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Resources for Democracy:
A short history of
Bradford Resource Centre

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Ref. Buff 45112, Blue 45113, Green 45114, Grey 45115,
Orange 45116, Pink 45117, Yellow 45118.



Resources for Democracy: A short history of Bradford Resource Centre

Joel White, August 2025

Introduction

Bradford Resource Centre (BRC) was set up in January 1979, to establish a base in Bradford providing information, research and practical support to community and trade union groups. In 2022, the Old Quaker School building on Chapel Street, which had been BRC's home since 1995 was damaged due to a flood, with some of the BRC archive and library affected.

The subsequent clean up prompted a group of people with various connections to BRC to get together to archive and preserve what they could from the space, and get it back into community use. This group, Friends of Bradford Resource Centre (FoBRC) also fundraised a small amount of money - from Bradford 2025, the Lipman-Miliband Trust, and the British Art Network – to create an archival website, exhibition, and film about BRC and the wider history of radical politics it was part of. The producer on this project, Joel White, and artist Adam Lewis Jacob hosted four workshops with Bradford youth film collective Toothless Films as part of this, thinking collaboratively about how to approach archiving and history. Joel also began writing up this short, written history as part of the process, based on material we were finding at BRC, a series of oral histories about BRC undertaken throughout 2025 with Bradford Community Broadcasting (BCB), and some additional research.

This document has been written by Joel, in the spirit of non-professional 'history from below' and 'history from within', and trying to capture some of the ethos and story of BRC, 46 years on from its founding.¹ This a way of doing history which focuses on ordinary people, how they shape and can write their own history, and thinks carefully about how established archives and

1 For a more detailed outline of Joel's approach to 'history from within' see Laura C. Forster & Joel White. 2025. *Friends in Common: Radical Friendship and Everyday Solidarities*. London: Pluto (page 23-24)

historic records tend to serve the powerful². FoBRC - including ex- BRC workers, volunteers and members of the BRC management committee – have offered feedback and ideas, but responsibility for any errors or omissions is Joel's. This document is a short and partial history of the BRC and the wider political movements it helped resource and support. It is skewed towards people who we've been able to track down at quite short notice, and physical materials (minutes, annual reports, photos, flyers etc) that were still at the centre. Part of the difficulty of writing such a history is the expansive ways in which BRC was part of and linked to a huge range of movements, organisations and initiatives. We try capture some of this here but - much like the process of sorting through the materials we found in piles and old filing cabinets across the BRC building – there will be things missing, important people that don't get mentioned, and random ways in which things end up at the top of the pile. Ultimately, there are many different ways of telling the history of BRC, and this is just one, written to sketch a broad picture of the organisation and its links to a wider history of political organising in Bradford.

We hope it can aid or inspire other histories of BRC and radical politics in Bradford and beyond. One more caveat: 'Bradford Resource Centre' as a phrase has often been used describe the Old Quaker School space on Chapel Street, but this was technically the 'Arts and Resources Centre for the Community (ARCC)', including Bradford Community Arts (who helped establish the space in 1987) and a range of other organisations over the years. We decided through this project to collect and archive material from Chapel Street as a shared space, telling the

2 For more on 'history from below', work of Marcus Rediker is a good place to start. This interview is a useful introduction: Carl Grey Marin & Modhumita Roy. 'Narrative Resistance: A Conversation with Historian Marcus Rediker' (Workplace, 30, 2018) p. 56

specific story of BRC, ARCC and some of the various other organisations it mingled and shared space with from 1995 onwards in this, its final home.

* * *

Summary:

We begin in 1979, giving some context to the pre-history of BRC, and the different political struggles it gathered together. Here, groups and people working in the trade union, women's, and anti-racist movements met and worked on issues like welfare rights, discrimination, abortion, local housing campaigns, access to childcare, racism, education, public health and local democracy. BRC became a key hub for such groups in Bradford, reflecting and resourcing the radical political milieu of the city at the onset of Thatcherism.

From the start, BRC was set up as place people could meet, type up minutes, design and print promotional materials, make phone calls, receive mail, and generally do the nuts and bolts work that is vital for community organising and political struggle. Having initially operated out of a small office on Little Horton Lane, BRC moved in 1984 to a building on Manor Row. While establishing a specific reputation for expertise on welfare rights and unemployment, BRC during this time continued to be a meeting point for a wider range of other groups including Gay Liberation groups, campaigns for striking miners, and a range of anti-imperialist and internationalist movements.

Towards the end of the 1980s BRC found itself in the first of a series of major crises around funding and was targeted for cuts by the Tory council of Eric Pickles. Despite this, BRC was able to rally and, following some time with staff on reduced hours,

rebuild, moving in 1995 to share the Old Quaker School on Chapel Street. Here, thanks to the work of disability arts organisation Valid, Metro Arts and Bradford Community Arts, was a far more accessible space that could provide privacy and security for its various tenants. We try to capture the vibrant ecology of groups using the space from this time onwards, whilst charting the specific initiatives that BRC was part of - the Bradford Community Statistics Project, work on occupational health, ongoing training programmes, Bradford Immigration Asylum Support & Advice Network (BIASAN), anti-fascist organising, and widening access to computer technologies and the internet. We finish by trying to consider how information and practical resources become archives and social movement history, and what it might mean to try and bring the ethos and political radicalism of BRC to the project of doing this historic work.

Gathering Struggles: 1979-84

Bradford Resource Centre was officially founded in January 1979. Its original constitution set out the core purposes of the new initiative: 'to provide a range of essential education and other resources to people who are organising for change either where they work or where they live, and to work with groups of people attempting to win improvements in, and to increase democratic control over, major aspects of their lives, and to oppose all forms of discrimination by race, sex and age.'³ As a job advert from this early period explains, BRC's early work was 'concentrated on the issues of employment, unemployment, health, welfare rights and issues affecting the lives and work of women.'⁴ Early initiatives also focused on housing issues, rights for part-time and home workers, and anti-racist organising, with BRC becoming a gathering point and hub for a range of groups in the city.

At this time, Bradford was going through profound economic and social changes. As early BRC worker Mandy Cook outlines: 'manufacturing was devastated, trade unions were very active, but it was also really grim – I was on the Bradford TUC and at every monthly meeting workers were turning up with redundancy notices [...] a lot of housing was in a very bad way [...] Bradford had considerable challenges.' Longtime BRC worker Mike Quiggin outlines a similar picture: 'It was the early days of Thatcherism, the last days of Bradford as an industrial hub, there was an increase in unemployment, a decrease of funding for the welfare state, it all sounds very familiar, doesn't it?' An application for funding during the first six months of BRC's existence lays out what it calls 'the need for resources':

3 BRC constitution – these footnotes relate to primary sources from the BRC archive, which will be made available on the BRC website alongside this text.

4 BRC Job Advert

Organisations seeking to achieve changes or to establish needed services cannot do so without access to resources – accurate information, technical skills which are comprehensible to them, organisational support, and the practical back-up to help them to present their case or to run their scheme. At present such resources are available only to government and to private industry, or to those bodies affluent enough to be able to buy in the help they require. Groups like those which are organising in the run-down parts of Bradford or trying to build city-wide organisations to represent neglected interests, do not have equal access to such help, and therefore face far greater odds than they should have to in a truly democratic society.⁵

This was the ethos of 'resources for democracy', a tagline and phrase that would continue to animate BRC's work for the next four decades.

