Bringing People Together

Bede House in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe 1938 - 2003

Katharine Bradley

Bede House Association
London 2004

Bede House Association,

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This history of Bede is dedicated to Courtenay (Tony) Covell in recognition of his many years of service to the settlement.

Tony joined the Princess Club as a volunteer in the 1930s. He was recruited by Nellie Hooker to undertake Bede's fundraising work. When the Princess Club closed and Nellie Hooker established a new settlement, Tony provided the name – Bede House. In a recent interview, Tony said that the name was chosen partly because it was easy to remember, but also because 'We felt that our aims and objects were very much akin to what Bede was doing all those years ago.' Tony rejoined Bede after the Second World War, and continued to work for many years as Bede's honorary fundraiser. Tony's wife, Evelyn, also volunteered as a fundraiser. Of his colleagues at Bede, Tony said, 'It was an honour for me to get to know someone like Nellie Hooker, she was terrific. I have met [through Bede] so many people like her who were prepared to give of their time and talents freely.'

Bede House and Tony Covell both celebrate important milestones in 2004. Whilst Bede marks its sixty-fifth anniversary in 2003 – 4, Tony will celebrate his centenary in June 2004. We hope that this volume is a fitting tribute to Tony and his many years of work.

About the Author

Katharine Bradley was born in Chesterfield, Derbyshire and grew up in West Wales. She received her BA and MA degrees at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She joined the staff of Toynbee Hall as archivist/librarian in 1999 whilst completing her MA degree, and continues to work part-time in that role. Since 2002, she has been completing a PhD degree on the settlement movement in the East End in the interwar years at the Centre for Contemporary British History, Institute of Historical Research, University of London.

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I am also indebted to Southwark Local History Library, who provided many of the images included in this book, and whose archives on Bede House and the local area were used extensively by me. Also to Howard Carter, who allowed me to refer to and cite his work in progress.

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Preface

This short history should be an inspiration to all who will take the work of Bede House forward in the future. It will also serve to remind those of us who have long been close to the association of the excellent and varied work that both staff and volunteers have done over more than 60 years.

The group of people who helped Nellie Hooker to build a new organization out of the Marie Louise Settlement and the residents and those who worked closely with the early wardens, Noel Nye and Dorothy Furness, would be heartened to know that their legacy of devoted social work and Christian commitment is intact today.

Bede House has always had difficulties with its funding and owes everything to many generous donors, in particular Southwark Council and other agencies. But it has an outstanding and deserving record, never being afraid to tackle or handle the most intractable problems. Traditionally its youth clubs in the old cottage hospital, Lady Gomm House, would welcome and keep in membership anyone, even if they were known to have been rejected for impossible behaviour in other places. Today in a changed world it confronts the scourge of racism in the most direct way. These and similar choices are not easy to make but they are entirely in the tradition of the settlement's leadership.

There are records in annual reports of the wardens, staff and volunteers but few mentions by name of the many families and people in Bermondsey and Southwark whose lives have been touched by Bede House. Some have achieved great distinction and many may remember the services they used with gratitude and affection. But above all, those who came from quite different backgrounds and who lived and worked at Bede House will be reminded that they took away much more from that experience than they gave. That is a tribute to the humour, goodwill and generosity of spirit of the people of the neighbourhood. I hope that some of them, too, will enjoy this record.

Roger Harrison
Vice President, and former resident at Bede House.

Introduction - The Victorian Scene

The year 2004 marks the 120th anniversary of the settlement movement, which grew out of attempts to bridge the vast gulf between the rich and the poor that had emerged during the course of the industrial revolution in Britain. Poverty was by no means a new social problem, but the social and economic changes caused by industrialisation had accelerated far beyond the nation's capacity to address them. Agricultural depression was paired with urban overcrowding, squalor and often dangerous industrial work. Although deprivation was spread across the United Kingdom, one area in particular became the focus for Victorians' anxieties: the East End of London. Whitechapel, Aldgate, Spitalfields, Bethnal Green and Stepney – the 'Cockney' East End – became synonymous with deprivation and crime not because they were necessarily unique, but because they were adjacent to the immensely wealthy imperial City of London. Charles Dickens, W.C. Stead and Henry Mayhew vividly documented the harsh conditions of life of many Londoners, but it took the publication of The Bitter Cry of Outcast London in 1883 to act as a catalyst for social action.

One attempt to address these enormous problems came from a group of socially aware men based at Oxford University. They were concerned that although the East End had been 'colonised' by many missions, what it lacked was a middle class, people who would act as leaders for their community. Arnold Toynbee, the Balliol economic historian, was one of the earliest Oxford men to move to the East End and to participate in 'neighbourly' work. Toynbee spent some time at the Commercial Street home of the Reverend Samuel Barnett and his wife Henrietta, née Rowland. In 1873, a young Barnett and his new wife Henrietta had moved to St. Jude's, a run-down church on Commercial Street, Whitechapel. At first, their parishioners expected to be paid to attend services, and the church itself was a dismal and decrepit building. However, the Barnetts were not deterred and they threw themselves into parish work. Barnett had trained at the parish of St. Mary's on Bryanston Square under the Reverend W. Fremantle. Fremantle ran a multitude of social and educational activities from his parish, from clubs and lessons for young people through to visiting the homes of the poor. Barnett emulated much of his mentors' work but also brought in University Extension Lectures and began organising annual art exhibitions in the St. Jude's schoolrooms.[1]

Over the next ten years, Barnett began to realise the limitations of parish work for effective social work. He began to formulate his ideas about another way of organising social work in deprived areas. Most parish work was carried out by people who lived away from the area, and after their duties were done they returned to their homes in more affluent areas. Barnett's idea was to bring young university men embarking on their careers into the East End to live as well as to give their spare time to social work. His idea was that a small community of university men could not only be neighbours to the poor, but to set an example to them of other ways of living. This was no patronising enterprise: the graduates were expected to learn from the workers of Whitechapel as much as they were there to enlighten and educate them.

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Barnett took his idea up to Oxford, where he presented a lecture on 'University Men and the Towns' at St. John's College. Barnett's proposals for communal living in Whitechapel struck a chord with the scholars and graduates, who were shocked both by Toynbee's premature death at the age of 30 and the desperate need in the East End. A committee was formed to enact Barnett's proposition, and after a year of fund-raising, the first of the residents moved into the universities' settlement, or Toynbee Hall, as it came to be known, on Christmas Eve 1884. Besides encouraging residents to stand for election to school boards and local councils, the settlement ran a multitude of activities and services. Adult education ranged from University Extension Lectures to guest lectures and debates, to first aid training. Many clubs ran, some organised by local people themselves – a Travellers' club, art, philosophy, economics, Shakespeare, drama and natural history all flourished before the First World War. The residents were also involved with arranging recuperative trips for children through the Children's Country Holiday Fund, work on sanitary committees and tenants' defence leagues. The popular art exhibitions in the St. Jude's schoolrooms grew into the Whitechapel Art Gallery, whilst the drama groups developed into theatrical companies.

The development of the settlement movement

Toynbee Hall was an immediate success, attracting ever increasing numbers of residents and pioneering a number of social services and reforms. Its approach was soon mirrored across the East End, the rest of London, Britain, and the world. Many settlements were established in the 1880s and the 1890s, with a smaller number during the twentieth century. The vast majority of settlements survive today, in some form or other. Most have abandoned their residential programmes, and base their services on professional employees rather than unpaid volunteers. Some have, for financial or practical reasons, merged with other charities or have become community centres rather than active charities.

The question may rightly be asked of the settlements' relevancy in the twenty-first century. After all, they began as Victorian solutions to Victorian problems – surely our needs are different now? Are the settlements effectively redundant, especially now that Britain has a comprehensive health, welfare and education system? The answer is no. Whilst some things have changed for the better, poverty still affects a great number of Britons, particularly children and the elderly. Many thousands of Britons may live above the poverty line in economic terms but suffer from cultural or social poverty – they do not have full access to healthcare, suitable housing, a variety of employment opportunities, education, transport, leisure, sporting, cultural or religious activities in their communities. These needs are still with us, and need addressing as much as they did in the late nineteenth century. The settlements have adapted their approach over the years to catch those who, for whatever reasons, find themselves excluded from society. They have both collectively and in their own locales identified need and experimented with solutions for that need. In some cases, their pioneering work has paved the way for the establishment of national charities and campaign groups, and in others for governmental intervention.

A unique contribution

The settlements' unique contribution lies in their ability to bring different groups in society together. People from all backgrounds work for settlements or participate in settlement activities. There is a rich diversity of human experience to be found in a settlement in 2003. Some histories of the settlement movement have focussed on the 'big names' of that history, the prominent wardens and social workers, the residents who went onto fame and renown. Whilst their roles are important, the history of the settlement movement is also a history of all those who have devoted time and energy into making even the smallest of projects work, and also a history of all those whose lives have been enriched and empowered by the services on offer.

Chapter 1: The origins of Bede House Association

Although North East London may be more immediately associated with social work and settlements, it would be wrong to say that South East London was without its contribution. The Thames beyond Tower Bridge on both sides of the river was home to bustling docks, quays and factories. From Tower Bridge, the southern bank housed St. Mary Overie's Dock, Surrey Water, Lavender Wharf, Sunderland Wharf, Nelson Dock, New Caledonian Wharf, Greenland Dock and South Dock, down to the Royal Naval Dockyard at Deptford.

