



Time and Talents Settlement

By Richard Miller



The handsome Time and Talents Settlement (T&T) at 187-189 Bermondsey Street was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield in the Arts and Crafts style in 1907. A partial reconfiguration of the original 1899 club house, the works cost £2500, raised by donations and fundraising events.

Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein, a daughter of Queen Victoria, was invited to open the new centre on Saturday, 14 November 1908.



The front elevation, constructed using purple bricks and framed by red brickwork around the windows and columns, helps the building to stand out against the common London brickwork seen on many neighbouring buildings. The right-hand side of the building has a steeply pitched crow-stepped gable, hiding attic windows.

We get a glimpse of the Bermondsey Street site as it looked in the early 19th century from two illustrations. The first, by John Chessell Buckler, in 1828 (*left*), and a second in 1840 by G.W. Philips (*above*).



Minna Gollock first developed the idea of Time and Talents in 1887, together with a group of like-minded women at meetings of the Young Women's Christian Association. They had become increasingly aware of the restricted opportunities available to young girls living in underprivileged areas. Part of a broader settlement movement during the late 19th century, the organisation encouraged educated women to contribute their time, share their skills, knowledge and experiences to enhance the lives of others less fortunate.

After a short period based in Whitechapel in 1888, Henry Lewis, Rector of St Mary Magdalene, Bermondsey Street, urged Time and Talents to move their work south of the river, and the first

settlement worker, Miss Bathurst, moved into rooms at a house in Bermondsey Square. Marjorie Daunt, writing in her history of Time and Talents, *By Peaceful Means*, recounts:

"Each evening, she played the piano at the open window of her sitting room overlooking the street; the wild spirits gathered to listen and look, soon to be welcomed inside."

Monies raised from events and concerts held across London and the Home Counties enabled Time and Talents to move into its permanent home in 1899, next to the Rectory at 112 Bermondsey Street - a former tailor's shop (later renumbered 187-189).

In the early 20th century, it was estimated that around 5000 young girls were employed in factories within the parish of St Mary Magdalene. Working conditions were challenging, and wages were low. Housing was often poor, and families commonly shared homes, sometimes living in only one or two rooms.

The project proved successful, and the *South London Press* reported that 500 girls had joined the Bermondsey Street Settlement and its sister club located at the Parish Room, Dockhead, which had opened in 1903. During the drive to raise funds for improved facilities, the *Southwark and Bermondsey Recorder* reported that the '*Guild of Time and Talents in Bermondsey Street has been a conspicuous success*', and urged factory owners to support the scheme, given the '*indirect benefit to many employers of female labour*'.

The new Blomfield-designed Time and Talents Settlement, completed in 1907 and formally opened in 1908, provided a warm and safe place for women and young girls to meet and socialise after work - an alternative to an overcrowded home or the beer houses, gin palaces and public houses on Bermondsey Street. It included accommodation for settlement workers, allowing them to live amongst the community. They wore uniforms resembling nun-like gowns, giving them a clear identity and protection from any trouble on the street outside.

A classroom and a club room capable of holding 100 girls provided space for activities including singing, sewing, reading, basketry and bible studies. The settlement also provided regular hot meals for 80 girls in winter months for 2½d, plus a hot cup of tea for an extra penny.

Girls enjoyed excursions to the countryside and holidays by the sea, and one particular trip further afield to Holland attracted the interest of Queen Juliana of the Netherlands, who asked to visit Bermondsey Street with Queen Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother) during her state visit to the UK in November 1950.

The growth of the Welfare State after World War Two saw a reduction in the need for many support services provided by Time and Talents, but a refocus and inclusion of the needs of the wider community enabled the organisation to continue and thrive.

Time and Talents stayed at its Bermondsey Street home until 1962, and today, the building has a mixed use of offices and flats. It relocated to The Old Mortuary on St Marychurch Street, Rotherhithe, in 1980.

Sources: *By Peaceful Means*, Mary Daunt, 1989; *Southwark and Bermondsey Recorder*, 2 May 1903 and 11 May 1907; *South London Press*, 20 Nov 1908; *The Royal Story*, by L. A. Nickolls, 1951; *Time and Talents*, www.timeandtalents.org.uk