Ali Hussein who was involved at the very start of BRC, considered that in a difficult social and political climate BRC was 'very crucial in giving communities some sense of direction... sense of community, solidarity, engagement.' And Mandy outlines in her interview how from the early days of BRC, there was a emphasis on combining this ethos with access to practical resources: 'there was Gestetner [duplicator] printing. People would come to us to print leaflets, to make photocopies. We started a library with books on welfare rights, housing issues. I did some work on part-time workers. We organised events. My angle was always the impact on women.' As Mandy makes clear, the BRC played a vital role in a time before computers, the internet and home printing: 'it's difficult for people to understand

5 Early BRC funding application

nowadays how invaluable the resources we had were – we were the only place where they were all in one place.'

BRC was a founding member of the wider 'Network of Labour and Community Research and Resource Centres' around Britain. The impetus for these, Mike explains, 'came out of a tradition of Community Development Projects' under the Labour Callaghan Government 1974-79. Here, concern around regional decline in areas like Bradford motivated funding for projects that could research possible solutions. Many of these research action projects concluded that, as Mike explains, 'the strengths of those communities lay in their working-class organisations, both trade unions and community organisations,' and the answer was to resource these communities directly, often through resource and research centres. In an overview of the Network written for FoBRC, Steve Schofield (who also briefly worked at BRC) argues that:

The real strength of Resource Centres was to bring together trade union and community groups, leading to new forms of support and cross-fertilisation of ideas for future activities [...] with a shared vision of a democracy in which working people have agency and control.⁶

BRC became part of this wider project, joining with initiatives in Coventry, Leeds, London and elsewhere – with BRC workers taking part in regular Network meetings to debate the politics, strategies and different approaches of the Research and Resource Centres. One 'Politics of the Network' printout from an early Network gathering shows the scope of these discussions: 'How do we want to spend our time, what would a feminist/socialist society be like? [...] Could we put too much energy into

6 Steve Schofield, 2025 - *Resource Centres – The Hidden History of a Radical Movement*. Available on the FoBRC website.

defensive struggles and fighting for the right to oppressive work while overlooking the need to develop pre-figurative forms of production and reproduction?'.⁷ Alongside such big questions, Mandy (who chaired the network in the early 80s) outlines how the debates would always entail an emphasis on the importance of process as well as outcome, a 'strong sense of how important it was for people to be engaged in their own solutions,' rather than these been imposed externally. BRC workers thought carefully from the start about the difference between 'resourcing' and 'leading' campaigns and groups, and what ideas of autonomy and self-organisation meant in practice. As she puts it, 'we were trying to become a sort of movement for change.'

However, there were other specific local origins to the BRC. A 1981 internal history of the centre outlines how the BRC's origins 'lay in the unsuccessful attempt to set up a 'Social Action Centre' (SAC) in Bradford.'⁸ 'BRC's funding from the Rowntree Trust was inherited from this project,' the document explains, 'as well its initial association with the University' of Bradford. The 'germs of an idea of a resource centre in Bradford first arose when the Young Volunteers Force Foundation (YVFF, later to become the Community Projects Foundation – CPF) investigated the city as a possible location for one of its pilot resource centres in the early seventies.' Though this didn't materialise, workers from a YVFF project in Buttershaw, an estate in Bradford, came into contact with academics from the newly formed Bradford University and its School of Applied Social Studies (ASS), where Professor Hilary Rose floated the idea of a University sponsored resource and research centre, employing a research assistant in 1976, Andrew Jakubowicz, to look into the idea. Frictions around the role of academics and funding within this fledgling SAC and the role of 'working class organisations' within it turned into a

7 Politics of the Network minutes 1980

8 1981 History of BRC

'extremely acrimonious' dispute through 1977-78, eventually leading to the University withdrawing its initial offers of financial support. Jakubowicz concludes in an interview with Keith Jackson and Rachel Peto for their 1982 'Report on Three Social Action Centres' (including BRC) that the ambiguous possibility of funding and questions over working class control over this were key to the frictions that emerged through the SAC episode, playing out across existing political fault-lines: 'SAC events were not in themselves about what SAC would do or be – but rather an arena in which other struggles could be played out – those within JCCA [Joint Committee of Community Associations], within the Black struggle, of influence over adult education programmes and practice, within the Labour Party and between the Labour Party and the Liberal Party, within the University, within the Communist Party of Great Britain – and so on.'⁹ BRC emerged from the ashes of this dispute (eventually restating a claim to the Joseph Rowntree Trust funding that had been secured), and for the first 18 months of its existence had a very tough time trying to rebuild trust and relationships with people who had felt let down by the SAC episode in the city. This began to change in 1980, as a new Labour-led council in Bradford opened up more funding opportunities for community groups including BRC, and the centre began establishing a reputation locally for its work on women's issues, tenants issues and welfare rights advice.

BRC initially started, in a tiny office on Little Horton Lane, with two workers – Mike White and Mandy Cook - and a small interim management committee, before moving to a slightly larger premises down the street. Mike had experience working at Coventry Workshop (part of the Network of Research and

9 Andrew Jakubowicz interview, filed within Keith Jackson and Rachel Peto's 1982 'Report on Three Social Action Centres' for Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust via Northern College, April 1982

Resource Centres) and Mandy was instrumental in supporting groups such as the Bradford branch of the National Abortion Campaign (NAC), Bradford Under 5's Group and the Trade Council Women's Sub-Committee; all of whom used the centre for minutes, leaflets and meetings. Nancy Carlton, who also threw herself into Bradford NAC's busy schedule of meetings, public stalls and demonstrations at this time recounts how she 'remember[s] seeing a poster in the library and deciding to come along [...] it really improved my self-image and confidence.. it was brilliant, it really changed my view of what I could do, what I could achieve'. Her fellow NAC member Judy White concurs, explaining how – against Tory attacks on abortion rights, with limited contraception and pregnancy testing available - the BRC helped facilitate a dedicated campaigning group of women who, 'remain firm friends forty five years on.' Deb Collett, a long-time BRC worker and volunteer who also first came into contact with the centre through NAC, also describes how she also remains friends with the people she organised with at this time: '[it was] very much a connecting sort of place.' The centre was also used by students from the Bradford Centre for Alternative Industrial and Technological Strategies (CAITS) during this time, foreshadowing a long-term commitment to supporting student placements at BRC, and educational uses of the centre library and facilities.

