

The Early Years of the Settlement



This is Ducie Road, opposite the Settlement, as it would have looked in 1911. These houses were demolished in the 1960s, to make way for Barton Green.

The concept of Barton Hill Settlement first saw the light of day when a steering group was set up to oversee its formation. This was in 1909 (the year in which Louis Bleriot became the first person to fly an aircraft across the English Channel!).

The buildings were purchased, and in October 1911, the first three occupants of Barton Hill Settlement, then known as the "University Settlement", moved in. Hilda Cashmore became the Settlement's first warden, a post she would hold until 1926, when she moved to Manchester Settlement.

Early activity focussed on children, partly because they were the easiest to get to know, but also because Hilda Cashmore was especially interested in reducing the high rates of infant mortality in the area. There was a large dolls house for the children to enjoy, and activities included work with disabled children. The Settlement ran an "Open Air School", only the second in Bristol, for children who were continually falling victim to chest infections, especially tuberculosis. Another early activity was a "School for Mothers" - support for mothers was to be a continuing theme throughout the Settlement's work, and continues strongly today.



*The cotton factory, seen from the Feeder Canal,
with Marsh Lane Bridge in the foreground.
2000 Bartonians worked here.*

Many of the early users of the Settlement worked at the local cotton factory. In 1912, industrial action at the factory led to a strike, during which the Settlement enhanced its credibility with the workers, particularly as the family of the owners had contributed financially to the startup of Settlement.

The first Settlement Hall was opened in 1913, in response to the need for more activity space.

Around this time, the Settlement helped set up the British Association of Residential Settlements, which would later become BASSAC, of which we are still a member. The WEA (Workers' Educational Association) was also closely associated with the Settlement from the very early days.

Between the Wars



We don't know a great deal about the Settlement during the First World War, although it is thought that it was an important source of support for women whose men were away fighting, and, of course, for the many who were widowed.

In 1918, the Settlement adopted a constitution that would last until it became a "community association" in 1970. The constitution enabled local residents to join as associate members for a nominal subscription.

After the war, Barton Hill was particularly badly affected by the depression, due to the relatively small number of employers in the area. In 1925 the cotton factory closed, which affected almost every family in Barton Hill. In the same year, the Wagon Works, another major employer, also closed, and the number of railway-related jobs also declined.

In the Settlement, a "Venture Club" was set up (and was visited by the Prince of Wales), to support unemployed men and their wives, helping them to find a role by learning and doing something useful. This gave rise to an annual Handicrafts exhibition, a showcase for arts and crafts produced by Settlement users. The Settlement also set up holiday camps for unemployed people, which led to the purchase of land at Cleeve (between Bristol and Weston-super-Mare) for camps. The Settlement also ran a respite facility near Almondsbury (in cooperation with Badminton School), where delicate children could recuperate from illness.



A Settlement Committee meeting, around 1930

In 1926, Hilda Cashmore moved on, and a Miss Orpen replaced her as warden. Records show that an interesting debate around this time centred on whether the residents of the Settlement (staff and students from the university) should live as local people, so that, for instance, they would not enjoy running water and sanitation, or whether by having these luxuries they would raise the aspirations of people outside the Settlement. They decided, not surprisingly, that it would be better for all concerned if they had the "mod cons"! Another debate was about whether the associate members should have a say in appointing staff. The Settlement chose not to allow this to happen.

Elsewhere in Bristol, the growth of new estates (such as Knowle West and Shirehampton) led to satellite centres being established there.

In 1937, Hilda Jennings was appointed as third warden. Settlement research at the time showed that many boys and young men, mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds, but also some high achievers, were missing out on local activities, due to not being involved in the religious or other organisations that arranged the activities. The Settlement set about filling this gap. There were also divisions caused by gang membership, which the Settlement aimed to combat by organising its youth provision into three groups, one for each of the rival gangs - possibly not one of the Settlement's better ideas!



Before World War 2, the Settlement started to organise mixed sex activities for young people for the first time, including dances for the "Young People's Club", and opened a "Women's Clinic" offering health treatment for those without insurance, also recognising the need to help with debt or relationship problems.