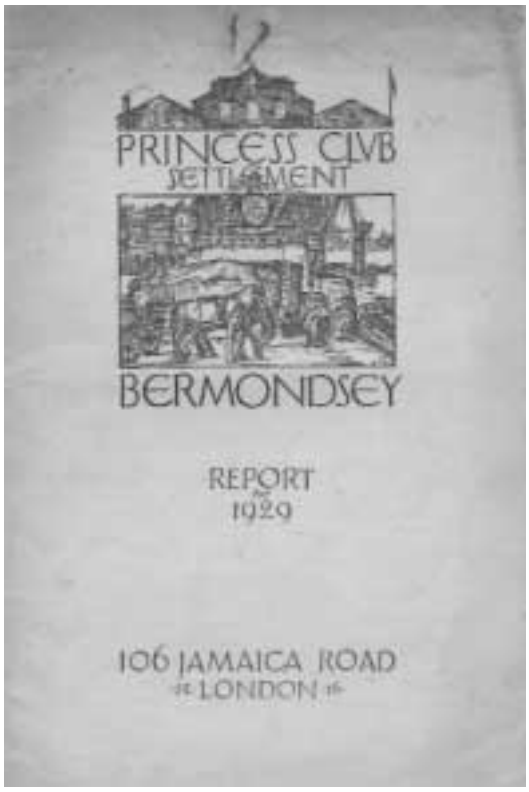
> ***The main social problems in Bermondsey, as much as across the river, stemmed from the tightrope most families walked in trying to keep them on the right side of the poverty line. Even if work was plentiful, it was not well paid, and men's wages in particular were meant to be able to keep a family.***

Accompanying the docks were a number of factories and warehouses. Hartley's jam factory was on Green Walk, by Bricklayers' Arms, and the B. Young and Company gelatine factory, was on Grange Road. Peek Frean's biscuit factory was on Drummond Road, one of the roads linking Southwark Park Road with Jamaica Road. The East London Line, the earliest of all the tube lines, was built to connect the docks on both sides of the river. Until the decline of the Pool of London, the West and East India Docks, and the Victoria, Albert and George Docks after the Second World War, the Eastern riverside was a centre of great industrial activity. The proximity and availability of employment at the many wharves and factories may suggest that the area was prosperous, but this was not the case. Although the decline of the shipping industries only became truly apparent after 1945, it had been in progress since the late nineteenth century. Not only was dock work extremely dangerous, there were more boys and men willing to work on the dockside than there were jobs. Even during times of prosperity, it was not unknown for enormous crowds to wait outside the dockyards hoping to get a ticket to work. Not all the men were skilled

dockers – often the unemployed would try their luck at getting a day's work. Both factory and dock work were exhausting and unpleasant, with long hours and shifts common. Equally, the factories and docks had a huge environmental impact on the local area, spreading dust and strong, possibly toxic, smells. Women had a constant battle against dirt; and many of them worked in factories or on piecework at home to support their families.[3] Children were also commonly recruited into doing errands or other work to boost the family budget.[4] Most industrial workers in the late nineteenth and early to mid twentieth centuries preferred to live near their place of work, to avoid unnecessary expenditure of time and money on travel. Consequently, they never truly escaped from the factories.

The main social problems in Bermondsey, as much as across the river, stemmed from the tightrope most families walked in trying to keep them on the right side of the poverty line. Even if work was plentiful, it was not well paid, and men's wages in particular were meant to be able to keep a family.[5] Women's wages were deemed to be supplementary, and they were commonly paid a great deal less than male workers. Frequently, family budgets were such that long hours were the rule, and often members of the family went without treats like trips to the cinema, newspapers and clubs to keep body and soul together. Naturally, the success of this balancing act varied from family to family, and some were always in need of outside help. Others found that the death, illness or disablement of the main earner could be disastrous; old age was another problem. In short, life in Bermondsey and other industrial areas revolved around the need to keep one's family and oneself fed, clothed and housed: it allowed very little else.

The need in the Bermondsey area attracted a number of missions and settlements. The Bermondsey Settlement was opened by Dr. Scott Lidgett in 1891 in Farncombe Street.[6] Dr. Scott Lidgett, a staunch Quaker, would become renowned for his pioneering approach to youth work. Clare College, Cambridge also had very strong links with social work in the area. In 1730, the college had taken over the patronage of St. Mary's Church, Rotherhithe, and in May 1884[7], the college had resolved to establish a mission in Rotherhithe based around the Rectory[8], which continued until 1959.[9] Alfred Salter, Bermondsey's most popular penny doctor and later Labour MP worked hard to raise standards of health in the area, as did the Peckham Experiment further to the south.[10] The Women's University Settlement in Blackfriars opened in 1887, as did another women's settlement, Time and Talents, and Dockhead followed in 1895. Peckham had the Union of Girls' Schools Settlement (1896) and Camberwell was home to Cambridge House (1897). Lady Margaret Hall Settlement in Kennington opened in 1897, and there was St. Anne's Catholic Settlement in Vauxhall (1911). Talbot Settlement, which later merged with Cambridge House, was founded in Bromley in 1900.[11] Charterhouse School also had a mission in Southwark.



Princess Club Settlement, 1929 Report

The Princess Marie Louise Settlement

Bede House Association grew out of the Princess Marie Louise Settlement, which was established at 106 Jamaica Road in 1907. Princess Marie Louise was born in 1871 to Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein and Princess Helena, one of Queen Victoria's daughters, and died in 1956 at the age of 85. In 1891, she married Prince Aribert of Anhalt, but this was an unsuccessful marriage In 1900, it was annulled by her father-in-law. Marie Louise was a devout Christian, and never remarried as she believed her vows to be eternally binding.[12] Her beliefs led her to throw herself into charitable work. The Princess Marie Louise Settlement was affiliated to the Church Army, an evangelical wing of the Anglican Church, and run along the religious principles that Princess Marie Louise advocated. Although the settlement movement was intended to differ from missions in that they did not seek new converts or to impose religious practices upon their users, the Princess Marie Louise Settlement was intended to work in support of the established church. The settlement was, however, one of many organisations with which Marie Louise had connections – her name lives on today in the Princess Marie Louise Bowling Club in Chelmsford, Essex, and her former home at 77 Pall Mall now partly accommodates the Oxford and Cambridge Club Her lady-in-waiting, Margaret Adams, inaugurated the Helena Club for Ladies (now the Sloane Club) in 1947. Princess Marie Louise was very much at the apex of a network of middle and upper class women who participated in charitable and fundraising work from the mid-nineteenth century until relatively recently. As the historian Frank Prochaska has examined at length, women from this part of society largely supported and maintained the voluntary sector at this time.[13] Some undertook voluntary work in their spare time, such as visiting the poor or distributing Bibles, out of a sense of religious duty or as a means of being involved in something outside the home; others, like Nellie Hooker, the first Warden of Bede, saw work in the voluntary sector very much as a means through which a woman could undertake a profession or a valid role in society on a par with men. Beyond this strata lay a further one of influential, elite women who had the particular ability to draw in donations and support simply by becoming patrons of events and

charities. This was an especially successful form of marketing, and has its parallel in more recent years with the late Princess Diana. Diana was not the first upper class woman to be acknowledged as a 'Queen of Hearts' – she was in many ways emulating her forebears, such as Marie Louise. We must not underestimate the contribution these women made. Although they were not at the coal face, so to speak, their responsibilities were spread across a large number of charities, and they often had to be booked many months in advance to open fetes or to sit on bazaar or campaign committees. They juggled their commitments as they were best able. The extent of this participation becomes clear if one has a look through the surviving minutes of women's settlements and fundraising committees, such as the Green, White and Gold Fair and the Canning Town Women's Settlement.[14] Patronage was a serious business, and Princess Marie Louise was one of the biggest names.

The archives of the Princess Marie Louise Settlement have scattered or been lost over the years, so the following account of Bede's forerunner is necessarily a little patchy, but nonetheless essential for building a picture of the times in which Bede began. The Princess Marie Louise Settlement, or Princess Club, was very much a part of a culture of women's voluntary work and settlements that had their own distinctive flavour. Nellie Hooker, the last warden of the Princess Club and the first warden of Bede, was both a product of and an exponent of this culture. The women's settlements were in their own way a centre of feminism, albeit a variety that we might not immediately recognise today. This is certainly the case in terms of the opportunities they presented to young working class women. Many settlements had or supported branches of the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants (MABYS), which was essentially an employment and support agency for young domestic servants. The Princess Club, on the other hand, offered an in-house training scheme for would-be servants.[15] Girls' clubs or sections of clubs offered a diet of singing, dancing and drama – the blatantly 'fun' activities – alongside classes in home economics and child care. Girls in mixed clubs – such as those run by the Princess Club – may have had a broader fare on offer, but not necessarily so.

To twenty-first century eyes, these clubs can seem very reactionary, aimed at keeping girls within the domestic sphere. Yet these activities had a very serious purpose – namely that they were aimed squarely at improving the lives and conditions of many working class women. A thorough knowledge of home economics could make all the difference to a newly married young woman, helping her to budget, to maintain her home more effectively and to adequately feed her new family. In a time before convenience foods and electrical time saving devices, these really did make a difference to the daily lives of young women – and their health. To understand the extent of the problem, it is worth reading Working Class Wives by Marjory Spring Rice and also Round About a Pound a Week by Maud Pember Reeves. Working class women did suffer – and their middle class counterparts tried to ease the burden by filling in the gaps that the basic elementary school education left.

Hooker arrived at the Princess Marie Louise Settlement in 1927, and over the next seven years she greatly expanded its services. In 1927, the Princess Club had two clubs and a girls' hostel; by 1934, the clubs had a membership reaching the 1,000 mark, and offered a broad programme of sporting, leisure and craft activities to its members.

During the 1920s, Nellie Hooker was learning her 'trade' over at the Time and Talents Settlement. Time and Talents had been founded by Ms Minna Gollock in 1887. Gollock's aim was to 'improve the lives of the poorer classes and at the same time open the eyes of the society women to the bigger picture.'[16] Time and Talents encouraged wealthy women to more productively use their time to bring some enjoyment to the lives of the factory girls and women of Bermondsey. In 1899, as Gosling notes, the activities of Time and Talents included a clubroom for singing, knitting, basketwork and sewing. Dancing and cookery were also taught, and a penny lending library was also available. Gosling noted, 'The fairy tale books [were] the most popular borrowed. Even though the girls' couldn't escape their meagre existence they could at least dive into the pages of magic kingdoms, handsome princes and happy-ever-afters'.[17] Trips and outings were common. In 1903, Time and Talents opened a canteen on Jacob's Island (near Dockhead, on the riverside) to serve nutritious food to the factory girls, and in 1907 the local girls were able to use a common room at the settlement to relax and have some peace and quiet.[18] In 1913, a hostel at 70 Abbey Street was opened to provide accommodation for young girls who would otherwise live in cramped conditions, and this continued to provide lodgings for sixteen girls until it was bombed in 1940.[19] During the First World War, the Princess Club ran a hospital for wounded soldiers in its club buildings, and for a time after the war there was talk of converting the club into a children's hospital.[20] This was the type of work Hooker had been doing before she moved to Princess Marie Louise, and the flavour of Time and Talents can be seen in the Princess Club under her wardenship and the early Bede.