BRC was involved from the early days in supporting a range of other community/neighbourhood advice centres around the city, with workers joining the Bradford Advice Centres Group in 1980. Here, people would share information about the changes in the Social Security Acts going through parliament at that time, with a new BRC worker Geoff Hinds being hired that year to focus specifically on workers' rights and trainings for community advice centre volunteers and workers. In 1981 Bradford Council approached BRC and the Advice Centre Group about supporting

a new Welfare Rights Campaign it wanted to run. This involved creating a leaflet that was circulated to almost every household in the city, with a postage paid card to return for further information. Around 12,000 cards were returned, and a BRC report from the time notes a 20-30% increase in enquires to advice centres as a result of the campaign. BRC's work in this area was particularly valued for its commitment to trade unionism, addressing the root causes of welfare inequality, and emphasis on combatting stigma about access. In contrast to the current political climate, this was often met with positive news coverage and political support. One 1981 report from the Bradford Telegraph & Argus quotes the leader of the council stating, 'it is nonsense that people should not claim what is their right'.¹⁰ As Mike Quiggin outlines in a 2008 article on 'Bradford's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)', Bradford's Council's tendency (after restructuring in 1974) to return 'hung' political results arguably 'contributed to the growth of the VCS in the District as politicians competed to gain community support', building on much longer histories of collective organising in the city (from 19th Century religious organisations, self-help educational initiatives, trade unions, and building societies to the campaign groups of the 1960s and 70s)¹¹. The size and scale of voluntary, community and trade union groups in the city meant that an organisation like BRC – which connected, resourced and supported them – was increasingly necessary. Though it had an initially bumpy start, from 1981 onwards BRC began to cement its place in these larger ecosystems across Bradford and the UK, becoming a key gathering point for a range of struggles.

10 T&A News Report 22/4/81

11 Mike Quiggin, 2008 - 'Bradford's Voluntary and Community Sector'

Liberation! – 1984-89

Following the early years of 'organisational mess' (in Mandy's words!), consolidation and growth, BRC moved to a bigger and more comfortable space on Manor Row in Autumn 1984, sharing with Bradford Law Centre and the Bradford Community Health Project. Here, during the heat of the miners strike (which many BRC workers and volunteers were involved in supporting) and continued Tory attacks on working class life, BRC expanded its work considerably. A 1984-1985 BRC Annual report outlines some of the key changes that accompanied the move: a restructured management committee, a new system where groups could 'affiliate' to be more involved in BRC, an increase in staffing (by this point four workers: Mike Quiggin, Margaret Bransby, Maura Wilson and George Pope, financed through Bradford Council's Unemployment Unit and Urban Programme funding), more student placements and volunteer contributions, new Risograph printing and word-processing facilities, a mailbox system for groups, a badge machine, an expanded library of periodicals and news cuttings, and attempts at improving the physical accessibility of the centre. The Annual Review outlines a breakdown of users of the centre over three months (*see table*).¹²

The review outlines how 'since the early days of the Resource Centre, a policy on work with groups has been developed. Our aim in undertaking group work is to provide support, information and advice to groups, without undermining or substituting for their own organisation'. Some groups mentioned include: West Yorkshire Hazards Group (a 'local group of shop stewards' focused on campaigning around workplace health hazards that BRC helped initiate in 1984), Community Computing, Bradford Women & Employment Group, Thornton View Hospital Occupation Committee (who

12 1984 BRC Annual Review

USERS – May to June 1984 (BRC Annual Review 1984-85)

Women's Groups	72
Black Groups	66
Trade Union Groups	141
Community Groups	340
Other Campaigns	184
Education Providers	47
Local/National Government	66
Media	9
Individuals	116
Others	36

Total 1077

used BRC as part of their campaign against the closure of a local hospital), Women Against Pit Closures, and the Unemployed Groups Network; along with continued work with the Advice Centres Group, Trades Council Women's Sub-committee and welfare rights training. 1984 also saw the inauguration of the BRC 'bulletin', a BRC produced and printed news-sheet first released in November in a run of '1,000 copies', according to minutes from the time¹³. The bulletin featured regular columns, a guide to the ever-expanding BRC library, short reviews, and information on local campaigning groups, with the first issue focusing on health: 'Racism and health: Women and Health; Health Hazards; Health & Safety.' Health remained a core focus of BRC work throughout its lifetime, including early work with the Trade Union and

13 November 1984 BRC Workers Minutes

Community Resource and Information Centre (TUCRIC) in Leeds, and BRC staff being instrumental in the founding of the Occupational Health Project (OHP) in 1988. An outline of the project from the time, titled 'Work Makes You Ill', outlines the context in Bradford by the late 1980s:

The city's two main manufacturing industries, textiles and engineering, have fallen into decline in recent years. Less emphasis has been given to health and safety with predictable consequences – an increase in the major injury rate, up by over a half in textiles and a third in engineering since 1981.

Workers were employed to interview patients at GP surgeries in the city, gathering information relating to workplace hazards and health outcomes. These were then used, in tandem with the West Yorkshire Hazards Group and others, in trade union campaigns and trainings for better working conditions. The OHP was instrumental in a string of early Health & Safety campaigns through the 1980s, focused on everything from asbestos, home working, workplace noise, and chemical exposure, to the emerging musculoskeletal and straining risks from new technologies and visual display units (VDUs).

The 1984-85 Annual Review also details a focus on 'attempt[s] to make the centre more useful to the black community in Bradford,' reflecting a wider focus on anti-racism and Black liberation in the city through this time. Here, it's worth noting that 'Black' was used as a collective descriptor of all those groups and identities excluded from Whiteness, oriented to anti-racist political struggle¹⁴. Anti-racist and Black struggle had already been a central part of Bradford's radical politics for some time,

¹⁴ This links to questions around 'Political Blackness', on which see Modood, Tariq. 'Political Blackness and British Asians'. *Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1994): 859–76.

led by Asian and Black communities in the city. But two key struggles marked a particular coming together of anti-racist, trade union and wider community groups at the time. The first is the Bradford 12 Trial, in which a group of twelve young Asian men from the United Black Youth League (a splinter group from the Asian Youth Movement) who were arrested in 1981 for planning a defense of their community against a fascist march, and successfully defended themselves in court on this basis, galvanized people across the city¹⁵. The trial also demonstrated the importance of embedded community research, with a report by Dave Stark (an anti-racist Trades Council member and college lecturer who would go on to be involved in BRC and Bradford Immigration and Asylum Support and Advice Network, BIASAN) on racist violence in the city being one key piece of evidence for the defense.

The second began in 1984, when parents at Drummond School got together to oppose the racist views of headteacher Ray Honeyford. By then, there was a strong network of anti-racist and Black groups operating across the city. Workers and volunteers at BRC, many of whom had participated in both campaigns but acknowledged their own limitations as a 'white collective' in minutes from October 1984, sought to build on this work by pushing for new Black workers at BRC, increased translation and work in different languages, and better outreach with Black groups¹⁶. A 1984 Management Committee report details some of the organisations BRC was reaching out to at the time: Checkpoint (the West Indian Community Centre), Asian Youth Movement (AYM), Karmand Centre, West Indian Parents Association, Rastafarian Cultural Movement, Bangladeshi Youth

15 See Ramamurthy, A. (2013). *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements*. London: Pluto.

16 October 1984 BRC Workers Minutes

Organisation, Council for Mosques, Indian Workers Association, Asian Women's Centre, and Bangladeshi People's Association¹⁷.

By 1985 BRC recruited its first 'Black Women & Employment Issues' worker, Gulshan Kahn Malik, who worked on developing a range of specific training opportunities for Asian women (alongside the Karmand and Asian Women's Centres), wider anti-racist campaigns, and fundraising for new facilities (including an Urdu word processing machine). A more comprehensive history would dive deeper into the substantial role that Black and Asian people played in the development of resource and community centres in Bradford, going back to the early days of the Social Action Centre (in which the Bradford Black group were heavily involved), the huge range of Black and Asian community centres across the city, and the often close relationship between AYM and BRC (AYM used the BRC offices in the early days of establishing their own Saathi Centre in 1984¹⁸, and had a delegate position on the BRC Management Committee until 1989). None of this is to deny what were clearly ongoing and difficult conversations about racism and representation within BRC and the wider political networks it was part of, where Black and Asian people were often still woefully underrepresented. The intentions and shift in thinking about racism in this era is clear however, as Management Committee minutes from July 1984 outline a change to BRC's core objectives: 'It was agreed that in future our remit will be "anti-racist, anti-sexist"; "non" is too weak, doesn't indicate positive action.'¹⁹

17 1984 Management Committee Report

18 See Rachel Peto's 1979/80 Monitoring Report on BRC for The Northern College / Rowntree Trust for more information on this.

