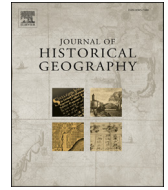




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# Sacred squares? A non-representational study of James Smetham's (1821–1889) everyday artistic experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality

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## ABSTRACT

This paper develops new ways of approaching representations to understand individuals' everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past. Drawing on non-representational theories' emphasis on practice and affect, it focuses on processes of making representations within religious, faithful, and spiritual practices. Contributing to ongoing dialogues between art history and geography, it explores the material spaces such representations were made in and the spiritual spaces they created, arguing that this approach overcomes the difficulties faced by historical geographers trying to explore embodied and out of body experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past. To demonstrate the potential of this approach, this paper focuses on miniature squares made by the Methodist and Pre-Raphaelite associate James Smetham between 1848 and the late 1870s. Approaching them as spaces that Smetham made and inhabited, it explores where and when he made them and how making and inhabiting them affected his body, mind, and spirit. By taking this approach, this paper simultaneously gains specific insights into Smetham's embodied experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality and out of body experiences of the spiritual realm. It also reveals his complicated relationship with the Wesleyan Church, particularly its impact on his mental health.

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## Introduction

Between 1848 and the late 1870s, the artist and devout Methodist James Smetham made thousands of 'squares'. He drew them in his diaries (Fig. 1), around the edges of his Bible (Fig. 2), and in the letters he sent to his friends and family. Inside these squares he made rough sketches of the things he had done that day; recorded his interpretations of complicated concepts; and reflected on Bible passages. This paper will use these squares to explore James Smetham's everyday, embodied, and out of body experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality. By doing so, it will contribute to cross disciplinary research into the everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past.

Inspired by non-representational theory and geographers' recent interconnections with art history, this paper will approach Smetham's squares as spaces he made and inhabited. These squares are representations, but loosely drawn and cryptically labelled, they are extremely difficult to read or visually analyse and therefore lend themselves to non-representative investigation in several ways. This paper will consider why Smetham made them, where he made them, and the affect that making and inhabiting them had on

his senses, emotions, mental health, and spiritual encounters. Demonstrating how this approach provides detailed insights into Smetham's everyday experiences of Wesleyan Methodism, his personal faith, and spiritual encounters, this paper will also establish how non-representational theories could be more broadly applied to understand individuals' everyday, lived experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past. Smetham's squares are unique. However, positioning them within the context of all acts of representation associated with religion, faith, and spirituality, this paper will argue that the way Smetham's squares demand non-representational analysis highlights how explorations of historical processes of producing visual, material, textual, or audio culture in association with religious rituals, personal expressions of faith, and individual spirituality, have significant potential to provide valuable insights into individuals' lived experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past.

## James Smetham and his squares

Born in Whaley Bridge in Derbyshire in 1821, James Smetham spent his early years training as an architect in Lincoln and an artist in London before becoming the art master at Westminster College, a Methodist educational institution for the preparation of Methodist

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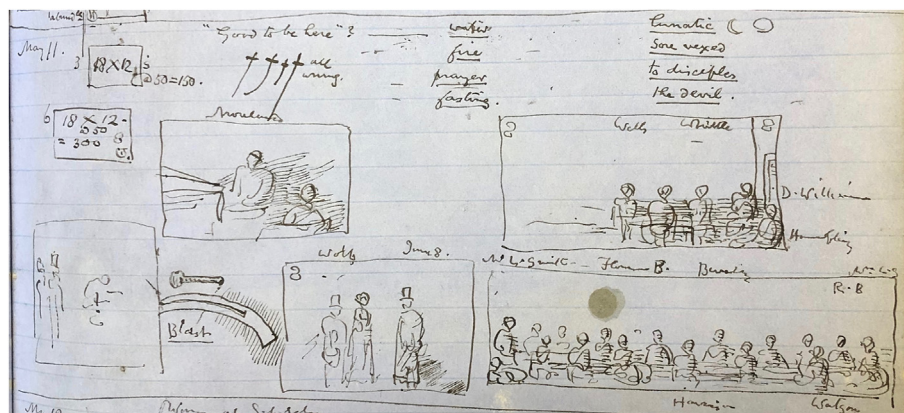


Fig. 1. James Smetham, Daily Journal of James Smetham, c.1874, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, B4, May 11, 1876. Used with permission of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University.

teachers (Fig. 3). Teaching here between 1851 and 1876, Smetham also (largely unsuccessfully) submitted paintings to the Royal Academy and was a prolific creator of smaller paintings and etchings.<sup>1</sup> However, Smetham's artistic career was continually blighted by bouts of mental illness.<sup>2</sup> Various descriptions as 'depression', a 'state of darkness', and a 'lowered tone' by Smetham and his close friends, Smetham's ill health resulted in regular six to twelve month periods where he rarely left the house and was unable to engage in creative practices.<sup>3</sup> Even when able to make art and engage with the world around him, Smetham's fragile mental health drove him away from the noise and busyness of central London and in 1856 he and his family moved from Pimlico to Stoke Newington. Located on the northern outskirts of mid nineteenth-century London, it provided a quiet, calm, and almost rural environment and afforded him a conducive working atmosphere.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, after a prolonged period of mental instability, during which he was confined to care homes and asylums, Smetham passed away in 1889 aged 68.<sup>5</sup>

The son of a Wesleyan Methodist minister, Smetham was a devout Wesleyan throughout his life and a well-respected member of Stoke Newington's Wesleyan community.<sup>6</sup> Founded in the eighteenth century by the Anglican priest John Wesley, Methodism gained its name due to its members' methodical approach to the ordinances of God (worship, evangelism, communion, prayer, biblical study, and fasting).<sup>7</sup> A radical group within the Church of England, the early movement prioritised regular prayer, Bible study, and fasting; encouraged their members to attend regular fellowship gatherings; and emphasised the importance of doing good to all in physical and spiritual need.<sup>8</sup> By the nineteenth century, Methodism was a denomination outside of the Church of England and had fractured into multiple groups that placed differing emphasis on the movement's original theological principles. The Wesleyan Church positioned itself as the official inheritor of John Wesley's tradition, but by the mid nineteenth century had disposed of much of the

original movement's radical practices in preference for the status of an established Church.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Wesleyans continued to take a disciplined approach to the ordinances of God and emphasised the importance of Christian fellowship and service.

Since his death, James Smetham has been the subject of several biographies. Some have been written by – and principally for – Methodists, presenting him as an inspirational man of faith whose art, literature, and essays were motivated by and facilitated worship.<sup>10</sup> Others have studied him as a peripheral member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, recounting his unproductive forays into the nineteenth-century art market.<sup>11</sup> However, in only one instance, a short article by Peter Forsaith, has Smetham's art and life been explicitly approached as an interesting case study with which to reflect on the relationships between creativity and spirituality.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, despite Forsaith's calls for Smetham's work to be conceptually reassessed, this paper is the first occasion on which any element of Smetham's art has been analysed for a purpose beyond the construction of his life history or as a postscript in the history of Pre-Raphaelite art.

This paper will focus on Smetham's squares and the squaring practices he developed. Smetham began to produce squares in 1848 and continued to make them into the late 1870s.<sup>13</sup> Although his squares were not always geometrically square in shape (Fig. 1 and Fig. 4), this paper will refer to them as squares and the process of making them as squaring, to reflect the language consistently used by Smetham to describe his creations and creative practices.<sup>14</sup> In 1867 Smetham described his squaring process as follows:

9am After breakfast and prayer come to studio – sit at desk – open my journal make a square for the day 3 inches by 2 ½,

<sup>9</sup> Cracknell and White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, 93, 98, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Smetham and Davies, *Letters of James Smetham*; W.G. Beardmore, *James Smetham: Painter, Poet, Essayist*, London, 1906; A.H. Robins, *James Smetham*, London, 1936.

<sup>11</sup> R. Ironside and J.A. Gere, *Pre-Raphaelite Painters*, London, 1948, 25–26; D. Stanford, *Pre-Raphaelite Writing an Anthology*, London, 1973, 181; M. Bishop, Some Reflections on the Career of James Smetham, in E. Malins and B. Morchard (Eds) *James Smetham and Francis Danby: Two 19th Century Romantic Painters*, London, 1974, 15–38; S. Casteras, *James Smetham: Artist, Author, Pre-Raphaelite Associate*, Aldershot, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> P. Forsaith, James Smetham: Wesleyan Pre-Raphaelite, *Pre-Raphaelite Studies Review* XXIV.3 (2017).

<sup>13</sup> Ventilator from James Smetham to William Davies, 5 July 1876, JS/1/100, Queen Mary University of London Special Collections.