World War 2



After the outbreak of the Second World War, the Settlement tried to maintain a sense of normality, while responding to residents' new needs. Whilst the area was subject to frequent bombing raids, Settlement buildings received only minor damage. There was a bomb shelter beneath one of the Settlement's buildings in Barton Hill Road, and activities were organised during air raids.

New activities included support for women managing while their husbands were away fighting. (Later in the war, this support focused on issues around demobilisation - one group of women who met in this way continued to meet up until the 1990s.) The Settlement was also home to an advice bureau, helping families to cope with the disruption of war. Some of the local boys were organised into a "service club", helping to salvage goods from bombed properties, carrying buckets of water for firefighting, etc.

The Settlement provided a rest home away from the stress of the bombing raids in Wotton under Edge, apparently funded by contributions from the US. There was also support for women who were hosting evacuee children - although it remains unclear why children were evacuated to Bristol, itself the target of much bombing.



Cleeve Camp, Somerset, in the 1940s.

During the war, the BBC Music Department was moved to Bristol, and they helped the Settlement establish an operatic society which ran for many years afterwards. The Settlement also hosted Sunday music concerts and a thriving theatre group (headed by someone who went on to run the Royal Opera House).

Towards the end of the war the Settlement contributed to thinking about the future, including hosting an exhibition about the Beveridge Report and another about future housing.

After the end of hostilities the Settlement ran family activities to help them learn to be together again and understand the way that the roles of women had been changed, and hosted a 20s singles club for people who needed to learn to be in mixed company again.

The Early Years of the Welfare State - 1948-56



The development of the Welfare State and the National Health Service meant a period of huge change for the Settlement, generally because many of its services were no longer needed. And fortunately, the general rise in living standards meant that people were no longer in need of poverty relief, and many could even afford new possessions and holidays.

A number of activities closed down because they were no longer needed, or the service was provided by the Welfare State, and the popular Singles Club fell victim to a spate of marriages! Other activities became increasingly independent of the Settlement as they focussed more on their own specialism and less on the overall mission of the Settlement, such as the Opera Society, which kept the Settlement name but little else, even moving rehearsal space and having few members from East Bristol.

By 1956, the Settlement's activities at Twyford House in Shirehampton had diverged to the point that it became a fully independent organisation. (Likewise, in 1960, the Farmhouse Youth Centre in Shirehampton would also become part of the Council's Youth Service activities.)



The Settlement knitting club. This photo is from the 1950s.

During this period, the Settlement experienced much greater turnover of staff as community and youth work became more professional and local authorities offered better salaries. Youth activities became more focussed on what young people wanted to do (dancing and sport), rather than the discussions and craft activities which the older and more experienced staff were able to run.



A Settlement event in the 1950s

The links with an expanding Bristol University were strengthened, with regular visits from the Student Union president and the proceeds of "rag week" coming to the Settlement.

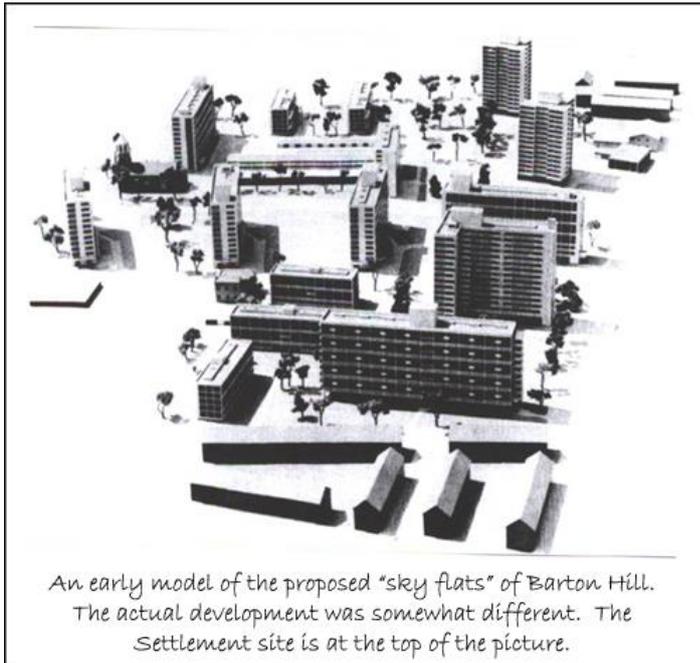
Links to the staff side were also strengthened and for a while the Vice Chancellor was President of the Settlement. In the early 50s, the Settlement's residents included a significant proportion of overseas students from the University, and the typical Settlement residents were no longer 'spinsters or other people of leisure who could give full time voluntary services'. Rather, they were people who worked elsewhere in the city, but gave help in the evenings and weekends.