Hooker arrived at the Princess Marie Louise Settlement in 1927, and over the next seven years she greatly expanded its services. In 1927, the Princess Club had two clubs and a girls' hostel; by 1934, the clubs had a membership reaching the 1,000 mark, and offered a broad programme of sporting, leisure and craft activities to its members. Hooker had also branched out into other areas of work, with nurseries and maternity clinics, a mid-day canteen for factory girls and a workshop for unemployed carpenters.[21]

Hooker, like many Wardens past and present, was involved in the local community and most significantly, as events would unfold, with the Christian Youth Council (CYC) in Bermondsey. The CYC had many prominent and experienced members whose religious affiliations were spread across the various Christian branches. In 1937, the Physical Training and Recreation Act was passed. The Act granted funding for the types of equipment and training the voluntary organisations in Bermondsey so desperately needed. Logically, the CYC realised that they would stand a much better chance of receiving funding if they worked together to put in a bid rather than sending in a series of applications for smaller amounts across the borough. The CYC resolved to set up a committee to create a funding proposal, which centred upon the creation of a new residential settlement centre. Around the same time, the Princess Club's Executive

Cubicle at Princess Settlement c. 1930

Committee decided to close the settlement, ostensibly on financial grounds.[22] Hooker and her staff were now faced with the very real possibility of having to give up their work in Bermondsey at the same time that enticing new opportunities were being presented. The practicalities of Hooker's work required her to adopt an ecumenical approach,[23] but she was sailing close to the wind as far as the views of the Executive Committee and the Princess herself were concerned. As Watson suggests, the funding crisis was a convenient excuse to 'pull the plug' on a settlement that was moving ever closer to ecumenism rather than supporting the work of the established church.[24] A solution was found – with the application for the grant going ahead, Hooker and her staff would leave the Princess Club in order to establish the new settlement. The settlement's name was to be Bede House, after the Venerable Bede, 'whose life was dedicated to prayer, work and study'.[25] The Venerable Bede (673 – 735 AD) was an historian and a doctor of the Church. He had an enormous influence on Christian scholarship both in Britain and in Europe,[26] and was famous for his work, The Ecclesiastical History of the English People (731 AD). Bede did not venture much further beyond the monastery where he lived, but he was nonetheless one of the most learned scholars in Christendom. Bede's work

Former members of the settlement's clubs had banded together to raise £400 to keep the settlement going. This was a highly substantial sum for 1938, even more so given that it was raised from a community suffering from years of economic depression.

allows us to understand the origins of the English people and the Christian Church.[27] By choosing this name, the settlement was aligning itself with the very beginnings of Christian England and a scholar who was devoted to the religious life of the English people.

From Princess to Bede

Hooker was prevented from using the Princess Club buildings, which were in any case in a highly dilapidated state. She was, however, able to keep the equipment belonging to the club, and a campaign to find money for the purchase of a new building was soon under way. A disused bakery on Southwark Park Road was found, and although it was small, it was affordable. David Nye, the brother of Noël Nye, who would become Warden in 1948, could make the necessary adjustments to the building relatively cheaply. The purchase was made in 1938, and in February 1939, Bede House Settlement was officially opened.

The people who use settlements are often left out of the narrative of settlement history. This is often for practical reasons rather than political – there are far more of them than there are settlement workers, and in most cases they leave little, if not nothing, in the way of papers in the public realm. Other sources, such as club address books and records, are simply discarded over time, usually to make space for other papers. However, it is not enough to say that the social workers of Bermondsey felt that there was a need to continue Hooker's work. It is easy to forget that for the local people, the settlement had become part of the fabric of their community. It was as important for them to continue the Princess Club, as it was for Hooker and her colleagues. A snapshot of this can be found in the testimony of Courtenay Covell, who was the fundraiser for first the Princess Club and then Bede many years later. Courtney recalled that former members of the settlement's clubs had banded together to raise £400 to keep the settlement going. This was a highly substantial sum for 1938, even more so given that it was raised from a community suffering from years of economic depression. Without the settlement workers' knowledge, the former members of the club had organised dances, whist drives and raffles to raise the cash. To put this in context, the sum of £400 was enough to purchase the Southwark Park Road bakery. What this incident demonstrates is the way in which the community around Jamaica Road wanted badly to hold onto something that greatly enriched their lives.

Chapter 2: Bede House - from the World War to the 1960's

Bede and World War Two

Plans for the outbreak of war had been carefully prepared by social workers, local councils and the defence department from around 1937. At this time, it feared that the Nazis would launch an enormous aerial bombardment campaign that would result in massive damage and loss of civilian life. Although the Blitz was a devastating campaign, it did not match the government's earlier fears. In the pre-war planning, the settlements were

Postcard showing the staircase at Bede House prior to renovation, circa 1938 (courtesy Southwark Local Studies Library).

Courtsey of Southwark Local Studies Library

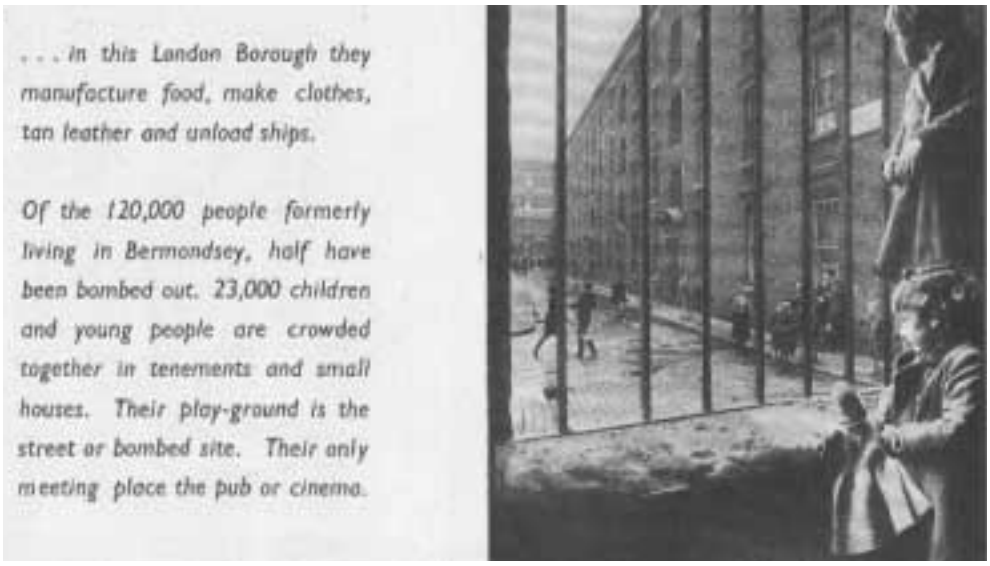
A helping hand to Leisure Club

seen as having a particular role to play as centres for the care of civilian casualties, and as centres of administration in residential areas. The newly-formed Bede was no exception, and in some ways it benefited from the outbreak of war in September 1939. Watson argues that it 'provided an immensely effective launching pad for the new settlement'.[28] Bede immediately stepped into the breach by using its basement as an air raid shelter, running a Boy Scout messenger centre, and helping to co-ordinate evacuation. It also ran a Citizen's Advice Bureau, which provided essential help later in the war for people who had been bombed out and lost all their possessions. It also organised a meal centre.[29] Although Bede itself suffered damage, it was in the right place to help when relief was needed. The docks on both sides of the river were heavily bombed, with the nearby Surrey Docks being set alight on one occasion. Although we have a 'myth of the Blitz', an idea of Cockneys stoically sheltering in tube stations and filling the hours of bombing with music, laughter and comradeship, the horror of that bombing campaign should never be forgotten. The bombing of the Docklands affected those who had the least and therefore the most to lose. In a matter of minutes, people lost the things they had spent their lifetimes building up, no matter how meagre. In some cases, they also lost family members, friends and acquaintances. They saw the destruction of their community and their workplaces. If your resources were scant to begin with, this destruction and the displacement it caused were far harder to deal with.

Bede House Association and the Post-War World

Bede's immediate post-war plans centred upon expanding their space and restoring the damaged Southwark Park Road site. The solution to their needs came after the Lady Gomm Memorial Hospital on the outskirts of Southwark Park became vacant. The Kilburn Sisters, who had been running the hospital, had been bombed out to Wimbledon relatively early on in the war. The building was structurally sound, and the Hospital Trustees – M.C. Carr-Gomm and Colonel Barstow – offered the site to Bede on a ninety-nine year peppercorn lease.[30] The outlook for attracting funding was not

optimistic, for despite the apparent post-war 'consensus' that Britons felt the time was ripe for social change, this was very much the period of Stafford Cripps' economic policy of 'austerity'. The settlements themselves had to operate on extremely tight budgets and with limited resources – rationing continued until the early 1950s. For example, the Toynbee Hall ration book was used to keep account of all meals taken – including how many cups of tea and coffee were consumed each day.[31] Bede was, however, able to capitalise on the fact that the Bermondsey Council of Social Service had surveyed the area around Bede and found that bombing had seriously curtailed both opportunities and facilities for leisure in the area. With this report to bolster their case, the offer on the hospital was accepted on 8 February 1946 and an appeal for the renovation of Lady Gomm House was launched. A leaflet entitled 'You Can't Do Without Bermondsey Because…' was issued for the Lady Gomm House Appeal. Beyond highlighting the industrial importance of the area, the leaflet noted that 60,000 of the



Courtsey of Southwark Local Studies Library

From leaflet 'You can't do without Bermondsey because...' 1946

120,000 children in the area had been bombed out, with no facilities. 23,000 children lived in crowded accommodation. Over two-thirds of houses had no bathrooms; in 73% of houses hot water could only be obtained from kettles. 14 youth clubs and 75% of schools had been bombed out. There were no bookshops, teashops or restaurants in the area to provide amusement. The leaflet noted that 'The 23,000 children and young people of Bermondsey are to-morrow's citizens. They dwell in drabness in a corner of the world's greatest capital'.[32]

The new centre was opened by the Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Sir George Aylwen, and dedicated by the Bishop of Southwark at 3pm on Thursday 9 December 1948. The inaugural address was given by the Chair

of Council, Harry Wigzell, and another speech given by Nellie Hooker, who had retired earlier that year to be replaced by Noël Nye. Sir Harold Scott, the Commissioner of Police and a Patron of Bede launched a financial appeal to close the ceremony before the Lord Mayor was taken on a tour of the new building.[33] When its normal activities began in earnest, Lady Gomm was home to seven clubs that met two or three times a week, a London County Council Maternity and Welfare Clinic, a Mothers' Club, a Veterans' Club, a Dockers' Club, a leisure club for disabled people and adult education classes.

Life at Lady Gomm House

Some of the membership cards and leaflets advertising Bede activities have survived, and provide an insight into the bustling, busy place that was Lady Gomm House in the 1950s and 1960s. Although by this point the economy had revived after its post-war dip, the leaflet for 1963 – 64 emphasised the need for continuing work in the area:

Bermondsey is now being rebuilt. The old, the thriftless and the handicapped still know poverty and loneliness. But years of prosperity, and the coming of the Welfare State, have transformed the neighbourhood into a thriving dock community. Yet the need for spiritual leadership remains as great as ever.[34]

Bede was right to continue to develop its work. The 'thriving dock community' was effectively dead on the ground, for in the years 1967 to 1970 the riverside docks adjacent to Bermondsey would close: East India, St. Katharine's, London and the Surrey Docks.[35]

BEDE HOUSE ASSOCIATION

Opening of

LADY GOMM HOUSE

by

The Rt. Hon. the Lord Mayor of London
(Alderman Sir George Aylwen)

and Dedication by

The Rt. Rev. the Lord Bishop of Southwark

at 3 p.m.