<sup>14</sup> Ventilator from James Smetham to Frederic James Shields, 25 February 1868, JS/1/70, Queen Mary University of London Special Collections; Ventilator from James Smetham to William Davies, 10 August 1869, JS/1/78, Queen Mary University of London Special Collections.

<sup>1</sup> S. Smetham and W. Davies, *Letters of James Smetham*, London, 1892, 1–50.

<sup>2</sup> S. Smetham, *Additional Letters of James Smetham Vol.1* (ALJS1), 1899, B5, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, 64.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from James Smetham to Mrs Budgett, in: S. Smetham, *Additional Letters of James Smetham, Vol. 2* (ALJS2), 1899, B6, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, 2; Letter from D.G. Rossetti to Mrs S. Smetham, 22 February 1878, NAL 86 NN Box II, National Art Library.

<sup>4</sup> Smetham, ALJS1, 133.

<sup>5</sup> Smetham, ALJS2, 294.

<sup>6</sup> Smetham and Davies, *Letters of James Smetham*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> J. Wesley, *The General Rules of the United Society*, 1743.

<sup>8</sup> K. Cracknell and S.J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, Cambridge, 2005.

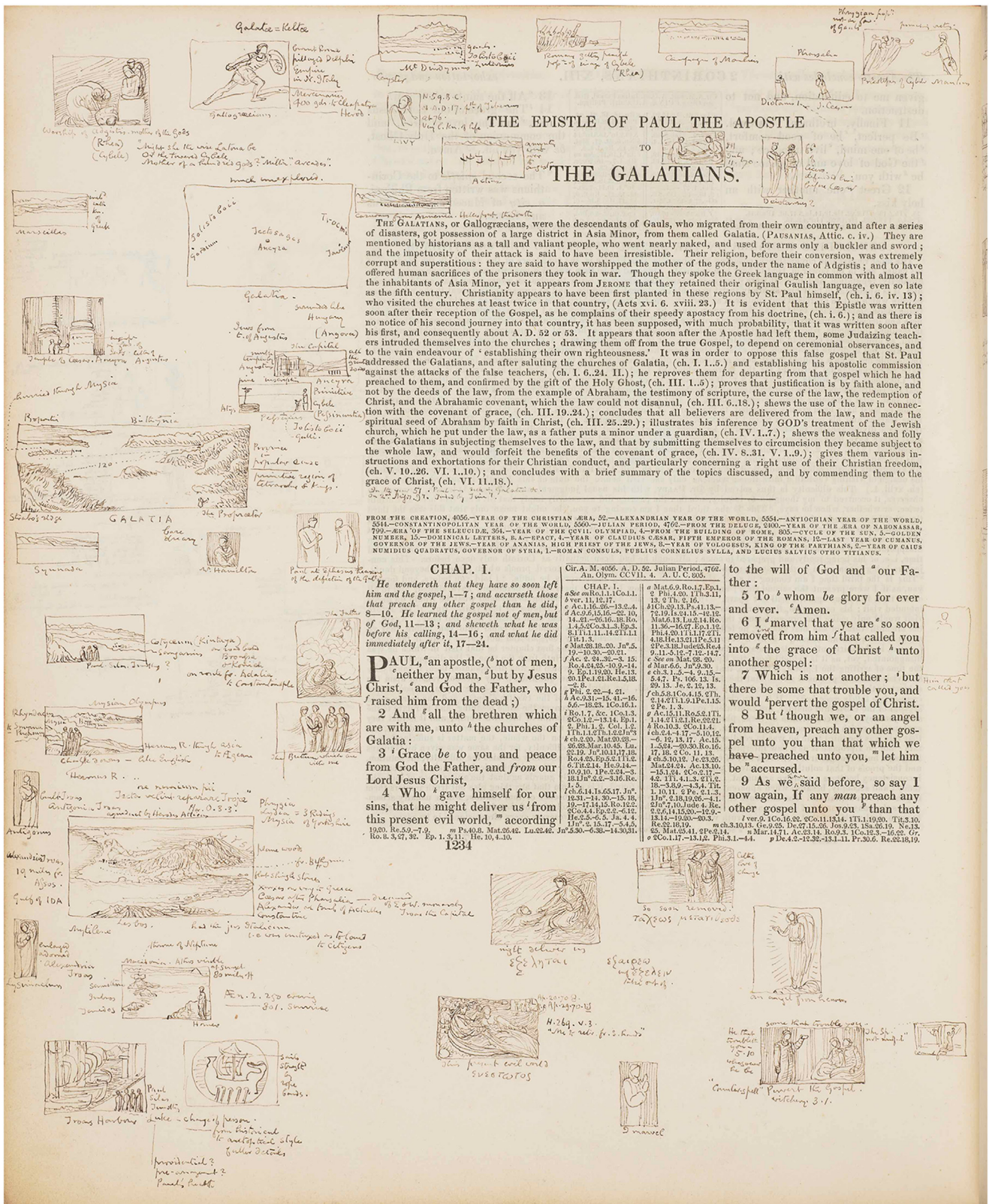


Fig. 2. Squares around the Book of Galatians. From James Smetham's Bible: *The comprehensive Bible*, 1868, John Rylands Library University of Manchester, M000008. Copyright of The University of Manchester.



**Fig. 3.** Self portrait, James Smetham, 1855, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, SM1. Used with permission of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University.

inside it make another square so big [he includes an illustration to demonstrate what 'so' big is] and with scribbled figures of who were at breakfast ... anyone who called – or on whom I called ... This takes a few minutes only.  
9.15 Read a few verses in my interleaved bible [sic] – square and note them.<sup>15</sup>

This demonstrates two important aspects of Smetham's squares and squaring. Firstly, squaring was part of Smetham's everyday daily routine. It was a mundane practice that resulted in the production of multiple, small scale, rough representations. Secondly, Smetham squared for a range of different reasons. He kept journals in which he squared his reflections on, and prayers for, his everyday life.<sup>16</sup> He made squares that recorded his reflections on biblical passages.<sup>17</sup> And he created an Index Rarum, an alphabetically organised journal of squarings of notable individuals (including Roman emperors, Napoleon, and William Morris), places (from the Israelites Temple to the seaside), and concepts (such as frugality, reverence, and fear) (Fig. 4).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Letter from James Smetham to Richard Smetham, 1867, ALJS1, 339.

<sup>16</sup> Daily Journal of James Smetham (Squarings), 1874, B4, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History; The Bible Studies of James Smetham, 1896, Smetham Box 1 B2, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History.

<sup>17</sup> Leatherbound, Gold Edged Volume with Brass Clasp: Bible Squarings, Many Incomplete or Skipped, 1862, B1, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History; James Smetham's Bible: *The Comprehensive Bible*, 1869, M0000008, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.

<sup>18</sup> Index Rarum, MA.1977.069, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.

In addition, it is also important to note that Smetham approached his squares as living spaces that he inhabited and acted within. He variously described them as 'garden-plots'<sup>19</sup> where he could plant and nurture new ideas and as a 'mirage of living fact'<sup>20</sup>, which kept all the vitality of his lived experiences in the material world, but allowed him to process and reorder these experiences to make them more 'efficient' and spiritual in nature.<sup>21</sup> In this way, squaring provided Smetham with a means of transcending the everyday and inhabiting an alternative, often overtly spiritual space, where he could develop thoughts and process experiences uninhibited by the demands and structures of societal expectations or realities.

Therefore, Smetham's squares were acts of representation inherently integrated within his personal practices of everyday religion, faith, and spirituality. Although unique in format, they had much in common with other representative acts associated with religion, faith, and spirituality, including copying or learning passages of holy texts, journaling, writing or playing music, and making material and visual things like rangoli or flower decorations. Engaging with cross disciplinary attempts to use material and visual sources to gain insights into individuals' everyday religious, faithful, and spiritual experiences, the following section will establish why and specifically how this paper will mobilise non-representational theory to approach Smetham's squares as sources of insights into individuals' everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past.

### Representations and everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality

Since Lily Kong made her first call for a revival in the geographies of religion thirty years ago, a broad range of scholarship has developed new ways of exploring the intersections between space, religious practices, and spiritual experiences in contemporary society.<sup>22</sup> Most recently, scholars have emphasised the need to pay careful attention to how people's experiences of faith spaces are informed by the interactions between their spiritual encounters and embodied engagements with various physical environments.<sup>23</sup> This research has expanded the breadth of geographical research from its previous emphasis on institutional religious practices, to engage with personal expressions of faith, and broad engagements with transcendent spirituality. However, while there have been various attempts to explore individuals' experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past, much of the existing historical geography research has continued to focus on individuals' engagement with the official locations of institutional religion and has been unable to find effective ways of understanding the spiritual aspects of historical experiences due to the limited evidence in archival sources.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, one of the most successful ways in

<sup>19</sup> Leatherbound Gold Edged Volume, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ventilator from James Smetham to Rev. Thomas Akroyd, 4 May 1875, JS/1/98, Queen Mary University of London Special Collections.