19 July 1984 BRC Management Committee Minutes

Black Liberation, Women's Liberation, Gay Liberation: BRC was a key meeting point for such struggles throughout the 1980s. The Gay Switchboard, a volunteer run phone line that people could ring for advice and support, ran out of the BRC office at Manor Row for some time, whilst other LGBTQ+ groups (including BOLGA / Bradford Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action, the lesbian newsletter Antics, and Lesbian Line) used BRC for a mailing office, meeting space and printing facility. The importance of BRC as a PO box in the days pre internet and email was emphasised by a number of interviewees, including Alice Parsons who is researching the LGBTQ+ history in Bradford:

[having a PO box at BRC meant that organisations] could safely distribute their material much more widely (they'd previously had to use personal addresses) - BRC was very actively used as PO Box by many lesbian and gay groups. They also met there at times and used the library – which was arguably one of the most extensive lesbian and gay libraries in the country. They had loads of copies of newsletters, zines and periodicals - some international, BRC tried to source what communities wanted/needed.

Organisations like 'Gaining Control' - a local 'group of black women looking at racism and sexism in Britain'²⁰ who organised workshops, day schools, and theatrical performances - used BRC as their base, connecting it to the Bradford Women's Centre and Asian Women's Centre. These linked into a thriving feminist scene in Bradford that included publications like 'Irregular Periods', a Bradford Women's Newsletter 'for women, by women' that contained 'news, views, reviews, what's on, campaigns,

20 1985 Programme for the Liberation Festival

gossip, humour, poetry and much more....', and a busy program of Women's Discos, meetings and events. The 1985 Liberation Festival, held on May 9th-11th across venues around Bradford, brought all such groups together for one weekend, with the date chosen to mark the 40th anniversary of the liberation of Europe from the Nazis. The Liberation Festival focused on the important connections between local and international struggles, reflecting an anti-racist ethos that shows liberation 'at home' as intrinsically tied to a wider politics of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. As the Festival Programme outlines:

'Fascism was not defeated in 1945. It is still alive, in Bradford and elsewhere, an insult to those who lost their lives to its earlier manifestation. Few nations are still formally colonies. Yet many are still colonised as effectively as before. Repressive regimes, allied to the interest of private companies, loot vast regions of the world and exploit people's labour. Others are oppressed because of their class, race, sex, religion or sexuality. The Liberation Festival brings together many groups working for liberation and approaches you with respect. We assume that, as a human being, you are interested and involved in these matters of life and death.'²¹

International delegations from the African National Congress, Association of Rural Workers of Nicaragua, the Grenadian revolution, Palestine Liberation Organisation, Democratic Youth and Students of Iran, and the Irish Troops Out movement joined solidarity groups linked to Chile, Sudan, El Salvador and the Gypsy & Traveller community, to all take part in the weekend. As Ludi Simpson, one of the core organising group behind the festival (and a long-time BRC management committee member and supporter), recounts:

21 1985 Programme for the Liberation Festival

The Liberation Festival brought together as many organisations as we could [...] and I suspect that one of the connections between all the groups was that they did use the Resource Centre. One of the valuable things about it was that you met other people there making their leaflets, producing their booklets, whatever, making their badges, and you'd get to chat and get to know about different organisations. [And all the groups] had experiences of very persistent struggles to put right injustices, and that was what the whole festival was about. A festival of liberation movements, local and international. And it was quite successful, I think!

Local anti-fascist groups were also well represented at the Festival, with a focus on defending twelve people who had been arrested that year at a protest in Bradford against a meeting held by British National Party (BNP) leader John Tyndall. As previously outlined, political groups and trade unions in Bradford have a long history of opposing racist violence and fascist parties like the BNP and National Front (NF). It was through the late 1970s and 1980s that this was increasingly combined with campaigns against deportation and the proliferation of repressive immigration legislation coming out of Westminster. An Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist (ARAFA) action newsletter from 1988 paints a picture of some of the work being done at this time, focusing on a national demonstration against the new 1988 Immigration Bill, an ongoing struggle to unite the family of Rajwinder Singh in Bradford after battles with the Home Office, and updates on British repression in Ireland, pro-choice, abortion campaigning, demonstrations against Social Security changes, and anti-fascist leafleting at football games²². The newsletter advertises a number

22 1988 ARAFA newsletter

of joint BRC and Bradford Law Centre trainings happening through 1988: on Gay Rights, Immigration and Nationality Law, Sexual Harassment at Work, and the Public Order Act, all with a 'crèche and refreshments' provided. Other events over the months of March and April include a Day of Action for Palestine in Lister Park; a CND Demo at the Aldermaston nuclear site; the third 'International Book Fair of Radical, Black & 3rd World Books' in Bradford; A National Demo against the deportation of Som Raj in London, another National Demo against the anti-gay Clause 28 (with 'coaches leaving from Bradford' with OLGAs from the BRC offices at Manor Row) and a local demo at City Hall to 'Save Bradford's National Health Service'.

Dave Stark, mentioned earlier in reference to the Bradford 12 Trial, opened a BRC meeting on 'The First Ten Years – 1979-89' in January 1989 with reflections on shifts in 'racist violence' during this time, speaking on behalf of ARAFA. Other speakers included Maura Wilson (on 'Women in the Labour Market'), Marsha Singh (on 'Anti-Deportation Campaigns'), Maggie Pearce (on 'People in Poverty'), Claire Connolly (on 'The Health Service') and Sandie Locke (on 'The Trade Union Movement'), followed by a night of music and entertainment at the local 1in12 Club, who had recently moved to a permanent premises on Albion Street. The Annual Review for 1988-89 details a total of 6368 'users' (1199 individuals, the rest groups and other bodies) using the centre through the year, whilst the Welfare Rights training programme 'continues to expand', offering a total of 29 courses through the year on topics including benefits, housing, travellers rights, disability, debt and legal rights (as detailed above)²³. In 1986, alongside the regular BRC Briefing newsletter, staff also

began producing a Welfare Rights newsletter, offering regular updates on trainings, legislative changes, and community action around welfare.

However, also included last minute in that 1988-89 Annual Review was a 'stop press' item about total cuts to BRC's funding by the council. A new Tory administration had taken over in Bradford, with ambitious councillor Eric Pickles at the helm. This would signal the start of a series of battles to secure funding and 'save the BRC' over the years, along with wider political changes across Britain at the onset of the 1990s.