Thursday, December 8th, 1960

Programme of the evening @ Lady Gomm House

The programme for 1965 – 66 states that the following events ran on a weekly basis:

Day	Time	Club
Monday	5.30 – 7.30pm	Pilgrims Club (Girls 10 – 14 year olds)
	8 – 10pm	Senior Club (Mixed, 14 – over 18 years)
Tuesday	2 – 4.30pm	Leisure Club (Mixed club for disabled people)
	6 – 7.30pm	Hawks Club (Mixed, 7 – 10 year olds)

Courtesy of Southwark Local Studies Library

Bede House Club members, 1960's

Wednesday	2 – 4pm	Veterans' Club
	6 – 7.30pm	Clare Club (Boys 10 – 14 year olds)
	8 – 10pm	Senior Club
Thursday		No clubs
Friday	2 – 4.30pm	Leisure Club at Tooley Street
	5.30 – 7.30pm	Play Centre (Mixed 5 – 7 year olds)
Saturday		Club football and netball
Sunday	8 – 10pm	Senior Club with service at 9.15pm[36]

The Play Centre offered a range of activities to young children, such as drama, painting, cooking, games and help for parents. The Clare Club allowed young boys the opportunity to play billiards, table tennis, a range of sporting activities and visits, and a hobby club. According to Tina Stanley, who helped with this club, the boys even had a go at cooking. They were fascinated and delighted on one occasion to be told that cochineal was made from squashed beetles… and were keen to discover what creepy crawlies were in green food colouring![37] The Pilgrims' Club allowed girls to develop their own interests in things like acting, dancing and cooking, and aimed to help them prepare to leave school. The Bede House Club, or Senior Club, involved dancing, television watching, films, billiards, and table tennis. It is interesting that television watching should be a major occupation of the club, for it marks it out as a communal rather than a

solitary teenage experience as it more largely is today when young adults often have their own television sets in their rooms. In the 1960s, although most households owned a television, very few households had more than one, certainly in an area such as Bermondsey. This period also marked the beginning of broadcasting specifically for teenagers, such as the BBC's Top of the Pops (1964 to present), Juke Box Jury (1959 – 1967) and independent television's Ready Steady Go (1963 – 66).[38] The television viewing aspect of the club would allow the youngsters to enjoy watching these together, away from other family members' demands. The members had a committee that helped to run the club, and they were encouraged to become friends with the volunteers.[39] How far this latter element developed is open to debate – some of the residential volunteers, like John Stanley[40], found the older club members difficult to get on with or troublesome, and there is also evidence that the police were occasionally involved with helping to sort out problems that arose in Lady Gomm [41] Sometimes club volunteers from the local area had more success with the children and young people. Tina cited the case of Ralph, a young local man who volunteered to help with the clubs. On one occasion he accompanied a trip organised by the residential volunteers to the Tower of London. All was going well until security asked Ralph to leave because he had been smoking in the Tower grounds. Ralph's subsequent absence resulted in pandemonium breaking out in the souvenir shop on the way out![42] Roger Harrison[43] noted that one of the few people with the ability to immediately impose order on the Senior Club prior to Sunday evening prayers was actually the local MP at the time, Bob Mellish.[44]

Youth Work

These are examples, however, of some of the perennial problems of youth work, and all those involved with this type of work will recognise them! Quite often the gap in expectations between those of the youth worker and those of the members could lead to conflict. This gap need not necessarily be concerned with differing social class or backgrounds; in some cases it was simply that the children saw the club as theirs and resented adults' (justified) attempts to control the club and impose order. But in this case, certainly the Senior Club was largely composed of youngsters who had just left school and were embarking on their first jobs, and they were keen to exert their own power, however disruptive this may have been.

Bede also ran a programme of discussion groups, with topics in 1965 – 66 ranging from 'Televising Christianity' to 'Modern Trends in Education and the Needs of Young People Today'. These were held on Tuesday evenings in the sitting room at Bede House from 8.15pm. A series of occasional events also ran through the year. A training day for club volunteer helpers was held in November, and Clare College students visited in December for a weekend. In the run up to Christmas 1965, both a Christmas Market and a concert for the elderly and disabled were held. The 1966 AGM had the Bishop of Southwark as its speaker, and the Annual Fair to raise funds for the Lady Gomm clubs was held on 18 June 1966 at Aylwin School on Southwark Park Road.

Lady Gomm House

The Lady Gomm Clubs' Annual Fair

Each year the Annual Fair took on a different theme. In 1954, this was particularly memborable – the Grand Wild West. According to the Kentish Mercury, the youth club members dressed up as cowboys and formed a parade along the streets, raising money along the way. Besides the procession, which included a drum corps and motorcycle outriders, there was a trek caravan, square dancers and forty 'toy' soldiers.[45] In 1959, the fair had a 'Sports and Sportsmen' theme, and was opened by a 'famous television star' - a wrestler named Dazzler Joe Cornelius. It also boasted a procession led by the Regimental Band of the 3rd Parachute Regiment.[46] The 1960 fair had an eve of fair dance with entertainment provided by the Haydn Moore Five.[47] 1964 hosted an animal fair, with an evening barbecue dance.[48] Mike Gomm, who was involved with Bede/Bermondsey fairs in the 1970s, pointed out that the fairs became a central point in the Bermondsey year, and were thoroughly enjoyed by the community. Bede was also able to attract a number of well-known faces to open their fairs – such as Terry Thomas, star of It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World and Warren Mitchell, best known for his West Ham-supporting bigot Alf Garnett in 'Til Death Do Us Part and In Sickness and in Health. As Mike Gomm points out, these people may not have had direct connections with Bermondsey, but people in the area knew of them from films, television or radio, and this was a real treat.[49]

Residential Life at Bede

During the course of the 1950s and 1960s, Bede began to welcome an increasing number of students as visitors or residents. Three of the interviewees consulted for this volume were residents at Bede in the 1950s and 1960s – Roger Harrison, Tina Stanley and John Stanley. All three are now trustees of Bede House Association. Most of Bede's residents – like Tina – spent time in residence whilst working or studying at college or university. Tina had first come across Bede through her mother, who at one point had been involved with the fairs and worked with the Leisure Club on Tooley Street. Tina had worked with youth clubs whilst at University in Edinburgh.She continued this when she came to be a resident at Bede whilst studying at the LSE. As John and Tina recall, many of their co-residents were preparing for or starting out on careers in the 'caring' services, such as medicine, teaching and social work.[50] Roger Harrison, who had recently been to university and come out of the army, was working at The Times when he met Dorothy Furness, then Bede's Warden at a party,

The Master of Clare College at the time, Sir Eric Ashby, sent some of his students down to Bermondsey to study the need in the area, and their conclusion was that Clare should work through existing institutions. Although the resulting Clare-Bermondsey Fund was never specifically intended to be devoted to Bede, it was so in practice.

where she talked about her work at the settlement and the need for young people to come into residence. Three weeks later, he received a letter from Furness notifying him of a vacancy at Bede and inviting him to apply for it![51] Both Roger and Tina lived in Bede House, albeit at different times to each other – Tina's room was where the director's office is now located. Roger recalled that the twenty or so residents would take dinner at table, with Dorothy Furness at one end, and the bursar, Stella Masterman, at the other. The residents were committed to doing one evening a week in service at Bede, such as helping with clubs or visiting elderly people. [52] Whilst some residents came to Bede through personal contacts, others had a different route. John Stanley came to Bede firstly as a member of the Clare-Bermondsey graduate scheme in the early 1960s, as two other current trustees of Bede, Sarah Billiald and Jenny Shellens, in the 1990s.

Clare College

As mentioned earlier, Clare College had long-standing links with social work in South East London, but by the 1950s the future of their mission was becoming unclear. In 1959, the college decided to abandon its missionary activity and to channel its efforts in other directions. The Master of Clare College at the time, Sir Eric Ashby, sent some of his students down to Bermondsey to study the need in the area, and their conclusion was that Clare should work through existing institutions. Although the resulting Clare-Bermondsey Fund was never specifically intended to be devoted to Bede, it was so in practice. Students from Clare were able to spend a year in residence at Bede, working in a number of areas. The students built up friendships with the other residents, and found the experience of social work highly rewarding. As John pointed out in his interview, life in Bermondsey was very different from the sheltered life in the cloisters of Cambridge; and Bede also offered an economical, comfortable and safe alternative to the 'really squalid flat share' many young graduates had to tolerate during their early years in the capital.[53] Today, Bede and Clare organise regular trips from Bermondsey up to Cambridge and vice versa to introduce the students and the settlement users to each other. Students who are interested in furthering their work with Bermondsey are invited to apply for the graduate placement. This lasts for a year and provides students with a living allowance with which they find digs in the local area.[54] The

placement provides an excellent introduction to the voluntary sector and social work – the students are able to choose to work in areas that have particular interest to them. For example, Jenny Shellens was involved with the youth adventure project as a helper, and with the education project as a numeracy/Maths teaching assistant. She also got involved with administrative and fundraising work.[55] Sarah Billiald was also involved with fundraising, and before her year at Bede had gone along to help with the camps in the Wye Valley.[56] In several cases, the students stayed on after their year on the placement. As mentioned above, John Stanley, Jenny Shellens and Sarah Billiald have all subsequently become members of the Bede Council. Andrew Mossop began as a Bede-Clare graduate, and after training as a youth worker, would become in time the Senior Youth Worker on the Adventure Project.[57]


BEDE HOUSE ASSOCIATION

ANIMAL FAIR

IN AID OF LADY GOMM CLUBS

Aylwin School, Southwark Park Road

Saturday, 20th June, 1964

Stalls · Sideshows
Baby Show · Clothing · Roundabout
Donkey Rides · Refreshments

Grand Procession leaves Lady Gomm House at 2 p.m., led by the band of the Lambeth Sea Cadet Corps

AN AFTERNOON NOT TO MISS

Admission by Programme on at the gate
ADULTS 1/- · CHILDREN 6d.