<sup>21</sup> Ventilator from Smetham to Davies, 10th August 1869.

<sup>22</sup> L. Kong, Geography and Religion: Trends and Prospects, *Progress in Human Geography* 14 (1990) 355–71; L. Kong, Mapping "New" Geographies of Religion: Politics and Poetics in Modernity, *Progress in Human Geography* 25.2 (2001) 211–33; L. Kong, Global Shifts, Theoretical Shifts: Changing Geographies of Religion, *Progress in Human Geography* 34.6 (2010) 755–76.

<sup>23</sup> C. C. Finlayson, Spaces of Faith: Incorporating Emotion and Spirituality in Geographic Studies, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 44.7 (2012) 1763–78.

<sup>24</sup> J. Hill, Tracing Material Geographies of Belief, in: C. Brace, A.R. Bailey, S. Carter, D. Harvey and N. Thomas (Eds) *Emerging Geographies of Belief*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011, 193–215; R. Slatter, Becoming Chapels and Everyday Congregations: How the Repair and Maintenance of London's Wesleyan Chapels Illustrates Their Communities' Everyday Practices and Experiences (1851–1932), *Journal of Design History* 33.1 (2020) 34–49.

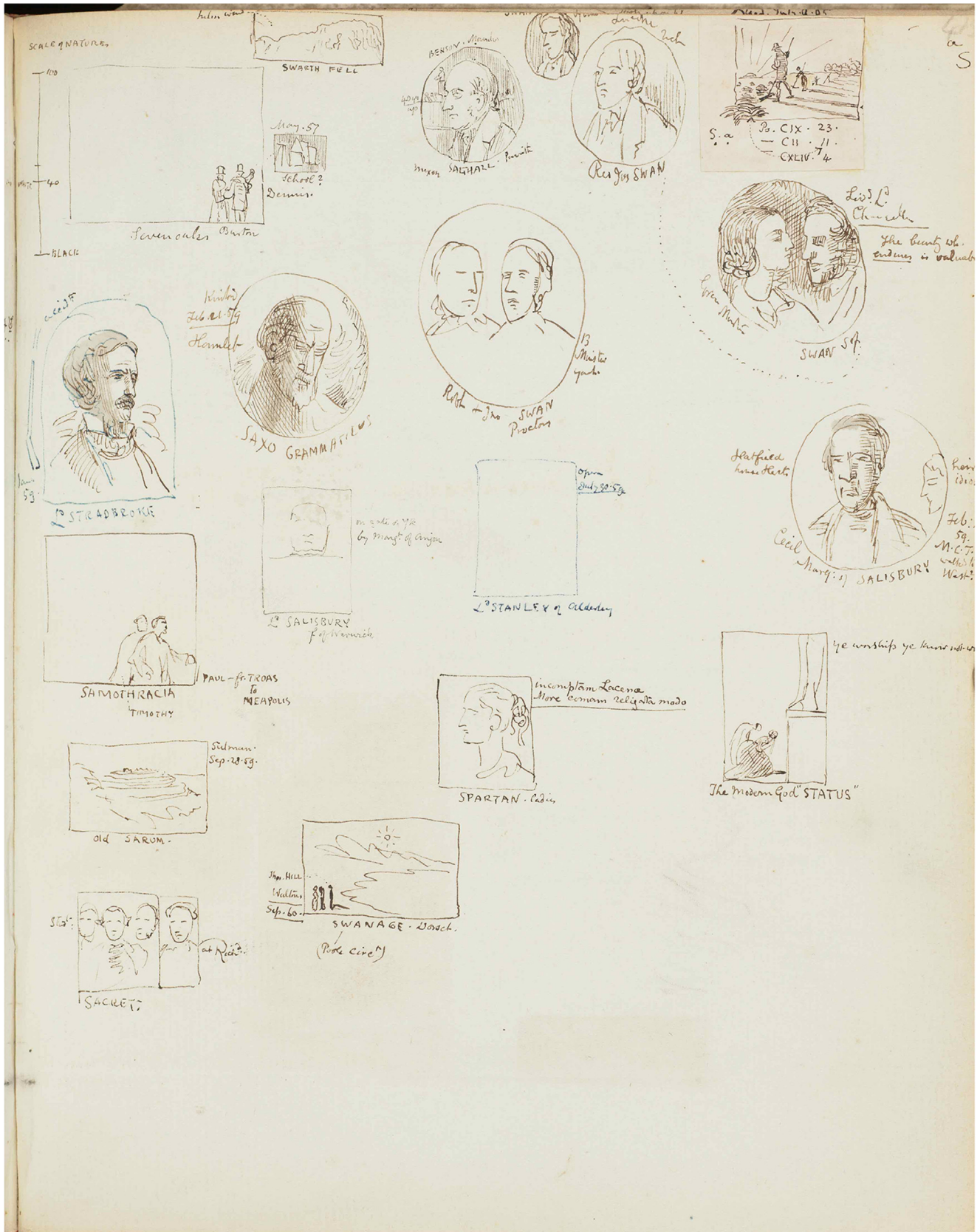


Fig. 4. James Smetham, Index Rarum, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, MA.1977.069. Copyright of The University of Manchester.

which historical geographers, as well as geographers of the here and now, have attempted to address this challenge, has been through engaging with the ideas and approaches of the material religion movement to use material and visual culture to reflect on individuals' embodied experiences of historical religious spaces and practices.<sup>25</sup>

The trends in cross disciplinary engagements with material and visual sources to explore individuals' everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality, bare striking similarities to more specific shifts in cultural geographers' approaches to representations since the 1990s. Firstly, like new cultural geography's approaches to landscapes, cross disciplinary approaches to representations made in and for religious, faithful, and spiritual practices have long read them as signifiers of communities' principles, priorities, beliefs, and practices.<sup>26</sup> Such approaches could be applied to Smetham's squares. His everyday squares could be mined for insights into his activities, the places he visited, and the people he spent time with. His biblical squares could be read as signifiers of his theological and biblical interpretations, and his *Index Rarum* as a source of information about his theological values and how they informed his interpretation of culture and intellectual concepts. However, because his squares are small, loosely drawn, and often cryptically labelled with symbols, acronyms, and initials, attempts to read Smetham's squares in this way are largely unsuccessful, or lack sufficient detail to be useful.

More recently, cultural and historical geographers have focused on the force of representations, approaching them as an interface between author's intentions and viewers' or readers' experiences, which play a creative role in producing, rather than simply reflecting, society.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, cross disciplinary approaches have explored how representations have played a significant role in teaching and reinforcing 'religious values, norms, behaviours, and attitudes'.<sup>28</sup> They have also explored how visual and material culture have informed individuals' experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality. Some have focused on how human interactions with material and visual things have informed the sensory experiences associated with religious practices.<sup>29</sup> While others, have more explicitly focused on how material and visual representations have contributed to individuals' encounters with the divine.<sup>30</sup> Using these approaches, consideration could be given to the impact of

Smetham's squares, how they were interpreted by the people who saw and engaged with them, and how they have influenced the development of subsequent Methodist practices. However, while Smetham's squares were shared with a few of his close friends and immediate Wesleyan networks, they were never widely consumed and continue to be largely unknown.