In a Pickle... - 1989-95

As a 1in12 produced publication by Tony Grogan called 'The Pickles Papers' outlines: 'In October 1988 Eric Pickles and his Tory group took control of Bradford Council with a radical programme designed to 'wipe out municipal socialism forever'.²⁴ Within a year, by his own calculations and despite a wafer-thin majority and widespread opposition, Pickles had, 'cut £22 million from the council's budget,' almost half of the £50 million outlined in his '5-year plan'. What became known as 'the Bradford Experiment' would have profound effects on local government, the CVS in Bradford, and on BRC specifically. A 1990 NALGO (National and Local Government Officers' Association) report called 'The Bradford Experiment: Counting the Costs' details how Pickles and the Tory administration at Bradford City Council 'embarked on a radical change involving spending cuts, commercialisation, privatisation and internal restructuring', which it intended as a 'model' for Thatcherite local governance across the UK²⁵. Though Pickles and the administration were voted out again in 1989, the legacy and ethos of this 'Bradford Experiment' would persist – not least through Pickles' own tenure as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government under David Cameron's coalition government from 2010-2015. The 1989-90 Annual Review report from treasurer Steve (Ludi) Simpson overviews the impact the cuts had: postponed work on disabled access to the centre, reduced opening hours and library subscriptions, greatly reduced staff time (though staff members shared out temporary hours to extend these), and a severely reduced training programme²⁶.

24 Tony Grogan, (1989). *The Pickles Papers*. Bradford: 1 in 12 Publications

25 NALGO The Bradford Experiment: Counting the Costs, Researched by SCAR (Services to Community Action and Trade Unions) and published by NALGO in 1990 (copy available in BRC archive)

26 BRC 1989-90 Annual Review

Despite this, as BRC Management Committee Chair Adrian Sinclair outlines in the same document, by 1990 the 'Resource Centre is still here. More than that, it is thriving,' with new funding allowing for a new worker (Tim Wallis) to be taken on alongside a regular staff of Gill Whitfield, Minu Mandora, George Pope and Mike Quiggan. The 1989-90 Annual Review gives particular thanks to volunteers and supporters of BRC, who 'kept the doors open throughout the crisis', listing over 30 people who contributed their time to this fight over the year. George, reflecting on this period, recounts how 'Pickles made the mistake of declaring he was going to close us down two years before the funding ran out, I remember the management committee declaring that we had two years to either campaign for our jobs or have some fun and we had both. We all went part time to make the money last longer and we outlived Eric Pickles in a sense.'

Here, the links between the fight for welfare rights, trade union involvement, and a healthy voluntary sector are illuminated. Many BRC volunteers would 'work' at the centre during times claiming their dole / social security payments, or on maternity leave. Volunteers helped in every part of the BRC and were encouraged to join the large 'Volunteer Sector Group' of the ASTMS [Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs] union, who met every month at BRC. Here, volunteers would learn the important work of trade union organising, share information related to volunteering, and join wider campaigns around employment and unemployment. As Deb explains in a group discussion filmed for this project:

At the time you could unionise the volunteers. Because ASTMS, as it was then, and then MSF, allowed free membership for volunteers. And before the point of the decimation [under Pickles] we had 650 members in Bradford Voluntary Sector

Branch. I mean, that's huge, and people can hardly conceive of it... but we did, and they were quite active as well – we had great big marches. And it was more understood then that if you unionised the volunteers, when they go on [to other kinds of work], they are already [organised]. I mean, when the Citizens Advice Bureau went on strike, so did the volunteers, in support! And that was crucial.

Volunteer labour was integral to the BRC and groups it supported, and it was not just the attacks on funding for such groups, but the wider Tory erosion of access to benefits, that made such work increasingly difficult. Defending the BRC against such cuts was always also about defining its work, and as a 1988 Bulletin admits: 'One of the problems BRC has always faced is that the various organisations who use the centre have a different idea of what BRC is here to do!!'²⁷. Arguably a strength in terms of supporting a wide and varied range of groups, such ambiguity was ill suited to the funding-focused and marketing inflected language seeping into the CVS through this time. BRC staff and documents were constantly writing, re-writing and attempting to publicise the project's core objectives from this point onwards, but this was always in slight tension with the organic and wide-ranging things that BRC did.

Following the Pickles debacle, BRC continued with core sets of its work: information sharing, training, providing practical resources, supporting groups, improving accessibility to the centre, and securing funding. Management Committee member and volunteer Paul Hubert remembers 'a very busy centre,' at the turn of the 90s: 'if you went in there was always someone going in or coming out.' Paul got involved in work on Travellers rights, housing, anti-poll tax campaigns and the 1in12 anarchist

27 BRC October 1988 Bulletin

publication 'Knee Deep in Shit', saying: 'I considered it very valuable to enable people to take action for themselves [...] it must be much harder now, everyone has to reinvent the wheel when they want to start a campaign, technology can't do everything, you need to meet people'. Various bits of new technology did arrive at BRC through this time however, including Desk-Top Publishing ('We've still got 'Letraset' for people who hate computers!' jokes an advert in a BRC Bulletin from the time), a fax machine ('not just for yuppies!!!'), and by 1991, new CD-ROM versions of the national news ('CD-What??'). The library - 'not just a load of old newspaper cuttings!' - continued to be an 'invaluable source of information' made up of 'booklets, reports, magazines, newsletters, and campaigning leaflets' around the country, along with the aforementioned 'newspaper cuttings', which were taken daily by staff and glued into a huge set of files, arranged by topic and theme²⁸. As George Pope recounts in an interview for the film part of this project, like many things BRC, this was never a simple or frictionless thing: 'We had all these files of newspaper cuttings. And newspaper cuttings was a big thing in those days. And there was this library with all these shelves, [...] and we used to have these ridiculous discussions about which file a newspaper cutting should go in. Because "its about this issue!" but "its about this issue as well!" So which file do we put it in?'

BRC Bulletins (now in a handy folded A5 format) through 1993-1994 detail some of the other work going on at the time. Adverts for events in October 1993 include: a lecture by Arthur Scargill, Lesbian Line meetings, wildlife surveys by Bradford Urban Wildlife Group, various Anti-Apartheid meetings, and a theatre production about the Manningham Mills Strike of 1890²⁹. Two Bulletins from 1994 focus on local campaigns against the

28 BRC September 1991 Bulletin

29 BRC October 1993 Bulletin

Criminal Justice Bill of that year, with the October edition arguing, 'the right to protest against injustice; the right to demand access to resources; the right to protect social gains ...] these were hard won by Bradford people.' The Bulletin encourages people to get involved in the movement against the Bill, with meetings regularly at the 1in12 Club³⁰.

New workers through the early 1990s period included Ramila Mistry, Julie Munday, Fawzia Mir, Farzana Mehrban, Deb Collett, and Sharon Allen, alongside a shifting but large pool of volunteers and management committee members. Along with the general day-to-day mingling that happened through the centre, regular 'Policy Days', meetings and the annual AGM encouraged feedback between the different groups, working on topics such as BRC's Equal Opportunities policy, strategy, and improvements to the centre. Computing technology also continued to develop apace, with the addition of a scanner, Coreldraw design facilities, multi-lingual word processing, and, by 1994-5, early forms of the internet. All of these are evidenced in the Bulletins themselves, which increasingly featured an array of 90s word-art, clipart, and Urdu translations.