Come back in the evening for a

BARBECUE DANCE

ADMISSION 5s

Courtesy of Southwark Local Studies Library

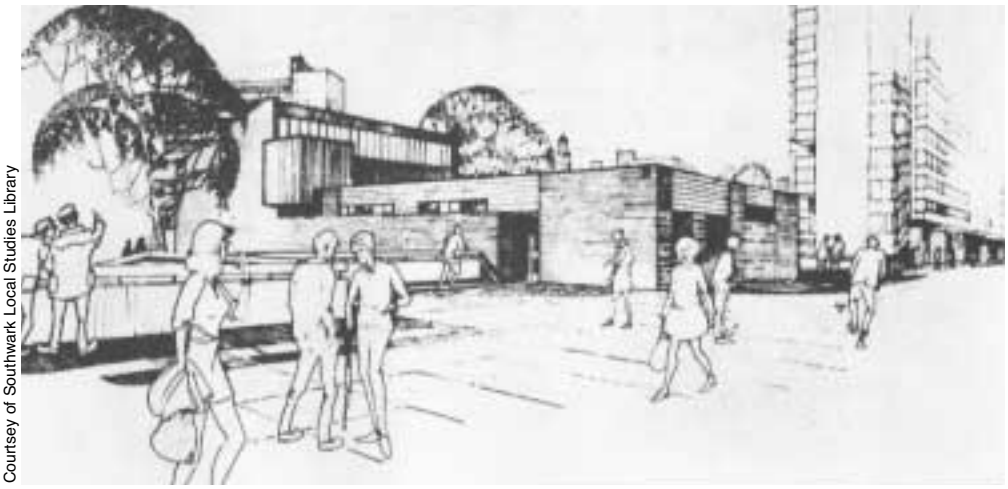
Sample flyer for Bede Annual Fairs

Royal Naval College

Slightly earlier, the Royal Naval College in Greenwich had begun to send its trainee officers up to Bede to help out on a regular basis. This link, as Roger Harrison recalled, was due to one of the trustees – Kenneth Lamb – working as a lecturer in history at the college. Lamb was therefore responsible for encouraging two of Bede's longest serving members and trustees, Sir Barry Wilson and Sir George Vallings, to become involved.[58] As Roger suggests, the Naval College had strong links with the area, and in some ways a vested interest in sending its officers up to Bermondsey. Whilst on the one hand the young officers had an excellent training in leadership, the college could also benefit from some publicity. The Docks were of course still going strong at this time, and Bermondsey and Rotherhithe had a very maritime flavour – an ideal recruitment ground for the Navy.[59] In their interviews, Sir Barry and Sir George both recalled spending an evening or so a week during their nine months' training at the college, often helping out with the boys' clubs, offering boxing classes. These were sometimes held in the Clare College Mission railway arches, and sometimes at Lady Gomm House. In the summer, the young officers could also be called upon to arrange a spontaneous game of football or cricket in the park.[60]

Chapter 3: Changing communities, changing centres

Although Bede had been granted the use of the Lady Gomm House for a peppercorn rent, by 1962 the Council was seriously considering changing their premises. The community around Bede was changing rapidly, and it



Courtsey of Southwark Local Studies Library

Architects drawing of the new Bede Centre

was felt that the settlement needed to integrate itself more fully and comprehensively within that community. One of the ideas mooted was the construction of a new centre on the Abbeyfield Estate. The new building would be in the very centre of the estate, and ideally constructed in the same style as the surrounding buildings.

In 1959, Bede had been recognised by the London County Council (LCC) as a community centre, and this meant that the LCC were keen to support the continuance of the settlement by funding the Warden's salary. On the one hand, this provided some financial stability; but it also opened up the way to Bede securing a joint LCC and Ministry of Education grant to build the new centre some years later. In or around the year 1965, a major capital appeal was launched to help fund the building of the new centre. By

November 1968, this appeal had raised over £10,000, a very substantial sum for that time. Shortly before the centre opened, Katherine Woodhouse, then director, launched another appeal to raise funds to keep the building open.

The new centre had been designed by the GLC's Architecture and Civil Design Department, and the construction had been directed by Hubert Bennett FRIBA FSIA and a team of architects lead by David Grove FRIBA. It was, as the author of one of the later appeal leaflets put it, the 'focal point' of the new GLC housing estate. 'It is a modern, light, practical building, easy to maintain, and designed with the activities of a community centre in mind'.[61] The building was certainly well equipped, with a sports hall for club activities and a café area for providing refreshments, amongst other things. Yet there would prove to be drawbacks with the centre over time. Firstly, although this would not have been obvious in the late 1960s, the nature of youth work was set to change away from the traditional weekly club based in a centre, and the sports hall would become increasingly underused. Secondly, the centre would become the 'property', so to speak, of the residents of the estate, who viewed it as their own and who could cause problems for centre users from other estates. [62] By being tucked away on the estate rather than on Southwark Park Road or any of the other main roads in the area, the centre missed out on catching the eye of people passing. It could also be quite daunting to walk through the estate to find the centre, particularly in the early evenings of winter. To an extent, the 'new' centre was one of the many casualties of the post-war housing dream, and like most purpose-built buildings it is prone to find itself becoming less useful over time as people's requirements change. To the casual observer, the Bede buildings seem unwelcoming, equipped as they are with heavy security doors and grids over the windows – unpleasant to look at but unfortunately necessary. Once one is through the door, the reality could not be more different. The buildings do not give Bede its flavour and character, but the people who work there or who come along to it.

A time for expansion

Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s Bede was expanding necessitating a further appeal for the centre and to cope with their work more generally. A new assistant warden had been appointed, younger members had joined the Executive Committee, and the residential volunteers were providing ever-greater help. It was noted that 'a far more active community sense within the borough [is] stretching our resources in the way we most want them to be stretched'.[63] The challenge for Woodhouse and her colleagues – and indeed all settlement and community workers – was to run the centre as economically as possible, yet without pricing the activities beyond the reach of those who wished to use it. Over the weekend of 8 – 9 November 1969, a conference was held at Lady Gomm House to decide how the new centre should be used on opening. Although the proceedings of this conference have not survived, a programme did, and this provides some insight into the thought that went into the centre. A series of important reports – such as Milson-Fairbairn's Youth and Community Work in the 1970s and the 1960

Bede House residents

Albemarle Report – figured largely in the planning. These seminal reports examined the ways in which young people could and should be served in the interests of the wider community. Bede was also keen to explore the ways in which these broader themes could be applied through the prism of Christianity, and this was a major theme of the second day. As Watson notes, the staff, members and council of Bede were seriously considering the role their Christianity and religious beliefs could have in the changing world of voluntary work. Until relatively recently, all meetings held at Bede commenced with a prayer, and the settlement had a very strong religious orientation. The pastoral aspect had been used in the past as a method of getting Bede's priorities back on track when the political affiliations of members had threatened to upset the balance of the settlement.[64]

Bermondsey in the 1970s was a place of immense change. One of the most immediately noticeable changes would have been the winding down and closure of the docks along that part of the Thames. With the docks closing, a large part of the character of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe went. Previously, the opening and closing of dock bridges had madethe area an island, cut off from the rest of London;[65] the bridges, dockers' shelters and sirens were all part of the fabric and spirit of Bermondsey life, even for those who were not involved with the docks. Now the docks lay redundant, as various groups decided what to do with them.

The second change was the demolition of the rows of terraces of Bermondsey to make way for new council housing. The London Borough of Southwark had one of the largest public housing programmes in Britain. Since 1946, 22,500 homes had been built in the area. In 1972, at the peak of the building programme, 1,775 homes were built at a cost of £11 million, and a further 5,700 were due to be built.[66] It is no exaggeration to say that great swathes of Southwark were demolished, and the landscape changed almost overnight. Although the new homes had better facilities than the older 'slums', they were not necessarily more popular:

"The flats are very nice inside but it's like looking out onto a barrack square. People from the flats keep telling me I should try and hang on to my little house with a garden."[67]

People were understandably attached to the homes they had spent their lives in, and were not happy about having to relocate themselves to the nearby new estates. As the 1970s wore on, Southwark Council began to realise and acknowledge that their policy of complete demolition had displaced the communities that had grown up over many years.[68] Furthermore, the 1969 Housing and the 1972 Housing Finance Acts put a financial brake on the policy of demolition and new building. These two factors encouraged Southwark Council to adopt a policy of restoring and converting properties.[69] However, the demographic damage was already done. By the late 1970s, long-established Bermondsey and Rotherhithe shop-keepers were beginning to comment on the fact that their customers were making special trips from other parts of London to visit them.[70] In other words, their 'traditional' customers with generations of loyalty to these firms were leaving the area, and instead of visiting them as regular customers, they were now treating the visit to the eel-pie shop or fishmongers' as a link to their past. The new residents of the area did not have these long-established connections. In 1981, the owner of a corner-shop next to a new housing development bemoaned the fact that he had known all his customers in the days of the rows of slum terraces; now he knew no-one in the new flats adjacent to his shop.[71]

It was not simply that residents from slum terraces in one part of the borough were being moved to new estates in another part. As a local Anglican priest remarked to a journalist in 1977, 80% of the homes in the area were now council properties, and young people were being forced out of the borough.[72] On the one hand, the lack of employment opportunities were pushing skilled workers out of the area, and had been since the 1950s;[73] on the other hand, young people were finding it difficult to find council homes in the area.[74] As Harold Carter noted, 'In Southwark physical mobility (out of the area) accompanied social mobility. At the same time, the [council housing] policy excluded many newcomers who wanted to settle in the area' as they were too 'successful' to be allocated homes as Southwark Council had developed a need-driven priority system for its housing.[75] Young, affluent, skilled workers with large families were leaving the borough in order to find homes and work suitable for them; they were 'leaving behind populations with high proportions of elderly people and unskilled workers.'[76] Not only had the 'traditional' communities of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe been dispersed around London, but the community that remained was increasingly disadvantaged. This would in time be balanced by the arrival of the highly affluent workers who moved into the new properties by the riverside, and also those who moved into the area as part of the owner-occupier scheme in the 1980s and 1990s.

Bede House Play Centre party

Challenges to Bede

These problems would be compounded by what we now know to be the problems of the post-war housing estates. Poorly-lit stairwells and the like can provide escape routes, hang-outs and hiding places for criminals; certainly law-abiding residents can fear these pockets of the estates. High-rise flats may have brilliant views but when the lift breaks down, elderly people and those with young children are forced to struggle up the stairs. Whilst much council housing is solid and well-built, some of the stock was shoddily built in the hurry to get the estates finished,[77] and residents struggle with damp, leaks and antiquated, expensive heating systems. In some cases, the architects did not consider the practicalities of the buildings they were designing for their future residents. For example, the windows of the Maydew House tower block on the Abbeyfield Estate whistled in the wind.[78] But beyond this, the most significant difference between the estate and the terrace-lined street as the loss of a community. Whereas neighbours on a street see each other coming in and out of their front doors, children playing in the street and people hanging out washing in the back garden, this is not so true of people living in purpose-built blocks of flats.[79] There the only real point of contact is the front door, the lift lobby and the stairwell – not places to linger, but points of departure or arrival.