In comparison, Smetham's letters, ventilators (Smetham's word for small, booklet-like letters that he wrote to a single recipient over several days or weeks), and textual diary entries include regular references to the process of making and inhabiting his squares. Indeed, he often reflected on how these acts of representation and his practise of mentally inhabiting his squares contributed to his lived experiences of Methodism and personal engagements with God. This suggests that to gain insights into these experiences, Smetham's squares would be most effectively approached as a process, practice, or action. However, despite the vast array of representative acts inherently incorporated within religious rituals and spiritual practices, there is surprisingly little research into representative processes or what they can reveal about individuals' everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality. The many explorations of how artists have engaged in creative practices to obtain and communicate specific spiritual ideas, focus on the messages these artists conveyed and rarely discuss the affect that the process of production had on their own spiritual experiences.<sup>31</sup> On the few occasions when scholars have explicitly addressed the relationships between representational acts and spiritual encounter, they have largely focussed on religious leaders, or discussed how making representations has influenced people's social and political status within religious communities.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, a few scholars using a diverse range of disciplinary approaches have demonstrated the significant insights into individuals' experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality that can be gained by studying their engagement in acts of representation.<sup>33</sup> For example, in her analysis of playful representational practices within the Jewish Renewal Movement, Cheva Weissler explicitly argued that 'art itself can be a spiritual practice for the artist – the very process of making the art can be a form of meditation'.<sup>34</sup> Claire Dwyer, Katy Beinart, and Nasnine Ahmed also demonstrated how creative processes can become spiritual acts that influence and capture the affect of religion, faith, and spirituality by developing, participating in, and reflecting on an interfaith art project.<sup>35</sup> While psychological research has shown that memorising and reciting the Qu'ran has spiritual and mental benefits.<sup>36</sup> However, most of this research has used contemporary acts of representation to understand individuals' everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the here and now. Therefore, the rest of paper will focus on how studying historical acts of representation can provide insights into everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past.

<sup>25</sup> B. Meyer, D. Morgan, C. Paine, S.B. Plate, The Origin and Mission of Material Religion, *Religion* 40 (2010) 207–11.

<sup>26</sup> D. Cosgrove and P. Jackson, New Directions in Cultural Geography, *Area* 19.2 (1987) 95–101; R. Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley*, New York and Oxford, 2004; J. Samson, Reading Images of Christ: Masculinity and Homosexuality as Sites of Struggle in Popular Religious Images of Jesus, *Religion and Gender* 2. 2 (2012) 280–304.

<sup>27</sup> B. Anderson, Cultural Geography II: The Force of Representations, *Progress in Human Geography* 43.6 (2019) 1120–32; U. Kothari, Seafarers, the mission and the archive: Affective, embodied and sensory traces of sea-mobilities in Melbourne, Australia, *Journal of Historical Geography* 72 (2021) 73–84.

<sup>28</sup> C. McDannel, *Material Christianity*, New Heaven, 1995, 2.

<sup>29</sup> P. Saenger, Book of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages, in: A. Boureau (Ed), *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, New Jersey, 1989, 139–74; F. Barry, Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity, Byzantium and Christendom, *Art Bulletin* 89.4 (2007) 627–57; R. Slatter, Materiality and the extended geographies of religion: the institutional design and everyday experiences of London's Wesleyan Methodist circuits 1851–1932, *Journal of Historical Geography* 64 (2019) 60–71.

<sup>30</sup> C.M. Mangion, "to Console, to Nurse, to Prepare for Eternity": The Catholic Sickroom in Late Nineteenth-Century England, *Women's History Review* 21.4 (2012) 657–72; W. Whyte, *Unlocking the Church: The Lost Secrets of Victorian Sacred Space*, Oxford, 2017; V. Della Dora, Circulating Sacred Place: Fin-de Siècle Russian Cards of Mount Athos as Travelling Object-Icons in: C. Brace, A.R. Bailey, S. Carter, D. Harvey and N. Thomas (Eds), *Emerging Geographies of Belief*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011, 168–92; J. Garnett and G. Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from The Renaissance to the Present*, London, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> G. Panichas, *Dostoevsky's Spiritual Art: The Burden of Vision*, New York, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> M.A. Tsang, Write into being: the production of the self and circulation of ritual knowledge in Afro-Cuban religious libretas, *Material Religion*, 17.2 (2021) 228–261; S. O'Brien, Making Catholic Spaces: Women, Decor, and Devotion in the English Catholic Church, 1840–1900, *The Church and the Arts; Studies in Church History*, 28 (1992) 449–64.

<sup>33</sup> D. Gilbert, C. Dwyer, N. Ahmed, L. Cuch Graces and N. Hyacinth, The Hidden Geographies of Religious Creativity: Place-Making and Material Culture in West London Faith Communities, *Cultural Geographies*, 25 (2018) 23–9.

<sup>34</sup> C. Weissler, "art is spirituality!": practice, play, and experiential learning in the Jewish Renewal Movement, *Material Religion*, 3.3 (2007) 354–379.

<sup>35</sup> C. Dwyer, K. Beinart, and N. Ahmed, My Life Is but a Weaving: Embroidering Geographies of Faith and Place, *Cultural Geographies* 26.1 (2019) 133–140.

<sup>36</sup> B.A. Taghiabad, S. Ahrari, Z. Garai, Mental Health and Stress-coping Strategies among Memorizers of Holy Quran, *Health, Spirituality and Medical Ethics*, 2.2 (2015) 15–21.

Specifically, it will apply non-representational theories to James Smetham's squares. Developed in response to new cultural geography's emphasis on reading representations as static signifiers of fixed social and cultural systems, non-representational theories focus on the apparently mundane aspects of everyday life and how they make important differences to peoples' experiences of space and place.<sup>37</sup> Applications of non-representational theory have focused on human actions, or practices, within space (such as walking, playing music, and dancing); how these actions draw individuals into relationships with humans and non-humans within the same space; and how this results in affective embodied emotional, sensory, and potentially even spiritual experiences.<sup>38</sup> Geographical approaches to religion in the here and now have applied non-representational theories to explore individuals' embodied religious practices and the affect of religion, faith, and spirituality on their experiences of and engagements with space. Julian Holloway and Andrew Williams approached spiritual spaces as shifting assemblages that result in different affective atmospheres.<sup>39</sup> While Stephanie Denning used affect theory to understand the relational role of faith in contributing to individuals' persistent engagement in faith-based voluntary action.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, focusing on the practices of nineteenth-century Methodists, Adrian Bailey, David Harvey, and Catherine Brace made a rare historical reflection on embodied religious practices, specifically considering how Methodists informed young people's engagement with alcohol.<sup>41</sup> These approaches have demonstrated how non-representational theory can provide a framework for exploring how material worlds and transcendent realms interrelate; how they inform the atmospheres in which individuals' engage with religion, faith, and spirituality; and how this influences their embodied and spiritual experiences. However, none of these studies have considered how engaging in acts of representation can contribute to individuals' experiences of faith spaces. However, Timur Hammond has recently focused on Ahmet Süheyl Ünver's practice of making notebooks throughout the twentieth century to understand how his Islamic faith informed his sense of self and the way he engaged with Istanbul's urban environments.<sup>42</sup> Building on Hammond's arguments, this paper will provide detailed demonstrations of the practicalities of exploring acts of representation to gain insights into the affect of religion in the past. Demonstrating that such approaches can be applied well beyond the context of the 'discursive tradition' of Islam explored in Hammond's article, it will also highlight how these approaches can provide insights into individuals' emotional, physical, and spiritual experiences of religion besides Hammond's emphasis on the intellectual affects of faith.<sup>43</sup>

In order to do this, this paper will draw on historical geographers' more general explorations of how non-representational theories can facilitate alternative approaches to, and insights from, archival material. Historical geographers were initially uncertain of the usefulness of non-representational theory, aware that their subdiscipline is consistently dependent on representational evidence. However, as Carl Griffin and Adrian Evans succinctly argued:

Non-representational theory does not equate to a critique of representations in themselves, but rather a critique of the types of Cartesian-Platonic approaches that would have us believe that representations are static mirrors of reality rather than active assemblages which are informed by, and in turn intervene with, everyday embodied practices.<sup>44</sup>

As a result, historical geographers have used non-representational theory to ask new questions of representative sources. What do representations tell us about individuals' actions and their human and more-than-human relationships? How did visual, material, and textual representations participate in more-than-human relationships? What do representations reveal about the ephemeral material, meteorological, and relational atmospheres surrounding specific events? And how do historical representations encapsulate and reveal embodied practices? Specifically, these questions have provided new insights into historical atmospheres and more-than-verbal communications and how both contributed to individuals' embodied practices in the past.<sup>45</sup> However, following the lead of the cultural geographers who developed and initially applied non-representational theories, these historical applications have focused on understanding individuals' embodied experiences of 'being-in-the-world'.<sup>46</sup> They have therefore prioritised individuals' sensory or emotional experiences and paid little attention to their spiritual encounters. While geographical approaches to the here and now have demonstrated that understanding embodied experiences are a necessary aspect of everyday geographies of religion, faith, and spirituality, focusing on being-in-the-world overlooks how transcendent aspects of spiritual encounter also contribute to atmospheres via, what we might refer to as individuals' 'out-of-body' experiences. Therefore, this paper will draw together, and expand on, how geographers of religion, faith, and spirituality and historical geographers have used non-representational theory to approach representative acts as sources of insights into individuals' embodied and out of body everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past.