Support for people in the asylum and immigration system continued throughout this period, with BRC supporting the launch of BIASAN (Bradford Immigration Support and Advice Network) in 1992 alongside the Trades Council, Bradford Amnesty Group, Bradford Law Centre, Girlington Advice Centre, and a range of other groups. A BIASAN leaflet from 2001, looking back at the history of the organisation, explains how 'Bradford has a long tradition of supporting refugees and Asylum Seekers; those escaping Fascism in the 1930s, Chileans in the 1970s, Vietnamese and Bosnians in the 80s and

30 BRC October 1994 Bulletin

90s. We are upholding this tradition.³¹ The BRC Bulletin for October 1993 introduced the new initiative, who were already meeting regularly at BRC: 'No it's not a prehistoric animal, BIASAN stands for Bradford Immigration and Asylum Support and Advice Network, [...] a group of people from Bradford and around West Yorkshire who are concerned about Immigration and Asylum issues.'³² The group organised trainings, English classes, information sharing, campaigning around new Immigration legislation, and, increasingly as the years progressed, practical support for asylum seekers and refugees in the city. BIASAN and BRC were central to campaigns such as the 1993-94 Mamta Right to Stay Campaign, which supported local woman Mamta Chopra after she fled an abusive marriage and faced deportation due to the immigration rules that tied her immigration case to her husband's. When BRC moved to Chapel Street, BIASAN met there every week to provide a meal for asylum seekers as well the support outlined above. Barry Clark who has been involved for many years recalls BRC as 'a good place to meet for BIASAN - had some outside space which was nice'. Sam Jackson, volunteer and BRC management committee member remembers how with BIASAN – 'meeting there with the meal every Thursday plus others who went as act of solidarity - you'd be hearing those accounts – of asylum seeker experience.'

Having survived a raft of cuts at the start of the 90s, BRC continued to grow and expand its work through the 90s. Questions around Manor Row – the lack of physical accessibility and long-term viability of the space - and a need to expand generally, meant that by 1993-4 BRC was seriously considering moving. This came to fruition thanks to space available in a building that BRC had already begun using for AGMs and bigger

31 BIASAN Leaflet from 2001

32 BRC October 1993 Bulletin

meetings: the Old Quaker School on Chapel Street in Little Germany. By 1995 a new acronym had been born, Arts & Resource Centre for the Community / ARCC!

* * *

Access, ARCC – 1995-1999

ARCC was only possible due to extensive renovation work carried out by groups that BRC would come to join in the space at Chapel Street: Bradford Community Arts, Metro Arts and Valid (initially called 'In-Valid'). Long-time Community Arts worker Caro Blount-Shah outlines via email how the organisation came about through people linked to radical Bradford theatre troupe the General Will, along with other arts initiatives:

Bradford Community Arts Association (BCAA) set up Bradford Mobile Workshop, we'd go out to communities with art and design materials and screenprinting equipment, including good quality 35mm cameras. BCAA was initially based with Metro Community Arts, part of the Council's Arts and Museums Service, on Lumb Lane. This old house which had good facilities but lots of stairs and steps. We wanted to find an accessible building aswell as running the mobile wrkshops out in community centres and campaign groups. Valid's knowledge supported the joint initiative to get the funding. We had a creche/cafe on the ground floor, performance spaces on the first, offices and meeting rooms on the second, and a [photography] dark room, design and screen printing on the top floor. Community Arts moved in 1987 [to Chapel Street] and launched the Art of

Disability Festival around then, with Metro Community Arts Jabadao dance and Valid.

BCAA/ BCAL was funded by Bradford Council, Yorkshire Arts, and later on by UK Youth, West Yorkshire Drugs Awareness Service, European Social Fund and Kaleidoscope EU funding. Much of our funding was for group projects using drama, design and photography. We worked closely with Bradford Women's Forum on International Women's Day events.

Community Arts activities included textile and banner-making workshops, mural making (with one still surviving in the Chapel Street car park), and international exchange visits to different art projects and festivals in Ireland, Spain and Pakistan. Valid, formed in 1985, described themselves in a 1987 edition of *Disability Now* as existing to 'promote awareness of and fundamentally change attitudes towards disability and discrimination using community arts'. By this time, the group already had experience with applying for arts funding, and led the project to make the building on Chapel Street accessible. Alice Parsons, who has become involved recently as an archivist said: 'the building is kinda amazing to me - BRC was so ahead of its time in how accessible it is, handrails across all floors, wheelchair accessible bathrooms, step free entrance, a lift, braille floor plan.'

Valid ran regular art, photography and drama groups from the space from 1987 onward, and published a bi-lingual magazine of poetry, opinion, and news. The mid-winter 1996 edition elaborates on Valid's aims, to:

- ◆ Bring a wide range of activities to Disabled people
- ◆ Encourage creativity without criticism
- ◆ Provide an alternative to day centres
- ◆ Support the Disability Rights Movement
- ◆ Give Disabled people a good social life with other Disabled people
- ◆ Campaign for access to change through arts
- ◆ Show what Disabled people can achieve³³

The magazine also advertises mail order VHS videos by 'Mustn't Grumble', 'Valid's theatre group for disabled women,' and copies of the group's 'Access to Image Photo Book', which came out of a photography exhibition held at the National Museum of Photography in Bradford in 1992. BRC were now sharing a building which, in Caro's words, 'brought people together and enabled them to be creative.' Deb Collett concurs: 'the building itself allowed things to flourish – [BRC tried to make it] very easy for a fledgling group to get a bit of space, a desk until they got going, a free meeting room. It was a good place for conferences, coming together, sharing ideas, and always also... big rows! But if you have a great building and someone to welcome people - it's easy to flourish. It makes me think about how the world now is so full of barriers - and it needn't be.' Privacy and security were also important for the continued anti-fascist work that happened in and around BRC, particularly against the rising threat of the British National Party / BNP (and, later, the English Defence League / EDL). Sam Jackson recalls how BRC was a crucial safe space for anti-fascist activity at a time when people were threatened and harassed by fascists and far-right figures: '[There was only one way into the building] and we had photos of fascists not to let in - they would try and get in, get hold of names and target people.'

33 Valid Magazine, mid-winter 1996 edition

With BRC moved in, ARCC's grand opening was on October 13th 1995, showcasing a range of activities across the building. In the basement: Daisy Age Video doing film workshops and the Reuben Sounds recording studio offering chances to 'dabble in singing, making music and jingles', whilst across the rest of the building was a free creche, desktop publishing workshops, a Valid photography exhibition, Community Arts Batik workshop, multilingual poetry recitals, food, and a Mustn't Grumble theatre performance. Jerry Crawford, who ran the community recording studio Rueben Sounds out of the ARCC basement explains the ethos of the studio in an interview filmed for this project from inside the space on Chapel Street:

The main reason why we set it up was because we were musicians ourselves and DJs, and we were producing things, but we'd never had access to a studio, they were always very expensive. So the idea was to get a studio set up for all those people who can't afford to go to studios. [From the minute we got going] there was a massive buzz, we were flooded! It were that flooded we couldn't even get time to go home sometimes! [...] It was very multicultural [...] it gave people a lot of confidence. [...] And you know, this building to me was close to my heart. My whole family used to come here. Two of my daughters had birthday parties here. It brings back some great memories, it would be nice if they do get it and fix it up.