Bede's challenge was therefore to bring an increasingly disparate community together. One of the solutions presented was the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Carnival. In the spirit of the earlier Lady Gomm Clubs fairs, the Carnival was a much anticipated annual event. All of the estates in the local area were asked to submit floats to the carnival, for which prizes would be awarded. There was also a carnival queen, dancing, dog shows, baby shows and the like. Unlike the fair, the Carnival ran for a week, with events happening on most days, and Saturday being the main day. Mike Gomm was one of the organisers of the Carnival. In the mid-seventies, the

Carnival had become the largest in South London, and one year boasted a turn-out of 8,000 people. Dare-devil events were a key part of the occasion – one year the Carnival hosted the closest parachute jump made to Central London. As Mike recalled, the aim of the carnival was to bring people together, perhaps neighbours on an estate working on their block's float. But it was also a 'holiday at home for the people of Bermondsey', a bit of fun and diversion. The carnival was run on a not-for-profit basis. After costs had been met, any surplus was distributed between local charities.[80] The carnival was an immensely valuable community event that provided entertainment at a time when relatively few people went away on holiday during the summer. The idea lives on in the shape of the annual Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Festival. This festival – which runs on the same weekends as the earlier Bede ones – is now organised by Time and Talents.

The late 1960s and 1970s also marked a transition in the settlement movement away from the 'residents and clubs' model. Almost without exception, the university settlements began to wind down their residential volunteer programmes. In retrospect, the change appears quite abrupt, and

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in many ways appears to be a consequence of the student protests of 1968. The 'traditional' constituency from whom potential residential workers had been taken effectively shrank as the impact of post-war prosperity became felt. Students were going to university in greater numbers, and they were also demanding greater independence whilst they were there. From this period onwards, students expressed an abiding preference for self-catered halls of residence and to live 'out' in shared houses and flats. Partly, this reflected their parents' willingness to financially support them in these types of accommodation, but it also allowed them greater freedoms away from the strictures of house rules and curfews. The students of the 1970s onwards were not necessarily more mature than their counterparts in earlier years, they were simply allowed more independence at an earlier stage. For those used to living in flatshares or even having their own bedsits, suddenly moving back as a graduate or as a postgraduate student to what was essentially a halls of residence could be a shock to the system.

Like many other settlements, Bede began to experiment with ways of making its living space available to groups in need. Bede for a while had arrangements with Social Services to accommodate people in need, firstly those leaving Borstal and later through the Residential Project. However, the residential community was reduced, and the communal meals were phased out in favour of self-catered accommodation. Besides Bede House and Lady Gomm, the settlement owned 318 and 320 Southwark Park Road and two houses adjacent to Lady Gomm. The two houses by Lady Gomm were eventually demolished to make way for council offices, and when the construction of the Bede Centre was completed, Bede was given two flats in Maydew House.81 The houses which had accommodated Bede residents were eventually let out to individuals connected with Bede. Yet these measures could not cope with the rising inflation of the 1970s, and in 1976 Hyde and Southbank Housing Association[82] took over the management of the accommodation.[83]

> ***The demise of both the GLC and the ILEA was about to have a massive impact upon the youth and education services at Bede. Rather than concentrating all of their energies on their social work, project workers and managers were required to reapply for funding for existing projects from Southwark Council etc.***

One of the features of Charles Woodd's tenure as director was an increasing involvement in community affairs, one of which was the organisation of the Surrey Docks Committee. Bede had always had close ties with the Docks, at one point running a Dockers' Club to accommodate dockers who were waiting for the next round of jobs to come up. The Surrey Docks Committee was, given the situation with the docks, the next logical step. The SDC was a way of ensuring that the redevelopment of the docks had some benefit for local people;[84] yet it was one of a number of politicised organisations in Docklands arguing and wrangling over the future of the area. In the long run, the activities of the London Docklands Development Corporation tended to favour the better off and businesses rather than the local people, certainly insofar as the reconstruction of the docks did not fully take into account the logistics of planning these new communities. The riverside is in some danger of becoming closed off as owners of prime real estate apportion off their properties; house prices in the area have risen as the more affluent move in, and the aspirant look for properties in adjoining areas. Yet, the dock redevelopment has brought greater accessibility to the area, with Bermondsey now having access to the Jubilee line, and quick

links to Canary Wharf and the West End. Whether this new accessibility benefits the disadvantaged in the local community is a matter of concern for the next author of a history on Bede House Association. Woodd's tenure also saw the development of the Rotherhithe Forum, which allowed local community groups to meet up and to discuss their work. An advice shop was also opened in the Blue, which aimed to remedy the absence of advice services in the area – prior to that, locals had had to go to Camberwell to consult a Citizen's Advice Bureau, or wait for their local MP to hold a surgery. Although such community 'empowerment' seems a very recent phenomenon in the voluntary sector, its roots are almost as old as the settlement movement itself. A young lawyer resident at Mansfield House Settlement in Canning Town, Frank Tillyard, set up a 'Poor Man's Lawyer' scheme in the 1890s, which allowed working people the opportunity to obtain reliable legal advice without having to pay prohibitive costs. The Citizens' Advice Bureaux was also supported in its infancy by the settlement movement. The advice shop in the Blue was at once an innovation to fill a very real need, and also part of a long tradition of empowering ordinary people to make the best decisions.

The year 1979, the last year of Charles Woodd's directorship was the first year of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government. In 1987, Thatcher infamously said:

> **I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand "I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!" or "I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!" "I am homeless, the Government must house me!" and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour and life is a reciprocal business.**[85]

Thatcher was throughout her government advocating a return to what have been termed 'Victorian values', or specifically to a notion of the deserving and undeserving poor. The Victorians, and most notoriously the Charity Organisation Society, were not the first to discriminate between the poor who could manage their own affairs without recourse to the Poor Law, and those who found life harder. In 1807, for example, Samuel Whitbread proposed a system of badges denoting able-bodied people who refused to work.[86] A large number of Victorian social commentators and activists in particular advocated 'self-reliance' – a state achieved by sobriety, industry, thrift and piety. Thatcher's principles, as the above quotation demonstrates, were a slightly modernised version of this. She was vehemently opposed to the notion of people relying on society, and particularly the government, to solve their problems.

As Luke Geoghegan points out in his forthcoming paper on the university settlements since 1945, Conservative policy aimed to rigorously control public spending, and to demand that any public expenditure reached targets set by the government. The settlements' problem was that they were dependent on the Greater London Council and the Inner London Education Authority for funding – both abolished towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s – and also on local authorities, most of whom had their budgets cut each year. The settlements, Geoghegan argues, were not designed to work to targets, but to embrace a notion of social and community development.[87]

The Demise of the GLC

For the directors of Bede in the 1980s – Peter Polish and Jenny Bentall Williams – the Conservative social and monetary policies caused great logistical problems. Andrew Sutton, who was Chairman of Council in 1988, noted in the Annual Report that the demise of both the GLC and the ILEA was about to have a massive impact upon the youth and education services at Bede. Rather than concentrating all of their energies on their social work, project workers and managers were required to reapply for funding for existing projects from Southwark Council and other bodies. Now, as Sutton noted, there was an element of competition between the various charitable groups as they clamoured to get a piece of what was an ever-smaller pot.[88] The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, had cut personal taxes in the last budget – so therefore the average Briton had more money in his or her pocket – yet public spending was curtailed. Sutton observed that the challenge was to increase these private donations at the same time that the public were – quite reasonably – enjoying the luxury of having more money in their pockets.[89] Jenny Bentall Williams echoed Sutton's comments: 'As we approach April 1989 we are already facing major cuts in support from statutory authorities, and as yet private sources of income cannot be found to replace them'.[90]

The future was not entirely bleak, as on one level, Bede was fortunate to have an excellent team of staff, trustees and volunteers whose efforts steered the settlement through the crisis in the voluntary sector. The people who work at Bede and those who help run it have been remarkably flexible and able to look critically at the work they are doing and assess whether it truly meets a local need. As will be discussed in the following section, Bede has never been afraid to leave things behind in favour of a more-needed project. On another level, several new funding bodies with high profiles were about to or had just emerged. Comic Relief was established in 1986 to raise money for charities in the UK and abroad, and like Children in Need and Telethon, was an excellent way of bringing the work of the voluntary sector to the attention of the British public. Bede has benefited from these new sources of funding over recent years – for example, the café project received a substantial amount of capital funding from the National Lottery to refurbish the kitchen. Bede, like all other voluntary organisations, has had to adapt to the times in order to be attractive to these new funders and the agendas they set.

Chapter 4: Bringing People Together Bede from 1980 to the present

The Bede Education Centre

Bede's agenda throughout the last couple of decades has clearly been to empower individuals and groups in the local community to develop themselves to their fullest potential. One such move was the establishment of the adult literacy project in 1976. In the late 1970s, Bede was becoming increasingly aware of the large numbers of people in the local area who had low literacy skills, and at the time the only resources for adult learning were based at the Frobisher Institute in Peckham, or at Cambridge House in Camberwell.[91] The logical step for Bede to take was to set up a local education project.