Rather than approaching Smetham's squares as finished cultural products, which illustrate Smetham's engagements with religion, faith, and spirituality, or have influenced others' religious practices or spiritual encounters, this paper will approach them as imagined spaces that Smetham made and inhabited. Cultural and historical geographers have used non-representational theories to study the practices, human and non-human relationships, and affectual consequences of making and inhabiting landscapes, gardens, homes, and public spaces. In the same way, this paper will explore Smetham's act of squaring. It will ask when did Smetham make his squares, why did he make them, why did he persist in making them,

<sup>37</sup> H. Lorimer, Cultural Geography: The Busyness of Being "More-than-Representational", *Progress in Human Geography* 29.1 (2005) 83–94, 84.

<sup>38</sup> G. Revill, Performing French Folk Music: Dance, Authenticity and Nonrepresentational Theory, *Cultural Geographies* 11 (2004) 199–209; J. Wylie, A Single Day's Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30.2 (2005) 234–247.

<sup>39</sup> J. Holloway, Enchanted Space: The Séance, Affect and Geographies of Religion, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96.1 (2006) 182–87; A. Williams, Spiritual Landscapes of Pentecostal Worship, Belief, and Embodiment in a Therapeutic Community: New Critical Perspectives, *Emotion, Space and Society* 19 (2016) 45–55.

<sup>40</sup> S. Denning, Persistence in Volunteering: An Affect Theory Approach to Faith-Based Volunteering, *Social and Cultural Geography* 22.6 (2021) 807–827.

<sup>41</sup> A.R. Bailey, D.C. Harvey, and C. Brace, Disciplining Youthful Methodist Bodies in Nineteenth-Century Cornwall, *Annals of The Association of American Geographers* 97.1 (2007) 142–57.

<sup>42</sup> T. Hammond, Conjunctions of Islam: rethinking the geographies of art and piety through the notebooks of Ahmet Süheyl Ünver, *Cultural Geographies*, online first (2022) 1–18

<sup>43</sup> Hammond, Conjunctions of Islam, 4.

<sup>44</sup> C. Griffin and A.B. Evans, On Historical Geographies of Embodied Practice and Performance, *Historical Geography* 36.1 (2008) 5–16, 11.

<sup>45</sup> S. Legg, "Political Atmospheric": The India Round Table Conference's Atmospheric Environments, Bodies and Representations, London 1930–1932, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 110.3 (2020) 774–792; H. Awcock, Handbills, Rumours, and Blue Cockades: Communication during the 1780 Gordon Riots, *Journal of Historical Geography* 74 (2021) 1–9.

<sup>46</sup> Griffin and Evans, On Historical Geographies of Embodied Practice and Performance, 11.

and what did he do in the squares he created? It will also consider the human and non-human relationships involved in the act of squaring. Where did he make them, what were the material and atmospheric contexts in which he made them, was he disturbed or helped by others as he made them? Finally, it will explore the affectual consequences of making and inhabiting his squares. How did the locations and atmospheres in which he squared contribute to his experience of squaring and what impact did squaring have on his engagement with his human networks and his encounters with the divine? To answer these questions, Smetham's squares will not be the only representations explored in this paper. Written and visual representations of the places where Smetham made these squares will be used to understand how the material and atmospheric contexts in which Smetham was squaring contributed to his experiences of making and inhabiting his squares.

The following three sections will practically apply these methods to answer this paper's principal research question: what were Smetham's everyday embodied, mental, and spiritual experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality? Specifically, they will explore the intersections between Smetham's act of squaring and his experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality within the context of the ordinances of God, fellowship, and Christian service.

### Practising the ordinances of god

Drawing on non-representational theory's emphasis on the affective experiences of practice, this section will demonstrate how Smetham understood squaring to be a practical apparatus for practising the ordinances of God and therefore analyse Smetham's act of squaring to gain insights into his embodied and out of body experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality. Nineteenth-century Wesleyans defined the ordinances of God as: public worship, evangelism, communion, family and private prayer, biblical study, and fasting or abstinence.<sup>47</sup> Informed by John Wesley's methodical approach to spiritual practice, all members of Wesleyan communities were encouraged to regularly and systematically practise the ordinances of God. However, Smetham used the act of squaring to personalise these practices. Therefore, considering Smetham's squaring processes provides insights into his embodied and out of body experiences of collective religious rituals and individualised spiritual practices.

Smetham regularly squared to explicitly participate in the ordinances of God. Firstly, he squared as an act of prayer.<sup>48</sup> Fig. 5 shows how he filled his squares with illustrations of people or situations he was praying for and accompanied them with a figure of eight, his symbol for prayer, to mark the active intersessions he made for them.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, Smetham squared to systematically search and study the Bible. Sometimes he squared biblical passages to understand their narrative or argument. On many occasions this involved splitting the text into a sequence of small squares. For instance, he broke Hebrews 10 into thirty-nine squares (one for each of its verses) to fully understand the argument that the early Church leader Paul made about how Jesus's death on the cross led to universal salvation through faith alone.<sup>50</sup> On other occasions, he used his squares to summarise sections of the Bible. For example, he drew one image for each Psalm to capture their essence and meaning.<sup>51</sup> Smetham also squared to position biblical events within

their historical and geographical context. One of the squares Smetham drew around Galatians in his Bible (Fig. 2), demonstrates how he reflected on the landscapes and broader geographical context of the early Christian communities in Galati who received Paul's letter.<sup>52</sup>

Smetham also found that even when he was not primarily motivated to square to participate in the ordinances of God, the act of squaring transformed his ideas and experiences into moments of praise. He often engaged in the act of squaring to develop artistic ideas, reflect on interactions with others, try and capture the essence of human expression and practice, and reflect on his day.<sup>53</sup> Sometimes he explicitly marked these sorts of squares with the sign of a harp to record how he associated the ideas he was developing or experiences the squares recorded with praise and joy (see Fig. 5).<sup>54</sup> However, more often, it was the process of squaring that turned his ideas and experiences into moments of praise. Smetham described how squaring allowed him to express his ideas and experiences in a 'much more efficient form' [sic].<sup>55</sup> By 'turning good things into acts of praise and taking joy in it,' squaring transformed the mundane into something divinely 'musical'.<sup>56</sup> For example, Smetham often discussed the physical discomfort he associated with the noise, smells, and busyness of visiting central London. However, by squaring these journeys he regulated his memories, reduced London's assault on his senses, and began to place greater emphasis on how thankful he was for the people he had seen, or activities he had engaged in while visiting central London.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, regardless of Smetham's initial intentions, the process of squaring was always an ordinance of God that transformed his mundane, everyday activities and experiences into divine expressions of praise.

Because squaring allowed Smetham to intentionally and incidentally practice the ordinance of God, consideration of when and where he squared can provide insights into his embodied experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality. Smetham persistently and regularly squared as part of his daily routine. After his morning walk, he squared in his studio before working on his etchings and paintings. In the evening, he squared in front of the fire if he was not at a church meeting or an artists' gathering.<sup>58</sup> He was so devoted to this regular practice that between 1851 and 1871 he squared all 31,102 verses in the sixty-six books of the Bible during these regular daily slots, which he said 'cost ... [him] 20 years of leisure'.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the act of squaring, and thus the ordinances he practiced through it, were a regular constant in Smetham's life. Undertaken at specific moments in his day, they provided him with a structured and rhythmic routine that informed if and how he engaged with other activities and responsibilities.

As well as squaring at a regular time, Smetham also tended to square in a regular place. When at home in Stoke Newington much of his squaring was done in his studio.<sup>60</sup> He referred to this as his 'sanctum' as it was 'the quietest place' in the house and full of 'pure

<sup>52</sup> James Smetham's Bible.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from James Smetham to Frederic James Shields, 13 July 1868, JS/1/71, Queen Mary University Special Collections; Ventilator from Smetham to Akroyd, 4 May 1875; Letter from James Smetham to J.S.B., 29th January 1877, ALJS2, 250; Ventilator from Smetham to Davies, 10th August 1869.

<sup>54</sup> Ventilator from Smetham to Davies, 10 August 1869.

<sup>55</sup> Daily Journal of James Smetham (Squarings), September 1875; Ventilator from Smetham to Davies, 10 August 1869.

<sup>56</sup> Ventilator from Smetham to Davies, 10 August 1869; Daily Journal of James Smetham (Squarings), September 1875.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from James Smetham to C.M., 17 September 1872, ALJS2, 87.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Smetham to Smetham 1867, ADLJ1, 339; Letter from Smetham to C.M., 17 September 1872, ALJS2, 87.