Managing such a large space, with so many tenants, was not an easy task however. Disputes over uses of the space, and arguments between different people using it, were not uncommon. This was exacerbated by continued cuts to the voluntary sector, which made it difficult to update equipment, and forced rises in what BRC charged for hires, printing and

other facilities. The 1995-96 Annual Review is candid, explaining that 'costs at the ARCC are higher than Manor Row', and in a heading titled 'Financial Future', explained that, 'We are in the same boat as the rest of Bradford's Voluntary Sector, unable to sustain any more cuts without serious damage to our service provision and job security.'³⁴ The 1996-7 Review notes a 'slight fall in the number of people using the practical resources in the center' but celebrates the wide range of new groups coming through the space: 'from a church choir to a radical anarchist group; from a budding music promoter to recycling groups; from the Boy Scouts to the University of The Third Age'³⁵.

March 1997 saw the launch of a new BRC produced magazine, *Rasalah* (Urdu for magazine), which combined the bulletin and welfare rights newsletters. The first edition covers a wide range of topics: organising against the fascist Combat 18 group in Bradford, opposition to the Asylum & Immigration Act, information about homelessness, trade union news, campaigns around the Disability Discrimination Act, and the new availability of 'Microsoft Word' on the BRC computers³⁶.

By 1997 however, according to the 96-97 Annual Review, the 'Money Situation' is not good: 'the escalating gap between diminishing grant funding and rising costs has reached catastrophic proportions and we have our first ever deficit budget'. BRC played a key role in campaigning against cuts and decisions taken as part of the local authority 'Voluntary Sector Review' through 1996-7, in which the onset of a New Labour government in Westminster did little to halt the tide of cuts to local services. Throughout this time, BRC continued to deliver its popular Welfare Rights courses, along with newer training courses

34 BRC 1995-6 Annual Review

35 BRC 1996-7 Annual Review

36 *Rasalah* Issue 1, March 1997

around Young People & Housing, Community Activist tactics and computer skills, and a series of 'lunchtime discussions' on political hot topics. Increasingly, BRC looked to non-governmental sources of funding, for instance applying in 1997 to the National Lottery for a 'Mobile Resource Centre Project', that would bring BRC facilities to different parts of Bradford. Writing in the 1997-98 Annual Report for the BRC Management Committee Maureen Galvin explains the challenges facing the organisation, along with the excitement in planning for the BRC's 20th Anniversary the coming year. 'The theme for these celebrations is 'Back to the Future'', she writes, 'a reminder that the principles which underpinned the founding of the Resource Centre are every bit as important and current now --- perhaps even more so'.³⁷

Despite the challenges it faced, BRC celebrated its 20th Anniversary in 1999 in a number of ways. A 'Routes of Resistance' event in Centenary Square in July that year included a range of speakers and topics, showcasing BRC's continued place in Bradford's radical political milieu: Tony Jowitt covered 19th and 20th Century struggles, Allan Brack shared memories of the 'early days of Bradford Festival', Courtney Hay spoke about 'struggles in the black community over the last 25 years and the Newby Square [housing estate] campaign', Maggie Pearse looked at 'community action in the 70s and the early days of Bradford's funded voluntary sector', while Rezina Bestan discussed 'the anti-poll tax campaign', among a range of other speakers. Always attuned to radical history, by the time of its 20th Anniversary BRC was considering its legacy as well as its future – with changes in technology and political context creating ongoing challenges for the center and its work.

37 BRC 1997-8 Annual Review

From Information to Archive – 2000-onwards

The turn of the millennium saw BRC having to again reconsider and re-communicate its purpose, in the face of continued funding cuts and a shifting political context. As information and computer technology became more readily available (though still not to everyone), the 'practical resources' at BRC were less in demand. Ironically, as we found trying to catalogue material we salvaged after the 2022 flood, it also meant there is a lot less physical history available about BRC from 1999 onwards.

Minutes, reports, and correspondences and news became digital and online, many now lost forever on old computers and hard drives. As the 1996 BRC Bulletin article 'What is the Internet' presciently argues, "The internet is simply a massive network of computers connected by telephone links – which are usually kept turned on for 24 hours a day so they are always accessible. [but] what is this information on the World Wide Web? Basically, it's whatever people want to put on it. A lot of it is rubbish."³⁸ The rich history of BRC before this point attests to the ephemeral ways in which the internet, whilst clearly revolutionising access to information, can erode and limit longer-termed archival projects.

What material we do have evidences the continued emergence of projects linked to BRC through the start of the 00s, often drawing on new sources of funding. Bradford Community Statistics Project, established as a partnership between with Bradford Council from 2000 onwards was funded by the European Regional Development Fund, to help community and voluntary groups in Bradford better understand and use statistics in their work. An article by Mike Quiggin in the Radical Statistics

38 October 1996 BRC Bulletin

journal lays out the ethos of BCSP - 'the task of demystifying social statistics is a form of community development'³⁹. In an email Mike explains how the project came together:

Erik Thomason, Ludi Simpson and others at Bradford Council built a web site that allowed users to draw their own geographic area of interest on a map of the Bradford District. They could then draw down social statistics from the census and other official datasets that were the best estimate of the data that applied to residents in that area.

This was used by community groups that worked in specific neighbourhoods who could then see what official statistics said about their particular neighbourhood. Using that information together with their own local knowledge they could see the main issues of concern and campaign accordingly or use the information to support funding bids.

As a result of the funding for this project BRC employed new workers whose job it was to promote the site, to train users in how the site worked and to work with communities in undertaking supplementary research. Amongst those recruited were Lorraine Fitzsimons, Dave Moore, Paul Meszaros and Bal Athwal.

One example of the work undertaken was research with Bradford Trades Union Council (BTUC). The BTUC anti-fascist committee were concerned about the growth in support for the BNP in the 2000s. BCSP workers were able to put BTUC in

39 Mike Quiggin, 'Some notes on the work of the Bradford Community Statistics Project (BCSP)', *Radical Statistics*: Issue 82 (2003)

contact with the neighbourhood groups they had worked with and look at the key social issues affecting local people. They could then campaign in that area to show the irrelevance of the BNP in tackling those issues.

However, even with funding in place for the project itself, the spectral lack of funding for others haunted the BCSP's work:

'We had expected to be called upon to help groups who had a variety of aims. However our experience is that the overwhelming majority of BCSP users want statistics to evidence a funding bid [...] Use of information for campaign ends is a rarity. Interest in gaining a carefully textured picture of conditions in a neighbourhood is subordinated to the use of information in the drive for funding.'⁴⁰

Such findings reflect the grim scarcity of funding at the time, and the increasingly competitive, and funder-driven nature of what was now more often referred to as 'the Third Sector'.

Some key BRC-linked projects persisted into the late 2010s, particularly the training programme and work of the Bradford Occupational Health Project, who moved into the space at Chapel Street in 2005. The OHP did invaluable work assessing workers who'd suffered injury or ill-health (for example doing hearing and lung function tests) and helping them claim compensation. They also: set up groups to support those with, for example work related asthma and hearing loss; did health and safety assessments particularly for the voluntary sector, writing reports for management setting out what they needed to do; and ran a forum with seminars for employers. The OHP was one of the last organisations to be based in the building and Carol Duerden their long-term worker recalls that whilst they greatly

40 Ibid

appreciated the support BRC had given them ever since their inception: 'It were an old building, because it was listed, they couldn't have double glazing, the windows used to rattle, so it were a cold building, depending on what money they had, whether they could get lift repaired or not in end heating went altogether, lift went altogether, so we managed through till they couldn't afford internet, and that were it'.