Bede House Adventure Project meeting with HRH Prince Edward at the London Boat Show

The education project was initially staffed by volunteer tutors, but soon it was able to have salaried, part-time tutors.[92] The education project continued to grow, continually evolving and developing to meet the needs of the local population. The education project was also beginning to make information technology available to the people of Bermondsey – in 1988, the centre possessed one BBC computer. Keeping up with the explosion in IT was not easy for people who had been away from education for some time or who did not have computers at home. This has been one of the key activities of the education centre:

The Bede Adult Education Centre

When my office went over to computers they gave me some training but I didn't really understand it, so I thought I had better come to Bede. Coming here has helped me keep my job, I'm sure of it.93

I use Bede on a regular basis. As I have no computer myself, I would experience great difficulty were the centre not close by.94

I initially came to Bede to do computer classes with a view to going back to work once my children were at school, but I went on to become a volunteer in Bede's literacy classes and that boosted my confidence, giving me invaluable experience and helped me focus on what I wanted to do. I enjoyed helping adults with their reading and writing and giving something back. I have been to other colleges but Bede can't be matched: the tutors are excellent – always approachable and the atmosphere for learning is relaxed but focused.95

English as a Second Language became an increasingly important part of the education project's work as the local population changed over time. An ESOL course was first introduced in 1989, and by 1992, the project had been able to develop a number of ethnic community specific courses, designed to focus on the particular needs of each group. With Southwark Refugee Project, a scheme for helping Somali women had been started; and there was also a course for those arriving from the New Commonwealth. The ESOL courses were – and still are – a vital first step for those joining the community. Nga, a Vietnamese student, stated that:

I studied at Bede since January 2001. I studied here because I would like to get a job and improve my knowledge in IT and English. Since I studied at Bede I have improved a lot. It enabled me to get a job. Now I am working at Winchmore School as a Senior Technician.96

Another student, Adama, came to Bede to build up her skills in English:

I came to Bede for read write and speak English. I like this class for two reasons. I have a nice teacher. They really teach me to understand very much.[97]

The general consensus of opinion amongst the education project users is that it is a centre totally geared to their individual needs. The students receive an enormous amount of attention from their tutors, which is exactly the boost they are looking for, that extra bit of help and encouragement:

I like the smaller classes to work within because I feel the tutor can give each one of the students more attention. This is important if the student lacks confidence or if he/she is shy. It also allows the student to achieve more.[98]

The Bede Education Centre, as it came to be known, has focussed in on a particularly important need amongst the local people, and has found a way of meeting that need in the most appropriate manner. It has identified that many people who do not possess basic skills need to be approached in a friendly, low-key way, that they are intimidated and worried about the prospect of enrolling at a large college. The centre has also been willing to ensure that its opening times and entry requirements are as flexible as possible. Crucially, the centre has been able to adapt to the changing educational situation – rather than insisting on teaching the same curriculum year in, year out, the centre has continuously looked to expand its provision to meet the needs or potential needs of its students. The prime example of this would be its inclusion of IT courses within its programme. The success of the project led to it becoming an independent charity in April 2002, and continuing its work under the name of BEC.

The Print Place

From the 1970s, Bede had begun to offer vocational training to the local community through the Print Place. The Print Place had originally been intended to provide silk-screen printing services to local community groups at cost price, but soon developed into a valuable training scheme. Many Print Place graduates found their way into jobs in the printing industry, which by this point was being to concentrate itself in the local area, firstly with News International at Wapping, and also with the Daily Mail group at the Surrey Docks. However, the Print Place was a victim of its own success. Printing at cost price had been a real boon to fellow organisations, but it effectively left the centre without capital to invest in new equipment. This became an increasing problem as the printing industry began to develop technologically and it became harder to find funding to update the equipment. That technical, skilled industries were returning to the Bermondsey area was a good thing; but the scale of the Print Place's competitors both in size and technological terms was huge. Smaller organisations such as the Print Place were hard pressed to match the

The Print Place

capabilities and capacity of the more advanced printers. However, the Print Place's departure allowed the education centre to expand, and by doing so, enabled a greater number of people to benefit. The Print Place had offered rather specialised training to a relatively small group; the education centre could offer the broader training necessary for people to get themselves into a depressed labour market. It was far better to fold the Print Place than to desperately keep it running in a worsening situation, and its closure meant that a larger group of people were able to benefit.

The Adventure Project

At the same time that the Education Project was being set up in the late 1970s, moves were being made to refashion the provision for young people in the area. One example of this attempted to reach children who did nto respond to more conventional means was the Scott Lidgett Alternative to School which provided support to teenage boys who found school difficult to cope with[99]. The role of youth clubs had been changing over time, reflecting a variety of social changes. On the one hand, children had been 'retreating' into the home as their parents' greater affluence could buy them toys and games to use at home. Yet, there would always be children who did not have such facilities and other children who wanted a bit of excitement. The Youth Adventure Project combined a sustained youth work programme with activities that were out of the ordinary – Duke of Edinburgh awards, sailing, and annual summer camps. Two young members, Amy and Sarah commented that:

> **Bede is fun. It is really cheap to do different activities, especially Summer Camp which gives us the chance to go away for a full week. It is good to have something every week which keeps us from getting bored or getting into trouble. Also Bede gives us a chance to meet and communicate with new people. We like the fact that we can get a lift home so we don't have to walk home in the dark and get scared. The workers are funny and make us laugh.**[100]

Besides providing the young people with something exciting to do, the youth adventure project was also keen to help them develop their potential as young adults. Its priorities were 'young people first and adventure second'.[101] Jenny Shellens, currently Chair of Council, was involved with the youth club during her year on the Clare graduate scheme, and she recalled that the youth leaders had established a great rapport with the youngsters.[102] This gave them a great basis from which to develop pastoral work, such anti-racist and anti-drugs work. The youth workers were also able to help overcome some of the children's prejudices and preconceptions about each other by encouraging them to see those things they had in common.[103] Ahmed commented that:

> **Bede has made me see the world differently, as we have chats about reality – talk about what is right and wrong, what we can do to stay away form people that break the law such as drug dealers, under age sex etc. This really helps me to tell who is not a good person to hang about with and who are really your friends. I would really like to thank Bede as I feel safe!**[104]

Canoeing experience for young adventurers

The club was also a very useful and immediate way of bringing home an anti-racist message to the young people. One young man, Nick, was shocked to realise that 'They're alright, you know!' He had made friends with some young Somali boys whilst on summer camp:

> **The penny dropped for him during a game of midnight run-outs in a wood in Kent, while on a joint-residential between a white group and a Somali group who would never normally mix in Bermondsey.**[105]

By bringing different groups of young people together, Bede effectively demonstrated to them that they had much in common to celebrate and very little to fear from one another. The youth adventure project has helped many teenagers to develop into well-rounded adults, and in the process has allowed them to make friends with each other and try out activities not to be found in the streets of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe.

Anti-racism and community work

The youth programme's success with its anti-racism work was not an easy process. The evolution of a diverse community in Bermondsey has had its benefits – and its problems. Along with other boroughs in London, Southwark has welcomed many of the groups who for economic or political reasons have been forced to leave their home country to seek refuge and security here. Yet whilst Britain has long had a *reputation* as a nation sympathetic to refugees, not all Britons made the newcomers welcome. Although some of the old Bermondsey families were moved out during the estates reconstruction, the families that replaced them were predominantly white as for some time immigrants were not able to gain access to council housing.[106] Equally, as was mentioned earlier, Bermondsey was increasingly becoming home to unskilled workers rather than the more prosperous skilled.[107] By and large, Bermondsey and Rotherhithe were homogeneous areas. Rotherhithe in particular had a sense of itself as an island, an impression heightened by the raising and lowering of the dock bridges.

> ***The area was a fertile ground for the British National Party (BNP). That is not to say that the 'indigenous' population of Bermondsey is inherently racist. Any group that fears for its future and is not sufficiently reassured is in danger of being courted by the simplistic and therefore attractive 'solutions' of extremist parties.***

According to Harold Carter's analysis of the 1951 Census, 97% of people living in the three boroughs that would make up the later borough of Southwark were born in the British Isles.[108] In 1981, 4% of the population living to the north of the Old Kent Road came from a Black or Black British background. By the 1991 census, this had risen to 12%.[109] According to the most recent census, taken in 2001, the population of the ward in which the Bede Centre is based – Rotherhithe ward – was 16.3% Black/Black British (of which 12.2% were of African origin), 3% Asian/Asian British, 3.4% Chinese or East Asian, and 2.8% mixed ethnicity.[110]

Despite Bermondsey's proximity to the docks, the ethnicity of the area had been substantially the same for many years. Within twenty years, the demographics of the area had changed dramatically. Combined with high levels of poverty during the recession of the early 1990s, the area was a

fertile ground for the British National Party (BNP). That is not to say that the 'indigenous' population of Bermondsey is inherently racist. Any group that fears for its future and is not sufficiently reassured is in danger of being courted by the simplistic and therefore attractive 'solutions' of extremist parties. To take an historical example of the problem, in the 1930s Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts had profited in Hackney and Stoke Newington from exploiting the locals' fears about the Jewish community moving into the area from Whitechapel.[111] In Bermondsey in the early 1990s, children and teenagers were absorbing the tensions around them, and very little anti-racist youth work was being done to combat this: 'the danger was that young white people would be ignored by everyone except the BNP, who were effectively doing street youth work'.[112] The early 1990s were a period during which the BNP enjoyed a degree of success in East and South East London. In 1993, at the peak of the problem, the BNP candidate Derek Beacon was elected as a councillor for Millwall in the Isle of Dogs, much to the disgust and horror of many people. Bermondsey's particular problems in this regard began with an outbreak of racial tension on the Abbeyfield Estate in 1991; and in April 1992 Bede suffered a serious arson attack on the Adventure Project. The Annual Report of 1993 – 4 noted alongside a statistic that revealed Southwark to be the fourth poorest borough in London, that racism was still an on-going problem. Leah Levane, director at the time, recalled a particularly unpleasant experience:

> **Someone had just tried to torch the place, and there was graffiti everywhere – 'Wogs go home', 'Rights for Whites', swastikas… stuff like that. There she [Levane] stood, director of the youth club, surrounded by 40 to 50 angry, young white men.**
>
> **'They came out with this amazing vitriol', she remembers. 'How come you have that tatty old car and all the black people have BMWs?' that sort of thing. But when I questioned them they had no response, it was just a bunch of stereotypes they'd picked up. Gradually, as we talked, you could see one or two start to think about what they were saying.'**[113]

The problem did recede during the mid-1990s, but not without a couple of particularly innovative projects being undertaken by Bede. The first was the Detached Youth Work project, which commenced in 1993 and resulted in the 1997 publication of the National Youth Agency's Blood, Sweat and Tears by Stella Dadzie, one of the project workers. This was an attempt to meet those children who would normally be excluded from clubs and

activities or who showed no interest in them. Rather than the children attending clubs, the workers went out to meet them. This method has been remarkably successful and its results have been enduring. By 1994, eighty young people were involved with the project, and the Metropolitan Police noted that Bede's work with the children had contributed to a 40% decrease in crime on one of the estates in the project.[114] The detached youth work aspect has since become a part of the youth adventure project, but Stella Dadzie's report has gone on to become key reading for teachers and youth workers across the United Kingdom.