<sup>59</sup> Ventilator from Smetham to Shields 28 April 1871.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Smetham to Smetham 1867, ALJS1, 339.

<sup>47</sup> E. Grindrod, *A Compendium of the Laws and Regulations of Wesleyan Methodism*, London, 1842, 173.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from James Smetham to William Davies, 18 April 1857, JS/1/27, Queen Mary University of London Special Collections.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from James Smetham to C.M., 3 September 1874, ALJS2, 187; Daily Journal of James Smetham (Squarings), September 1875.

<sup>50</sup> Leatherbound Gold Edged Volume, 248.

<sup>51</sup> Leatherbound Gold Edged Volume, 93.



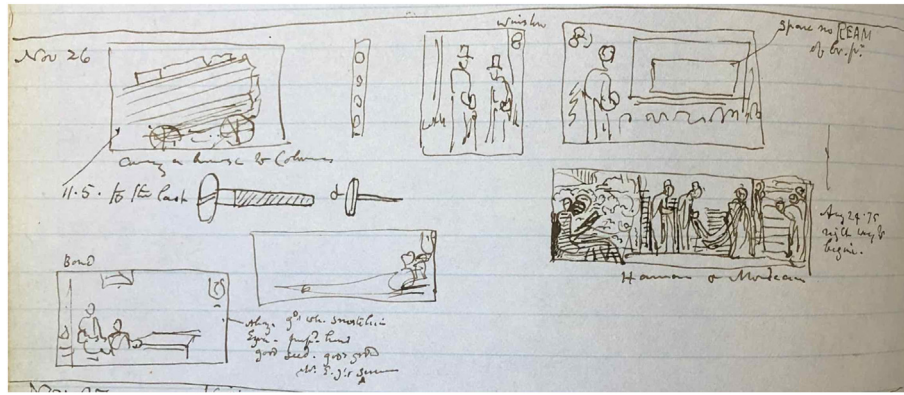


Fig. 5. James Smetham, Daily Journal of James Smetham, c.1874, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, B4, November 26, 1874. Used with permission of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University.

thoughts and pleased memories'.<sup>61</sup> This would have resulted in quiet and peaceful experiences of squaring and engaging in the ordinances of God. However, Smetham's studio was not the only place he squared in. Some of the other locations he squared in had a similarly peaceful and homely atmosphere. For instance, he described squaring in front of the fire in his Stoke Newington House, illuminated by the light of a lamp, and surrounded by family members who were sewing and playing the piano.<sup>62</sup> But other locations, including his work, chapel, and the South Kensington Museum's picture galleries, were less secluded and comfortable.<sup>63</sup> A contemporary etching of the South Kensington Museum's picture galleries includes hot water pipes running along the bottom of the walls and several members of the public sat on wooden chairs (Fig. 6). This suggests squaring in these galleries would have been relatively temperate and physically comfortable, even if much less secluded than his private studio. In comparison, photographs of the music and art room in Westminster College (Fig. 7) and Stoke Newington Methodist Chapel (Fig. 8) depict, large, draughty spaces, that would have echoed with the voices of many students or

congregation members. Furthermore, because Smetham always sat in the back pew when he attended chapel, his embodied experience of squaring in this location would also have been informed by his hard wooden seat, the draught from the chapel door blowing down his neck, and his limited view of the rest of the chapel.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, Smetham had a huge variety of embodied experiences of squaring and engaging in the ordinances of God. While his preference was for quiet and secluded, physically comfortable spaces, associated with pleasant memories or thoughts, this was not always the case, and the process of squaring could also be accompanied by ambient noise and physical discomfort.

Smetham's experiences of squaring and participating in the ordinances of God also resulted in out of body encounters of the divine.<sup>65</sup> Comparing his act of squaring to the medieval practice of illuminating manuscripts, Smetham believed that producing miniaturised forms resulted in divine encounter that could 'deliver the



Fig. 6. John Watkins, 'Picture galleries'. Etching of an interior of the South Kensington Museum, 1876–1881, © Victoria and Albert Museum, E.816-1945.



Fig. 7. Westminster college art and music room, Westminster College Souvenir Booklet, 1905, Oxford centre for Methodism and church history, Westminster college archives. Used with permission of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from James Smetham to William Davies, 28 March 1856, JS/1/20, Queen Mary University London Special Collections; Ventilator from James Smetham to Rev. Thomas Akroyd, 29 October 1867, JS/1/66, Queen Mary University Special Collections.; James Smetham Journal Entry, 10 July 1861, ALJS2, 196.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Smetham to C.M., 17 September 1872.

<sup>63</sup> Ventilator from Smetham to Shields, 25 February 1868; James Smetham Journal Entry, 27 October 1866, ALJS1; Ventilator from James Smetham to Frederick Shields, 23 August 1875, JS/1/99, Queen Mary University London Special Collections.

<sup>64</sup> Smetham Journal Entry, 27 October 1866, ALJS1; Slatter, *Becoming Chapels and Everyday Congregations*.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from James Smetham to Mrs Hall, 1864, ALJS1, 292.



Fig. 8. Interior of Stoke Newington Methodist Chapel, built 1851. © Stoke Newington High Street Church – image reproduced with permission.

spirit from the demonic curse of intellectual pride'.<sup>66</sup> He personally experienced this as 'magical' sensations, feeling inexplicably 'joyful', a sense of 'diapason', and being 'inclined to burst out in mere enjoyment'.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, he believed his life was considerably more enjoyable when engaging in the act of squaring, because it calmed his body, mind, and spirit.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, while Smetham squared in the material world and had embodied experiences informed by these physical locations, the act of squaring also took him into a spiritual realm. Here, his spiritual encounters had a significant impact on his mental, emotional, and spiritual state.

Understanding Smetham's embodied and out of body experiences of the act of squaring provides insights into how he experienced religious ritual and personal faith. The ordinances of God were institutionally stipulated acts of religious ritual. However, Smetham also turned them into personal expressions of faith by developing a unique representational tool to participate in them and by persistently integrating them into his personal, daily routine. Therefore,

<sup>66</sup> Letter from James Smetham to William Davies, 30 March 1861, in Smetham and Davies, *Letters of James Smetham*, 109–110; Ventilator from Smetham to Davies, 10 August 1869.

<sup>67</sup> Ventilator from James Smetham to Rev. Thomas Akroyd June 1863, JS/1/50, Queen Mary University Special Collections; Ventilator from Smetham to Davies, 10th August 1869.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from James Smetham to William Davies, 28 August 1853, in Smetham and Davies, *Letters of James Smetham*, 54.

religion and faith were all-pervasive aspects of Smetham's life. While he preferred quiet and materially comfortable embodied experiences of religion and faith, he also engaged in these practices in noisy public spaces, on uncomfortable seats, and in suboptimal temperatures. In contrast, religion and faith provided him with more consistent out of body experiences of the spiritual realm, which resulted in joy and peace that soothed his mind and spirit.

### Atmospheres of fellowship

Inspired by historical geographers' use of non-representational theories to explore the atmospheres of urban spaces and political meetings, this section will focus on Smetham's practice of squaring class meetings to reflect on the atmosphere of Wesleyan fellowship and how it affected Smetham.<sup>69</sup> Nineteenth-century Wesleyans promoted the importance of gathering with others to share and encourage each other in faith.<sup>70</sup> Smetham was part of various Wesleyan fellowship networks. Locally, he was a member of the Stoke Newington Methodist Church.<sup>71</sup> Regionally, he was one of nearly twenty teachers at Westminster College.<sup>72</sup> Nationally, he had a network of supportive Wesleyan correspondents.<sup>73</sup> However, Smetham chose to spend much of his everyday life on his own, walking, painting, and engaging in prayer, praise, and biblical study. He described his life and the environment he lived in in Stoke Newington as 'secluded', 'solitary', and 'isolated', took great pleasure in reflecting on his solitary morning walks, and revelled in how quiet his home studio was.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, Smetham was a member of Wesleyan classes throughout his adult life and led classes in Stoke Newington from 1861 to the late 1870s.<sup>75</sup>

Nineteenth-century Wesleyan class meetings were small, weekly gatherings, led by lay members of the local Wesleyan community. All members of Wesleyan communities were required to attend class meetings, which were structured around mutual encouragement. In these meetings, members shared stories of spiritual encounter and were encouraged to reflect on their behaviour, identify where it was not in line with their desire for salvation, and receive spiritual conviction and human support to make suitable improvements.<sup>76</sup> Smetham explicitly reflected on his experiences of these gatherings, referring to an 'incommunicable' atmosphere that cast 'a spell' over his body, mind, emotions, and spirit.<sup>77</sup> He explained that after a bad night's sleep he was physically revived by spending time with his class, that he

<sup>69</sup> S. Sumartojo, 'Dazzling relief': floodlighting and national affective atmospheres on VE Day 1945, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 45 (2014) 59–69; Legg, *Political Atmospherics*.

