

# DENIS BARRITT

**Best known for:** Peace work, Activism, Work within the voluntary and not for profit sector

**Lived:** Born 08/12/1914 in Dunmurray - Died 31/08/1993. Buried Friend's BG, Balmoral in Belfast

**Family life:** Parents were Roland and Sybil (both Quakers). Married Monica Barritt (nee Clipstone) in 1951. They had three sons Christopher, Paul and Jonathan (all accomplished musicians)

**Educational Life:** Friends School Lisburn before transferring to Bootham School in York and finally to Dalton Hall, a residential hall named after a Quaker chemist, John Dalton, at Manchester University.

**Health:** In 1943 he was diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis and after 2-3 years when the condition had not improved he was admitted to Forster Green hospital (see fact file 2). Honeymooned in Nice in 1951 when he almost died, at this time he was refusing traditional medicine insisting instead on a vegetarian diet with raw vegetables. A local doctor changed his mind and he began to recover. He remained a life-long vegetarian and helped start Belfast's first vegetarian restaurant in the 1950s

**South Belfast Meeting:** Involved in founding South Belfast meeting in 1957 although he had grown up in the original Belfast Meeting (Frederick Street)

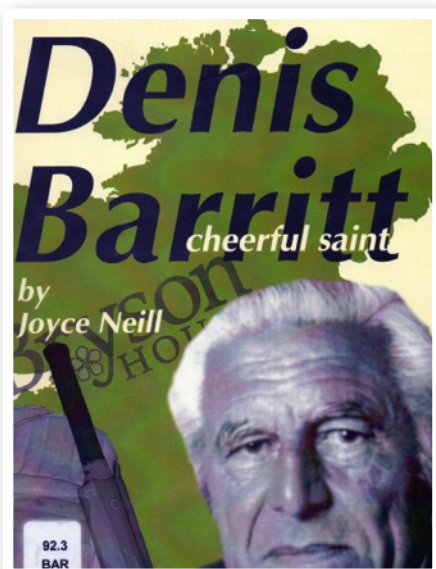
**Activism:** Activism was a way of life for Denis, whether it was protesting against the death penalty outside the Crumlin Road Prison in the early 1960s or organising the 1962 Freedom from Hunger Campaign. If it was working towards social change in Ireland, Denis was probably there in the middle of it all.

## BRYSON HOUSE

Between 1964 and 1980, Denis managed Bryson House, an umbrella organisation for a wide range of voluntary and charitable services. During his tenure the Charity created many new projects and built upon existing ones - A Citizen's Advice Team, Laundry for the Incontinent, a housing scheme for families with low incomes, a family centre on the "peace line"



and North Belfast's first family Aid project. This all happened in the midst of the "troubles" which resulted in the building suffering bomb damage on 7 different occasions and impacted on the work Bryson House needed to undertake such as the re-housing of families subject to intimidation and managing of emergency relief funds. His exceptional work in Bryson house was recognised with both an OBE in 1978 and an Honorary MA at Queen's University in 1979



For further Reading "Denis Barritt - Cheerful Saint" by Joyce Neill

**Cross Border/Community Work:** With Victor Bewley, Denis co-ordinated 2 groups (one from the North and one from the South) who met several times in 1972 in a hotel outside Dundalk trying to find common ground and listen to each others views. The groups consisted of Quakers, Catholics and Protestants both Nationalists and Unionists. This may have laid some of the ground work for the eventual project at Frederick Street and later at Quaker House, Belfast. He was a member of the Irish Association for Cultural, Economic and Social Relations ( a cross border society founded in 1938). From this involvement came the 1962 ominously named publication "The Northern Ireland Problem" written by Denis and Charles Carter (an English Friend). This publication for the first time separated fact from myth about the many beliefs of people living on both sides of the Irish border. Twenty years later in 1982 he published the equally unsettlingly titled "Northern Ireland - A problem for every solution"

**Denis Barritt Trivia:** As a keen gardener he had a particular love for willow trees and took it upon himself one day to plant cuttings along the banks of the Lagan just above Shaw's Bridge across the river from Barnet's Park. These trees still stand there to this day.

**Organisational Founder:** Denis was responsible for bringing the Peace Pledge Union, Fellowship of Reconciliation and PACE to Northern Ireland