Increasingly, activities focused on older people, reflecting both the older population of Barton Hill and the fact that they were particularly affected by the redevelopment of the area. An old people's club thrived and spun off a men only club for more traditionally male activities. Children's and youth activities still continued, however, as did some of the craft activities.

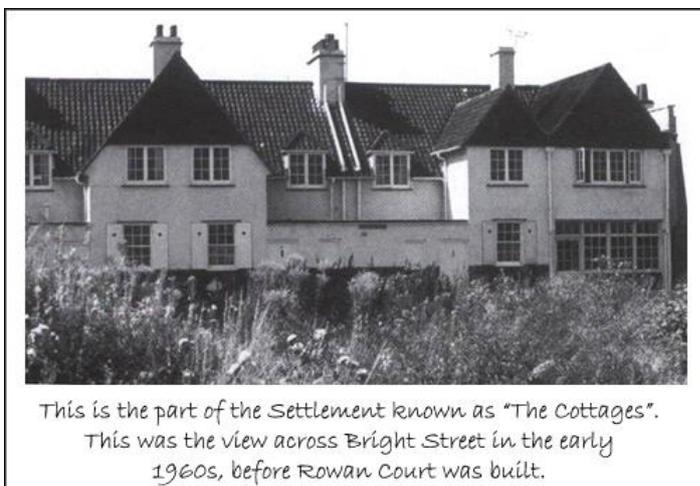
A BASSAC survey (carried out by the Settlement for them) found that in 1951 the Settlement had 17 residents, as did Birmingham, but many other Settlements had little more than a resident Warden and a caretaker.

Housing Renewal - 1956-70



As the Council planned a period of massive change for the area, the Settlement organised meetings with the Council and local residents over the planned redevelopment. Relations with the Council and residents were often strained!

The Citizens' Advice Bureau at the Settlement dealt with practical problems such as compensation for owner occupiers and appeals where planned demolition schedules would separate generations of families.



Many families were moved to the new estates at Hartcliffe, and the Settlement placed a staff member in housing in Hartcliffe to help former Barton Hill residents settle in. This worker frequently had to support families from other parts of Bristol who were struggling to settle into a new community from diverse backgrounds in Bristol. She also helped to support the Community Association in the area which was struggling because of the rivalry between groups relocated from different parts of Bristol. The Settlement withdrew from this work in 1960, concentrating instead on work within Barton Hill itself.



In 1961, the Settlement celebrated its 50th anniversary, which was marked by a civic reception at the Council House, hosted by the Mayor with senior figures from the Council, the University and local industry attending along with many people from Barton Hill.

When the new blocks opened in the early '60s, they initially housed mainly elderly people, as the Council policy was to house families with young children in larger houses on the outlying estates. This created an age imbalance with many isolated elderly people whose only social activity would be attending Settlement clubs or receiving visits from students.

The Settlement helped set up the Barton Hill and Redfield Community Council to represent the views of the community during the time of redevelopment. This later merged with the Barton Hill Tenants' Association, and eventually they acquired their own premises, rather than meeting at the Settlement.

In response to the need for more meeting space for groups and activities the Club House was built in 1965 - this building would later become the Day Centre. In 1966, the Settlement's Youth Club was taken over by the City Council. For a while, this broke the Settlement's tradition of working with all ages of the community.