<sup>70</sup> Minutes of the Liverpool Conference 1820, in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, London, 1988, 364–372.

<sup>71</sup> ALJS2, 137.

<sup>72</sup> Westminster College Photograph Album, 1857–1883, 3, Westminster College Archives, Ph/a/1, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History.

<sup>73</sup> ALJS1; ALJS2.

<sup>74</sup> James Smetham's Studio Notes, 1871–1873, 26 December 1871, 28 December 1871, 3 December 1872 and 18 February 1873, Smetham Box 1, B3, Oxford Brookes University Centre for Methodism and Church History; Letter from James Smetham to William Davies June 1856, JS/1/21, Queen Mary University Special Collections; James Smetham Journal Entry 8 April 1870, ALJS1, 509; ALJS1, 137; Smetham Journal Entry, ALJS1, 10 July 1861.

<sup>75</sup> ALJS1, 92; Letter from James Smetham to Mrs Hall 1861, ALJS1, 191; James Smetham Journal Entry 1870, ALJS1, 415; James Smetham Journal Entry 26 August 1877, ALJS2, 282.

<sup>76</sup> Church Membership and the Class Meeting, from the Report of a Special Conference Committee Recorded in the Minutes of the Wesleyan Conference, 1889, Appendix XI, in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 4, London, 1988, 571–75; Grindrod, *A Compendium of the Laws and Regulations of Wesleyan Methodism*, 170–92.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from James Smetham to Thomas Akroyd, 26 May 1875, in ALJS2, 213–214.

found 'great joy' when leading classes, that class meetings provided a 'balm' to his mind when he was in mental distress, and that after a class meeting his spirit had a specific 'odour and glow'.<sup>78</sup> These reflections provide evocative insights into his weekly engagements with members of his Wesleyan community and how they affected his body, mind, emotions, and spirit. However, to what extent did these regular gatherings affect his solitary everyday experiences beyond the specific time and place of class meetings?

The original aim of Wesleyan class meetings was to support members in their spiritual growth and prevent them from becoming 'disorderly walkers'.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, it was initially expected that the fellowship experienced during class meetings would influence members' behaviour in the hours, days, weeks, months, and years after these meetings finished. However, as broader debate raged about the ongoing relevance of class meetings in the second half of the nineteenth century, many contemporary Wesleyans criticised class meetings for their limited and fleeting impact on individuals' behaviour and spiritual condition.<sup>80</sup> In contrast, Smetham believed the specific 'odour and glow' his spirit obtained during class meetings lingered beyond these gatherings.<sup>81</sup> He also argued that although others may be critical of how 'Mrs ABC has sweet experience in class, and then comes home and half bites her husband's nose off', he believed that if she had not attended the class she 'would [have] BIT IT ALL OFF [sic]'.<sup>82</sup> As a result, Smetham actively employed squaring to preserve the atmosphere of the class meetings he led and attended and the affect they had on his body, emotions, and spirit.

Firstly, by squaring these events he relived their assemblage of people, conversations, and spiritual encounters. As seen in Fig. 9, Smetham squared class meetings by making rough sketches of human bodies, noting who had attended, and sometimes marking them with the sign of a harp (his symbol for praise) or a figure of eight (his symbol for prayer). This gave him a second opportunity to experience everything that had happened in these meetings, who was there, how they had related to each other, if there were things to celebrate through praise, and things that required significant prayer.<sup>83</sup> Secondly, once he made these class meeting squares, Smetham used them as a space to mentally inhabit in order to process and respond to what had happened during these meetings. Smetham took his role as class leader very seriously. He isolated himself to spiritually prepare for them, developed systems to methodically pray for his members, and considered it his duty to reflect on what members had said during meetings to inform how he prayed for them.<sup>84</sup> To facilitate this, he returned to squares by adding further images, notes, and symbols, helping him inhabit these spaces and constantly ensure he was effectively responding to the spiritual needs of his class.<sup>85</sup> Finally, Smetham preserved the atmosphere of these meetings by squaring them with rhythmic regularity. Class meeting squares appear every five to seven days in Smetham's everyday journals.<sup>86</sup> Not only does this indicate that he

fastidiously engaged in the act of squaring after attending a class meeting, but it also means that class meeting squares were the most regularly repeated act of squaring a specific event that he engaged in. As a result, the act of squaring these events, reliving them, and processing what happened during them formed a foundational background to his life that fundamentally informed his weekly experiences.

Therefore, the act of squaring allowed Smetham to experience the atmosphere he associated with Wesleyan fellowship when alone. The physical restoration, emotional joy, and mental serenity he experienced during class meetings were more than an assemblage of fleeting emotions. Instead, his participation in the institutionally stipulated religious activity of fellowship, had a significant, ongoing impact on his physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

### The affect of christian service

Grounded in non-representational approaches to affect, this section will assess the turbulent impact of Christian service on Smetham's mind and mental health. In the early years of the Methodist movement, John Wesley established that:

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Neither is love content with barley [sic] working no evil to our neighbour. It continually incites us to do good ... in every possible kind, and in every possible degree to all men.<sup>87</sup>

Subsequent generations of Wesleyans continued to stipulate that faith in God led to acts of service. First published in 1842, Edmund Grindrod's *Compendium of the Laws and Regulations of Wesleyan Methodism* stated that to 'continue to evidence their desire for salvation', all Wesleyans should be:

... doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity; doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible to all men ...<sup>88</sup>

For most, this resulted in supporting people's physical needs by giving money or practically engaging in social action, or supporting their spiritual needs by becoming a lay preacher, Sunday School teacher, or engaging in everyday evangelism.<sup>89</sup> However, Smetham was determined to use his artistic abilities to serve others and therefore mobilised his act of squaring to engage in Christian service.<sup>90</sup>

In 1853, Smetham expressed the great joy he found in teaching art to students at Westminster College and by the 1860s he was convinced that his process of squaring the Bible simultaneously provided him with unique insights into the scriptures and an effective tool for sharing this discernment with others.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, by the 1870s, Smetham was using his squares as teaching aids in his class meetings, squaring four of the new testament gospels to a sufficient standard to 'go steadily through with them, six or ten verses at a time, once a week with my class'.<sup>92</sup> However, Smetham was also consistently uncertain about the extent to which his

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Smetham to Akryod, 26 May 1875; Ventilator from James Smetham to Mrs Steward, 12 December 1870, JS/1/86, Queen Mary University Special Collections; James Smetham Journal Entry, 26 August 1877, ALJS2, 282.

<sup>79</sup> J. Wesley, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists in a Letter to the Rev Mr Perronet (Written 1748)*, Ninth Edition, London, 1795, 9.

<sup>80</sup> C.E. White, The Decline of the Class Meeting, *Methodist History* 38.4 (2000) 258–67.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Smetham to Akryod, 26 May 1875.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from James Smetham to Mrs M.C. Taylor, 13 December 1874, ALJS2, 187.

<sup>83</sup> Daily Journal of James Smetham (Squarings), February 1874–January 1875.

<sup>84</sup> James Smetham's Studio Notes, 1871–1873, 3 December 1872; Daily Journal of James Smetham (Squarings), December 1874.

<sup>85</sup> Leatherbound Gold Edged Volume, 160.

<sup>86</sup> Daily Journal of James Smetham (Squarings), February 1874–January 1875.

<sup>87</sup> J. Wesley, Sermon 36: The Law Established through Faith, in: *Sermons on Several Occasions (A New Edition) by the Rev. John Wesley*, Leeds, 1799, 486.

<sup>88</sup> Grindrod, *A Compendium of the Laws and Regulations of Wesleyan Methodism*, 172.

<sup>89</sup> Grindrod, *A Compendium of the Laws and Regulations of Wesleyan Methodism*, 173.

<sup>90</sup> ALJS1, 241.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from James Smetham to William Davies, 6 December 1853, in Smetham and Davies, *Letters of James Smetham*, 55; Letter from Smetham to Shields, 13 July 1868, JS/1/71.

<sup>92</sup> Ventilator from James Smetham to Rev. Thomas Akryod, JS/1/102, Queen Mary University of London Special Collections.

