

1877

A small, private School of Science and Art is set up in one room of a Working Men's Club on Abbey Road (most recently known as The House of Lords, and which, until gutted by fire, was one of Barrow's finest buildings).

Not long after opening, the school moves into Ramsden Hall, the former Ramsden Baths.

1883

Due to an increase in the number of pupils attending the school, an additional building is proposed between Ramsden Hall and the Working Men's Club.

A plan submitted by architects Paley and Austin of Lancaster, designers of many local buildings, is selected but quickly abandoned for a changed proposal.

Furness Railway gives a plot of land between Abbey Road and Dundonald Street specifically for a larger school.

1884

A new design for the larger building is submitted by Paley and Austin and accepted.

After an initial setback over funding the building is completed.

The rear of this building can still be seen today; it forms a section of the rear wall of the Nan Tait Centre, on the Art Gene side.

1889

The Technical Education Act gives councils control over Science and Art education.

A competition is held to design a larger building incorporating the existing School of Science and Art.

Architects Woodhouse and Willoughby win with their design.

The new building is to feature spacious lecture theatres, laboratories, workshops, and picture galleries.

W. Gradwell and Company, a local firm, secure the construction contract for the building, which is to be made of Accrington Red Brick with golden buff terracotta banding and dressings.

1891

Barrow Council takes charge of the Barrow School of Science and Art.
138 students take exams in subjects, such as:

Art (Freehand, Model and Perspective): Sciography (representation of shadows and gradations of light and shade); Drawing Foliage from Nature; and Elementary Principles of Ornament.

Science: Descriptive Geometry; Machine Construction and Drawing; Building Construction; Mathematics; Applied Mechanics and Steam.

Technology: Mechanical Engineering; Carpentry and Joinery; and Iron and Steel Manufacture.

1900

The foundation stone is laid by Mrs Albert Vickers, wife of the chairman of Vickers Limited, on 26 May.

Within the foundation is buried: a sealed bottle containing coins; a list of councillors; copies of a local daily paper; and a directory of the Barrow School of Business and Art for the session 1899 – 1900.

1903

The official opening of the £20,000 Technical School is planned to coincide with a visit by H.R.H Princess Louise (4th daughter of Queen Victoria), invited to launch the battleship, *Dominion*, on 25 August.

After launching the ship, the princess and her entourage proceed to the school via the town hall. At the school she is presented with an 18-carat gold and enamelled key (in 2024, on sale on ebay for over £14,500).

1908

Walney Bridge opens

When the bridge is officially opened in July 1908, the park on Walney stretches from the Ferry pub all the way to the church. Central Drive doesn't exist.

1909

Trams are introduced to Walney for the first time in June.

(The Barrow -in-Furness Tramways Company operated a tramway service in Barrow between 1885-1932).

The trams turn left onto the Promenade, where a shelter and toilets were built.

1911

The tramline is extended to reach Biggar Bank.

1915

Central Drive is built after an agreement between the council and the Isle of Walney Estates Company, which built Vickerstown.

1919

The Technical School offers courses relating to Barrow's main industries, including:

5-year courses in Mechanical Engineering and Naval Construction

4-year courses in Electrical Engineering

3-year courses in Building Construction

2-year courses in Commercial Subjects

A Junior Technical School is opened, admitting students from age 13.

Pupils are required to stay in school until they are 16. The year consists of three terms, each costing 12 shillings and sixpence (roughly £30 - £40 today).

1932

Trams cease running in Barrow and Walney.

1941

The Barrow Blitz.

The Technical School incurs minor damage when a German bomb strikes the eastern gable before exploding on the other side of Abbey Road, destroying Christ Church and the Trevelyan Hotel, and, sadly, taking a number of lives.

The damaged gable is demolished and never replaced.

1942

On Walney, a YMCA canteen is built in Vickerstown Park between Central Drive and the Ferry Hotel.

Designs for the 'hut', produced by Liverpool-based architect, Hubert Arthur Thomas, show no sign of the present day Walney Shelter.

1943

Toilets are added to the canteen. No shelter can be seen on the related plans.

1944

The Education Act of 1944 encourages day-release classes for young workers, supported by industry.

1950 - 1970

For a number of years, education is delivered over several sites, not only the Abbey Road and Howard Street buildings but also in the old Ramsden Baths, the John Whinnerah Institute and St Mary's Annex.

The Technical School operates primarily between Abbey Road and Howard Street.

Many former Vickers Armstrong apprentices will recall attending day release and evening classes at the school (or college, as it was also known then) relating to their chosen trade.

1950

On Walney, plans are made for a chair store in the park. The chair store plan shows the existing shelter at the bottom on Central Drive.

In the absence of any plans being found so far for the shelter itself, we can predict the shelter is built sometime between 1943 and 1950.

1954

On Abbey Road, an increase in demand for technical education prompts the adaptation of premises into the Department of Engineering.

A new building in Howard Street accommodates Arts, Science Departments, and the County Technical School for Boys.

1964

In January, the County Technical School for Boys, or the Barrow County Technical School for Boys as it was then known, moves into a new, purpose-built building on Thorncliffe Road.

1980s

Mid-1980s - the Abbey Road building (by then known as the Barrow College, Abbey Road Annex) falls into a state of disrepair; plaster falling from the ceilings, broken windows boarded up and leaking roofs.

The College Governor at the time, Frank Ward, describes the building as: "Dickensian, decrepit and [it's] a disgrace to the town that school children, students and apprentices have to be taught in such an establishment".

1992

The Principal of what is by now Furness College, Maggie Chadwick, looks towards new uses for the Abbey Road building. She tells the Evening Mail:

"The building is badly run-down and of course no longer suitable for modern learning methods, but we believe it is structurally sound and with imagination and investment it can be transformed."

1998

Artist's Maddi Nicholson and Stuart Bastik and Julie Hammerton of Barracudas Carnival band move their businesses in and rent studio spaces within the then derelict building.

1999

£2m for the restoration is confirmed but work doesn't start.

Grants are provided by funders of the time: The North West Development Agency; Arts Lottery Fund (National Lottery), Cumbria County Council, the European Development Agency and the Heart of Barrow Regeneration Project.

2000

Refurbishment of the building takes place, led by Capita with Architect Mark Wharton.

Maddi, Stuart and Julie move out on a temporary basis while refurbishment of their spaces take place. Maddi and Stuart relocate for a year to the Lesser Kings Hall on Hartington Street.

2002

January 24th Art Gene is founded by Maddi Nicholson, Stuart Bastik and Julie Hammerton to hold the lease for 55% of the building. The artists and Barracudas move back in as the first tenants, to their newly refurbished studios. Building work continues on the County Council side of the building.

Maddi and Stuart undertake the interior design of the County Council areas of the building. This includes the marriage and waiting rooms for Barrow Registration Office.

2001

18th June the building is named in honour of former councillor and Mayor of Barrow (1959 - 1960) Agnes 'Nan' Tait, who died in 1999.

Bill Minto (Cumbria County Council) and Barrow Mayor, Pam Smith, unveil a commemoration plaque.

2003

Officially opened by the Right Honourable John Hutton MP 18th July 2003

2008

Art Gene raises funding for the refurbishment of the Art Gene Gallery led by Research Design Architecture, with Architect Charlie MacKeith.

Funded through Arts Council England and Barrow Regeneration.

2017

Women's Community Matters move into the Nan Tait Centre.

2021

Barrowfull move into the Nan Tait Centre.