Outreach Work

Bede's outreach work had been pioneered by Charles and Joanna Woodd. Joanna's work with disaffected youngsters had its echoes in the detached youth work project of the 1990s and 2000s; and Charles' Rotherhithe Forum and work with Triple 'S' had created the scope for Bede to work collaboratively with other voluntary organisations and individuals in the

Mothers and Toddlers on a day out

area. This type of work proved to be one of the best ways for uncovering need. Work ostensibly in one area could reveal further need in another, and with time, Bede's outreach programmes could develop a focussed approach that was at the same time suitably broad in scope. In the late 1980s, Bede's outreach work encompassed a wide range of needs, from a mothers' and toddlers' club to groups for young men and women with learning disabilities. It aimed to cater for everybody, and yet was not able to, as funding could not be maintained for all the activities year on year. Whilst it was noble to attempt such scope, it was ultimately reducing the outreach programme's overall capacity. Nevertheless, their variety was a symptom of their versatility – the outreach programme was particularly good at identifying need and responding to it. Such was the case when the project

workers realised that many parents were having difficulties understanding the newly-introduced National Curriculum. By 1991, the outreach programme had split into two parts – community and education. The education side would fade in time to leave a stronger, leaner community outreach project. Rather than trying to be all things, the community side began to focus on particularly pressing needs, such as anti-racism work with the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Anti-Racist Forum and community safety work with the Metropolitan Police in the early 1990s. From their work with immigrant and refugee women, the outreach workers noticed that some women were experiencing violence both within and without the home; and that there was an increasing need to work on domestic violence issues with women in all parts of the community.[115] Essentially, the outreach programme developed two core activities, supporting victims of racial harassment and domestic violence, which it performs consistently and comprehensively. Rather than addressing need per se – certainly there was a need to provide clubs for mothers and toddlers, but there were other providers at the time of such activities – Bede's outreach programme began and continues to search for needs that are not being addressed by any service provider. Domestic violence and racism are two areas that if ignored, do the most damage to the community and the individuals within it. By concentrating its development, the Bede outreach programme is managing to reach some of the most isolated people in the community – the very purpose of such a project.

Voluntary Organisation

1992 and 1993 were the two hardest years of the national recession in the early 1990s, and many people who were out of work came forward as volunteers in order to find a stepping stone to something else. However, it was at this point that Southwark lost both its Volunteer Bureau and its Council for Voluntary Services. Bede was able to step in to fill the need by securing funding to create the post of Volunteer Co-ordinator, which was filled by Keib Thomas. This was highly successful, locating a bank of volunteers with widely differing experiences and expectations across the borough's voluntary organisations. In some cases, it was also a method of helping would-be volunteers take the first step to acquire skills they would need to find a job in the future.[116] Some volunteers were referred to the Bede Education Centre. This project evolved into the Voluntary Action Rotherhithe and Bermondsey (VARB), and then later the South Bermondsey Project. Besides acting as a resource for the area's voluntary sector, one of VARB's aims was to find ways of helping people deal with urban overload, the vast array of stresses that arise from life in the inner cities. It also sought to address the problems left behind by the LDDC's exit from the area, which

left many voluntary organisations with much work to do, and few practical resources with which to do it. VARB's work in placing volunteers with organisations and assisting those charities with coping with fundraising and effective management largely kept the voluntary sector in the area afloat. The South Bermondsey Project was designed to explore and identify the community development needs of the area – and its first finding was that 'there are only five voluntary organisations in the area with no regeneration, community safety or community development initiatives taking place. However, the findings also reveal a new and dynamic interest in community development both nationally and within Southwark'.[117] The South Bermondsey Project sought to bring these voluntary organisations and similar groups together to network between themselves as well as to provide advice on how to more efficiently run their services. The Project also designed and produced a Networking Directory for Southwark. This was a project designed to empower community organisations to cope with the changing world of the voluntary sector, and it was not afraid to evolve itself.

If the 1990s were marked by work with community organisations, the early 2000s have been characterised by the growth of projects to encourage individual members of the community to get involved with the society in which they live. Bede's most recent community empowerment project has been the Hands-On the Blue, Bermondsey and Rotherhithe. It is funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and is run jointly with Cambridge House and Talbot, another settlement. The aim of the project is to bring people into the democratic process and to become involved in Local Area Plans and a Local Strategic Partnership in order to exert some control over the development of their area:

> **The Hands-On Project is concerned with identifying local issues, needs and barriers to participation, working directly with individuals and groups and linking residents into existing services, promoting and encouraging self-help and other innovative approaches to dealing with issues, and identifying local community champions.**[118]

The second phase of the project is to help local residents put their ideas and strategies forward to the relevant bodies and thereby become fully involved in the democratic process. Although the Hands-On project has only been in existence for a year at the time of writing, it is a very exciting development that should assist the residents of the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe areas to have a say in how their neighbourhoods are run. Other similar projects have been recently launched in the area, such as the Southwark Council Community Councils and Southwark Alliance's Neighbourhood Priority Area scheme. The Community Councils were set up in April 2003 to get local residents more closely involved with their local council. Elected councillors are required to serve on the community councils and to work with local people to make decisions. Key issues in 2003 for the Rotherhithe area included setting up a Rotherhithe Community Forum, appointing school governors at two local primary schools, and encouraging young people to get

In the Bermondsey area, local people wanted to tackle 'crime and grime', traffic and services for young people. Key issues in 2003 for the Rotherhithe area included setting up a Rotherhithe Community Forum, appointing school governors at two local primary schools, and encouraging young people to get involved.

involved. In the Bermondsey area, local people wanted to tackle 'crime and grime', traffic and services for young people.[119] The Priority area work is part of the government's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund scheme. The Southwark Alliance – which is made up of representatives from the council, the health service, the Metropolitan Police, the Department of Work and Pensions, the voluntary sector, religious organisations and local people – is ultimately charged with improving the lives of people who live and work in the areas it covers. The borough of Southwark has been divided up into six areas. Representatives in these areas draw up local area action plans, concentrating on particular on priority neighbourhoods. The priority neighbourhoods are those with a 'concentration of issues needing attention'.[120] These issues include high levels of economic and educational deprivation; unemployment and benefit claiming levels; and high incidences of poor health amongst the population.[121] The local area action plans focus on areas of need that have been identified by the alliance members and local people, and these findings are then passed for action to the police, the council and the voluntary sector.

Hands-On is particularly involved with the South Bermondsey and North Livesey Neighbourhood Action Plan's work on social cohesion and community involvement. It will be helping to co-ordinate community resources in the area, and to work with specific estates – Abbeyfield, Rennie, Bonamy and Bramcote – to boost social cohesion, to promote the Action Plan and similar activities, such as the community councils.[122] Hands-On, Community Councils and the Priority Neighbourhood Schemes are all working to bring the local community and service providers together, to get local people talking to one another and working with each other. Although these are extremely recent initiatives, they hark back to the earliest days of the university settlement movement. In the 1880s and 1890s, residents at settlements across London and the United Kingdom began to get involved with local sanitary committees, tenant defence associations and school boards. Their motives were to ensure that these bodies were being run in the best interests of the local community rather than local slum landlords; today, the settlements are keen to get the local community fully involved in making decisions in matters that apply to them. It is also a continuation of Bede's work throughout its history of helping the local community to come together and also to empower themselves, from the festivals and fêtes through to the outreach programme and education.

A Bede Cafe trainee

The Bede Café Project

The Bede Café Project was set up in the late 1980s to provide work experience and training opportunities for people with learning disabilities. The café in the Bede Centre had originally been intended to be a meeting point for the estate residents, but this had never truly taken off.[123] The café project really touched a need for helping young adults with learning disabilities to gain essential life skills, develop confidence, meet people and give, in some cases, valuable structure to their day. Its growth was rapid, and its provision expanded from offering the basic hygiene certificate to its trainees to allowing them to work for a Level One NVQ (roughly equivalent to GCSEs at grades G to D). The trainees learnt how to handle money, to help customers and to take orders besides undertaking more general work on their life skills. The café project has been an excellent blend of providing constructive activities for these young trainees alongside a comprehensive catering service. Some trainees go on to get involved with the Go For It! Volunteering scheme, which provides further opportunities for them to gain work and life experiences. Its success has been through evolving a core activity base – the running of a café – from which many supplementary activities can be added. The café therefore allows its trainees to benefit from both its structured activities and a variety of new experiences. It becomes a large part of the trainees' lives, and they often stay until the project can no longer usefully help them.

The Bede Café is one of the few places where an outsider can truly come into contact with the results of Bede's work and the way its users feel about it. Certain projects by the nature of their work are closed to the observer, such as the domestic violence and anti-racism projects; others, like the education or youth adventure projects are best appreciated by the people who use them or work on them. Yet anyone can go along to the café, and see the trainees in action. It truly is a vibrant, happy and pleasant place, and it is rare to visit a café where the staff are enjoying themselves as much as the customers!

Conclusion

Bede House Association's 65th anniversary comes at a time of great change, both external and internal. The docklands are continuing to develop into a major financial centre, and the Mayor of London's office has been seeking to regenerate the eastern side of the city with the Crossrail transport project and the possibility of holding the Olympics. Blair's New Labour government pledged in the late 1990s to set in motion mechanisms to end child poverty by 2025, and has ploughed money into various social initiatives such as Sure Start, which aims to support parents of very young children. The latest community and citizenship initiatives – such as the community councils – are also exciting projects on Bede's doorstep. At 'home', the leaving of the Bede Education Centre will allow Bede the space to either branch out into new work or to expand its current projects. All of these offer rich opportunities and new problems to seek solutions for.

The Annual Report of 1993 – 4 noted the findings of the Toynbee Hall/BASSAC initiative, 'The Apple Needs a Core', which allowed settlements to have a free assessment by a management consultant. Bede's consultant concluded that the settlement reaches out to individuals rather than pursuing causes; it seeks to serve the whole community. This is as true of Bede in 2003 as of Bede in 1938 or of the Princess Marie Louise Settlement before that. It is Bede's strongest and most abiding quality. The ideal settlement, to paraphrase Canon Barnett, is one that is redundant because want has been eradicated. One hundred and twenty years later, we seem on the one hand to be no closer to this ultimate goal than we were in 1884. Poverty and deprivation still exist, despite our efforts. But the settlement movement has not stood still, and has made considerable efforts to improve the lives of the people it serves. What matters is that a group of people are committed to taking the steps to improve things for the benefit of all – and this has certainly been the case at Bede since 1938. Bede House Association may be a relative youngster in the settlement movement, but it has as much to be proud of and to celebrate as any other.

Wardens and Directors of Bede House Association

Nellie Hooker 1938 – 1948

Dr. Glazer (acting Warden during Blitz) 1941 – 1943

Noël Nye 1948 – 1956

Dorothy Furness 1956 – 1966

Kate Woodhouse 1966 – 1970

Charles Woodd 1970 – 1980

Peter Polish 1980 – 1984

Jenny Bentall Williams 1984 – 1990

Leah Levane 1990 – 1997

John Westby 1997 – 1998

Marc Thackham 1998 – 1999

John Westby (acting director) 1999

Conrad Hollingsworth 1999 – 2002

John Westby (acting director) 2002

Nick Dunne 2002 –

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About the Author

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