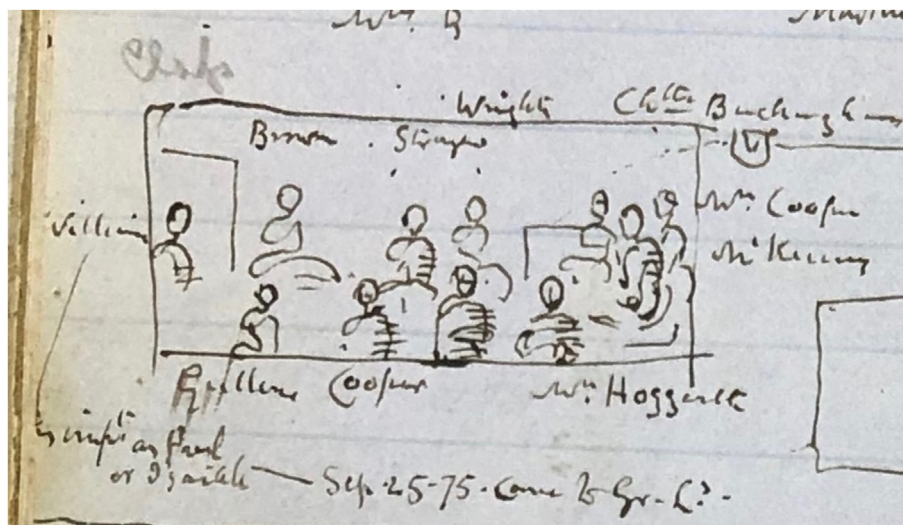


Fig. 9. James Smetham, Daily Journal of James Smetham, c.1874. Close up on a square capturing a class meeting. Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, B4, March 6, 1874. Used with permission of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University.

attempts to use his artistic skills to serve others would be successful or profitable.<sup>93</sup> These insecurities were grounded in Wesleyanism's complicated relationships with the visually beautiful and materially valuable. Although John Wesley explicitly warned early Methodists of the spiritual dangers of beautiful things, Peter Forsaith argues that Wesley had an ambiguous relationship with art and culture, sometimes using visual culture to create and promote his own and Methodism's profile, reputation, and influence.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, informed by printed compilations of Wesley's sermons and articles, Smetham was regularly convicted of the potential harm and distraction that visual art could cause. In one diary entry, he copied the following text from one of Wesley's sermons:

Are not you seeking happiness in books, pictures, gardens etc?.. why what is the harm of these things? ... There is the harm that they gratify the desire of the eye, and thereby strengthen and increase it making you more dead to God and more alive to the world.<sup>95</sup>

Referring to this text as 'serious words', Smetham expressed concern that Wesley would consider his work 'a life-long mistake – all pampering the desire of the eye'.<sup>96</sup> As a result, Smetham often worried that using art to share his insights into the Christian faith would distract others from the fundamentals of divine truth. He also felt guilty about his artistic temperament and expressed concern that if his gift of art was of no spiritual use then he was of no value to God.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, on at least one occasion he admitted that reflections of this kind had contributed to his serious mental breakdown in 1857.<sup>98</sup>

As a result, once Smetham identified squaring as an effective way of using art to contribute to the spiritual growth of others, he began to feel two sets of emotions while squaring. Firstly, he found

significant joy in making squares to serve others, as it was one of the few occasions when he felt he was fulfilling his spiritual purpose.<sup>99</sup> However, as time passed this was replaced by an obsessive compulsion to engage in an activity that had the potential to give him spiritual value and meaning. By the early 1870s Sarah, his wife, had imposed a 'no sketching' rule on her husband to reduce his compulsive squaring practices.<sup>100</sup> While by 1876, only months before his mental health deteriorated so badly that he moved into an asylum, Smetham himself was aware of the mental strain associated with constantly drawing and squaring and wrote to his friend William Davies that he yearned for time to rest and make nothing, not even his squares.<sup>101</sup>

Therefore, engaging in the act of squaring to share his faith and spiritual knowledge significantly affected Smetham's mental health and thus his experience of religion, faith, and spirituality. Initially this process was accompanied by joy and satisfaction because it finally allowed him to use his artistic skills for a spiritual cause. However, as his concerns about the extent to which art could be appropriately used for spiritual purposes grew, Smetham began to compulsively create squares in an act of supplication and an attempt to demonstrate his spiritual value. Therefore, while studying the act of squaring to understand Smetham's experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality has often demonstrated that engaging in religious practices, personal expressions of faith, and having spiritual encounters were beneficial for his mental health, ultimately the emotional pressure Smetham experienced from Wesleyan expectations contributed to the deterioration of his mental health and its ultimate collapse.

## Conclusion

Inspired by non-representational theory, this paper has approached James Smetham's squares as spaces that he made and inhabited as part of his everyday engagements with Wesleyan religion, personal faith, and spiritual encounter. By doing so, it has gained specific insights into Smetham's embodied and out of body

<sup>93</sup> Ventilator from Smetham to Akroyd, JS/1/102; Letter from James Smetham to William Davies, 11 September 1856, JS/1/24, Queen Mary University Special Collections.

<sup>94</sup> J. Wesley, Go'd Vineyard, from Arminian Magazine, 1789, 388–96, in *Selections from the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, New York, 1901, 90; P.S. Forsaith, *Image, Identity and John Wesley*, London, 2017.

<sup>95</sup> ALJS1, 212.

<sup>96</sup> ALJS1, 212.

<sup>97</sup> ALJS1, 212.

<sup>98</sup> Letter from James Smetham to Mrs Steward, 20 March 1859, ALJS1, 161.

<sup>99</sup> Ventilator from Smetham to Davies, 10 August 1869.

<sup>100</sup> ALJS2, 40.

<sup>101</sup> Letter from James Smetham to William Davies 3 July 1876, in ALJS2, 238; ALJS2, 293.

experiences of nineteenth-century religion, faith, and spirituality. Smetham's embodied experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality were varied. He preferred to engage in personal expressions of religion in quiet, secluded, and comfortable spaces. However, this was not a requisite and he also regularly practiced religious rituals and had spiritual encounters in noisy, uncomfortable, and busy public spaces. Smetham's engagement with religion also provided him with a regular routine, stipulating physical places he should be on specific days of the week and facilitating the regular, daily creation of imagined spiritual spaces through his squaring practice. In some ways, this routine had a positive impact on Smetham's life. It provided him with an emotionally pleasing sense of purpose and a mentally calming structure to regulate his embodied experiences. However, it also had detrimental consequences. It restricted Smetham's capacity to participate in non-faith-based activities and contributed to his overwhelming, but unfulfilled, desire to create visual culture that could support others in their spiritual growth. This ultimately advanced the deterioration of his mental health. Smetham's out of body experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality were either calming, peaceful moments that helped him to regulate his everyday experiences, memories, and emotions, or were instances of heightened, joyful emotions. These insights into his spiritual encounters are particularly valuable because it has been notoriously difficult to understand individuals' transcendent experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality in the past.

Collectively, this paper's specific insights into Smetham's experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality have also highlighted his complicated relationship with Wesleyanism, its theology, practices, and values. It has demonstrated that Smetham greatly valued, and often personally benefited from, repetitive participation in the ordinances of God, Wesleyan fellowship, and Christian service. However, his religious affiliation was also restrictive and arguably contributed to the decline of his mental health. Nevertheless, Smetham had his own personal faith and used squaring to adapt Wesleyanism practices to make them relevant for him. Furthermore, studying Smetham's act of squaring has also highlighted how he was a spiritual being, who through inhabiting his squares was daily participating in an alternative, spiritual realm.

More broadly, these specific insights into Smetham's everyday experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality demonstrate the potential of using non-representational approaches to explore historical representations made in association with religious rituals,

personal expressions of faith, and spiritual practices. As representations that cannot be usefully approached using representational analysis, Smetham's squares have focused this paper's analytical emphasis on how, where, and why they were made and the affect of these processes. By doing so, Smetham's squares have shown that non-representational approaches to spiritual acts of representation can provide difficult to obtain insights into the range of sensory, emotional, and spiritual experiences associated with religion, faith, and spirituality in the past. These insights have the potential to be particularly pertinent for two reasons. Firstly, in contrast to many current approaches that either emphasise the embodied or out of body experiences of religion, faith, and spirituality, focusing on representational practices could effectively balance considerations of the worldly, material contexts in which representations were made, and individuals' fleeting, yet impactful, spiritual encounters. Secondly, this approach could also advance geographical explorations of spiritual atmospheres beyond specifically designated sacred spaces, challenging the currently limited range and diversity of locations explored within geographical approaches to religion, faith, and spirituality in the past.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> R. Slatter, Geographical Approaches to Historical Religion, *Geography Compass*, forthcoming.