Research in the late 1960s showed a declining demand for clubs and activities as television became a more popular source of entertainment. Alongside this trend, the families with children in the blocks, particularly newer blocks opened in the mid-sixties, found that they were not a good environment for children. The children couldn't play outside, and the noise they made playing indoors made for bad relations with older neighbours. The Settlement responded by helping to set up playgroups and junior youth clubs. It also ran activities for mothers with a crèche provided. By 1969, 170 were attending junior activities, and the Settlement had 1200 members, of whom half were over retirement age.

Renewing Communities - 1970-79

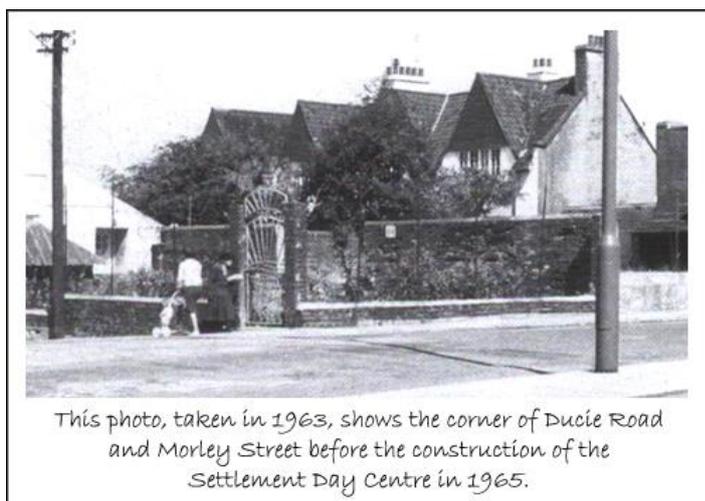
The 1970's was undoubtedly a turbulent time for the Settlement. The social upheaval of the 1960's called into question the role of 'outsiders' in leading the organisation, while inflation ate into the regular donations from Settlement supporters, causing financial problems for the organisation.

One consistent element throughout was the Chair, Professor Tom Ewer, although he took leave of absence while working in Saudi Arabia in 1979. When he finally stepped down in 1988 he described the late 70s as a "wild left wing era".

Mrs Maddock retired as resident Warden in 1974, to be replaced by the Settlement's first ever Director, Malcolm Sykes, a social worker. Although there was considerable unease among the leaders of the Settlement about the creation of the post of Director, the four years during which Malcolm Sykes was in post seem to have been relatively stable. The main new development was the launch of an advice service. Malcolm Sykes left in 1978 and was replaced by David Cemlyn.

In 1979 the lunch club for older people was providing 13,000 hot meals a year and running two minibuses, and there was recognition that it was evolving into a Day Centre providing activities before and after the main meal.

During the 1970's, there were ongoing concerns about the condition of the Settlement buildings, with frequent unplanned expenditure to mend roofs or comply with fire regulations placing added strain on the already stretched Settlement budget. This problem was alleviated by the launch of Manpower Services Commission schemes to address mass unemployment. The Settlement was quick off the mark in getting in help to start to refurbish its premises.



In 1967 Miss Marion Jones retired as Warden and was awarded an honorary degree by the University. She was succeeded by Mrs Maddock.

In 1969, the Settlement itself embarked on a major change, aiming to give its users a greater say in its direction. In 1969, it began the process of becoming a community association, completed in April 1970.

Decline of the Welfare State - 1980-95

The 1980's was another period of rapid change. The influx of funds from the Manpower Services Commission programmes supported a wide increase in activities, and the Settlement ceased to be a residential organisation, with the last resident (a Miss Millard) moving out in 1985. The space previously occupied by residents was rented out to other voluntary organisations, which also helped financially. (Today, the Settlement continues to let office space to other organisations.)

David Cemlyn resigned as Director in 1979, to be succeeded by Graham Partridge. At this time, the Settlement became more involved in schemes to help with unemployment. A large youth project was developed, offering training opportunities to 200 young people, including running a Settlement cafe. By 1983, the continued expansion of this training programme created a demand for additional space and the Settlement took on the disused All Hallows Church as an education centre.

All the training and employment schemes brought about a dramatic change in the staffing of the Settlement. By 1982, there were 53 paid staff and 30 volunteers, with staff exceeding volunteers for probably the first time in the Settlement's history. However the nature of the unemployment schemes and the low wages available to the few permanent staff means that there was a very high staff turnover.