Across the CVS, Jobs became increasingly tied to specific short-term funding bids, and by BRC's 30th anniversary in 2009 the two remaining employees of the centre, Mike Quiggin and Bal Athwal, 'have to spend more time on finance and fundraising, planning and co-ordination, field research and community research', according to the Annual Review that year⁴¹. As ever, volunteers played a vital role, particularly in maintaining 'open sessions' of the library and facilities. As the 2011 Annual Review notes however, finding people to volunteer at BRC or on the management committee was increasingly difficult, as 'the cuts to the public and voluntary sector have taken more of people's time. So much for the Big Society!'. Difficulties in maintaining the space and regular income persisted. Sam Jackson, BRC Management Committee Chair in 2011, ends the Annual Review of that year describing 'heated debates about the role of BRC and its future.'

Despite these issues, the 2011 Review documents resistance to the racist English Defence League in 2010, and sustained 'coalition against the cuts' work, opposing the 2010 coalition government's austerity program. BRC was also very integral to the Bradford People's Assembly movement, fighting austerity and cuts across the city, and highlighting concerns around the Council's leadership and accountability. The wider ARCC building continued to be well used, housing Action for Black

41 BRC 2009 Annual Review

Community Development (ABCD), Changemakers Bradford, Church Action on Poverty, Bradford African Women's Empowerment Forum, Raise Your Banners (a radical political music festival), South Asian Women's Health Awareness Association, BIASAN, Woodcraft Folk (a secular and progressive youth group) and Bradford Community Arts. Joe Cole who regularly attended Woodcraft sessions at ARCC as a teenager recalls the feeling of the building in his interview:

I have good memories in that building, I remember it as much bigger! Those red stairs I remember really vividly [...] It was great being around a group of friends who were not from where you lived or went to school with [...]. It was a melting pot. When I look back on it now, it was progressive and endorsed a lot of things that are relevant today.

Joe, who also got involved in the clear-out of the building, argues: 'it would be amazing to have community access back to that building...for people to use, to access, to express themselves in. It would be a massive full circle movement for me to move back there [with an arts project he is currently working on]. That building has an energy, a spirit'.

Conclusion

It was something of this spirit that many of us rediscovered whilst starting to work through and archive the material we found at BRC after the 2022 flood. By the time the material that has informed this short history was re-discovered through 2024-25 – in piles and boxes across the ARCC building - the space was only regularly being used (after further funding cuts and the Covid-19 pandemic) by the Bradford Metropolitan Foodbank, as a distribution point. The material in it increasingly like an 'archive', rather than an active bank of information. But where do we draw such lines? BRC always had one foot in the future, and one in the past. Bradford is a city that has been shaped by brutal 'experiments' in unabated deindustrialisation, structural racism, council cuts, and austerity, but also by the radical political struggles that resisted and built alternatives to this. From 1979 onwards, BRC was a space that people could learn about these issues and campaigns, and then, crucially, take action. 'Information is never neutral' a BRC printout from the 1990s argues, it reflects the systems and forms of power we live under.

Archives are no different. This project and short history have therefore not only tried to tell some of the remarkable stories that make up the history of BRC and the wider political scene it was a key part of, but also to raise questions about how archives and history operate. How do we collect social movement history? Whose stories are we able to collect and share? How can we do a history of BRC in a way that reflects its ethos and values? What kinds of limits – in terms of funding, resources, and scope – are we up against, and how do these mirror the struggles BRC went through itself? Ultimately though, the more important questions are asked of us, by the history of BRC and the archival material itself: what are we going to do with all this stuff? How can we use

it to strengthen struggles today? Can we learn from our successes and failures? What resources do we have, and need, at this current moment?

We hope this short history offers some starting points, and new questions, to think about these ideas. More than that, we hope that they can inspire action – a reaching back to the past that shows all the messy, imperfect but hopeful ways in which people have tried to organise for a different kind of world, a different kind of future, and built the resources they needed to do so. As we write this history, we are in the latter stages of the ARCC / BRC building on Chapel Street being transferred over to People's Property Portfolio (PPP), 'a community benefit society with a mission to regenerate both spirit and place in our cities, starting with Bradford'. PPP explain on their website how they are 'seeking support to redesign [the] Grade II listed building for creative, heritage and community use, thereby revitalising a much-loved (but at risk) community space. [...] Our ambition is that once again, the building will be the beating heart of the creative and community sectors in Bradford, supporting social change and innovation for years to come. .' ⁴²

In some ways we have come full circle, to the early days of BRC in 1979, with a small group of dedicated people hoping to start something new, and a city struggling to sustain radical forms of community action and working-class self-organisation. On top of these difficulties, we face the particular horrors of our time: climate catastrophe, a global far-right resurgence, deep economic hardship, rising anti-LGBTQ+ politics, spiralling conflicts around the world, and Israel's continuing genocidal decimation of Palestine. We hope that the history of BRC can offer some different ways of thinking about how to meet these crises,

42 See the PPP Website at:

<https://peoplespropertyportfolio.co.uk/projects/bradford-resource-centre>

together. More than ever we need spaces where we can come together to share ideas, debate, argue and organise. We need resources to communicate our ideas and find common cause. Let's hope that the Chapel Street building can provide such a space once again, albeit in a different form, to meet these new and challenging times.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this history in different ways, particularly all those who came along (often from far and wide) to help with the sorting and workdays at BRC. Huge thanks to Carole Moss, Mary Dowson (both of Bradford Community Broadcasting) & Judy White for conducting the oral history interviews that we quote from throughout. Thanks to everyone who did an interview: Ruth Collett, Julia Dick, Mandy Cook, Mike Quiggin, Ludi Simpson, Caro Blount-Shah, Deb Collett, Ruth Dunstan, David Odunukwe, Bridget Maguire, Alice Parsons, George Pope, Joe Cole, Barry Clarke, Carol Duerden, John Baruch, Heather Esiri, Gill Thornton, Ali Hussein, Paul Hubert, and Nancy Carlton. And to those also featured in our accompanying film: Jerry Crawford, Sarah Lawson, and Dusty Rhodes.

Thanks to Toothless Films and the other participants of our archival workshops: Armaan Ali, Patrick Bradshaw, Sarah Derrick, Zero Stead, Louie Haslam-Chance, Virgil, Mathew Rowan, Usman Javaid, Adil Hussain, Joel Anderson & Haider Mahboob.

Thanks to Andrew Jakubowicz for feeding in all the way from Sydney! Endless gratitude to Sarah Lawson, Joe Harvey and Adam Lewis Jacob for support with the this text and the exhibition, along with driving and emotional support (like BRC itself, this project had its moments of stress!), and Louie Pegna for formatting. Thanks to the Friends of BRC – Graham Walker, John Henkel, Deb Collett, Judy White, Steven Schofield & Mike Quiggin – for steering the ship throughout, and to Rosie Freeman and everyone at PPP for continued support and guidance as the Chapel Street Building hopefully enters a new lease of life. Thanks to the teams at Bradford 25, the The Lipman-Miliband Trust and the British Art Network for the funding and support.

This document, and the exhibition and film it accompanies, was made possible thanks to funding from Bradford 25, the The Lipman-Miliband Trust and the British Art Network.



Formatted by Louie Pegna.
Printed by Footprint Workers Co-op, Leeds





