attar (1987); Ferry (2007); McClaugherty (1983).

<sup>84</sup> Ferry (2007).

<sup>85</sup> Borsay (2001).

<sup>86</sup> Keeble (2004), p. 109, posits this shift. Hamlett (2009), p. 582, finds that 70% of her sample of 200 inventories for 1850–1910 included both a drawing- and a dining-room; however, her sample was specifically chosen to represent the middle classes.

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