In 1988, the temporary building which had housed the day centre since 1965 was finally replaced by a new building, which was opened by HRH Princess Anne.

By the end of the 1980's, the Settlement was becoming uneasy about the quality of experience offered by the new MSC schemes and progressively withdrew so that the final scheme ended in 1990.

In the local area the consequences of the sale of Council houses and the virtual freeze on new building to replace the stock means that families from ethnic minorities moved into the area for the first time in significant numbers, which at times led to an uneasy relationship between older residents and some of the new black and single parent tenants.

In 1990, Graham Partridge left to be replaced by Will Bee as Settlement Co-ordinator.

In 1991, part of the old "Farmhouse" building at the Settlement was developed as an education facility, which came to be known as The Workshop. It included a computer training facility, a job club, and facilities for a wide variety of adult learning opportunities. Within two years the Workshop was running more than 20 classes.

A period of relative stability followed (both in terms of finance and staff turnover), as the Settlement's core projects (the Day Centre, the Playcentre, the Neighbourhood Centre and the Workshop) were supported to develop their own plans and take more responsibility for fundraising.

Community-led Urban Regeneration - 1995-2011

By the mid 1990's there was a growing recognition in Government that regeneration of disadvantaged communities could not be achieved by "top-down" initiatives, whether led by the City Council, the private sector, or Government Task Forces. The new buzzwords were "community-led regeneration", and the Settlement was well placed to be at the forefront of this approach. The work which the Settlement had been doing to empower its own users helped Barton Hill win selection as one of the New Deal for Communities areas in 1999.

The Settlement's third constitution, adopted in 1995, reflects a clear focus on giving the users of its projects control of the organisation's direction, rather than a general aspiration to be governed by the local community. The organisation was also formally renamed, "Barton Hill Settlement" replacing the now inappropriate title of "University Settlement".

The Family Playcentre was the first to seize on the opportunities presented by the new constitution, developing plans for a major extension to its part of the Settlement. When the financial climate suggested that it would be extremely difficult to raise the necessary funds they decided to build the extension themselves, the self-build work being successfully completed in 1997.

Will Bee was succeeded as Co-ordinator in 1995, by Bob Lewis, and 1998 saw the first ever local resident as Chair of the Management Committee.

Barton Hill's success in securing New Deal for Communities funding (to be managed locally by Community at Heart) was due in no small part to the key role played by Settlement committee members and staff in the bidding process.

In 2001, the Settlement adopted a strategic plan, a major step forward from the financial uncertainty which had characterised the previous 40 years, whilst funds from the New Deal programme enabled the building of a four story building, "The Light House" in 2002. Funds from New Deal programme also supported a drug and alcohol project, "CAAAD", responding to a rapidly developing need in the community.

By this time, Joanna Holmes had become the Settlement Co-ordinator, having already been involved with the Settlement as a service user, volunteer and worker.

This period brought a greater recognition of the need to support volunteers properly, leading to the launch of a Volunteer Co-ordination Unit in 2002. The focus on staff-led activities over the previous 20 years had meant the volunteer support was patchy, although the contribution of volunteers remained crucial to many Settlement activities.

Despite the overall success of the Settlement, the focus on providing social care for only those in greatest need meant that Social Services funding for the Day Centre was withdrawn. The Day Centre closed in 2001, although more informal, volunteer-run activity began to fill the gap (lunch clubs, shopping trips, etc.), so support for older people did not come to a complete halt.

In 2003, the Settlement's annual turnover exceeded £1 million for the first time, and, with the work of the Settlement attracting growing recognition, 2003 saw visits from both the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, as policy makers sought to learn lessons from its approach to user empowerment.

Changes in the local community saw Barton Hill play host to its first refugee community, as growing numbers of Somali families moved into the area. They struggled to fit some of the larger families into the flats, and there were undoubtedly racial tensions from time to time. The arrival of migrants from Eastern Europe added to the diversity of the population and the Settlement began to develop activities to support understanding and multiculturalism in Barton Hill.