



Newsletter Number 13 – May 2021

Well, you probably all think that I have been lying back and enjoying myself over the past few weeks and that is why there wasn't a Newsletter in April. But, you would be wrong! There are two reasons why there has been no Newsletter; firstly there wasn't much to say and secondly, I have been rather busy working on what I am about to tell you about.

Newbiggin Arts Centre has a new home!

We have taken out a lease on 74B Front Street; the studios next door to the Town Council offices – which used to be 'Jumping Jax'.

We have always been on the look out for somewhere nearer the centre of town, more convenient and where there is more passing trade for the gallery and therefore higher potential sales. When I saw 74B was up for lease, I quickly contacted the Landlord (part of Northumberland County Council). At first the cost seemed too high. But, after some detailed negotiation and the ability to fall back on our reserves built up from Government grants received during COVID, your committee has concluded that we can afford the move.

Additionally, we had already been awarded a significant grant from NCC Community Chest to pay for replacement shutters at Gibson Street. The grant committee have graciously allowed us to re-allocate this money to the set up of our new studios on Front Street. (We can make a grant application to another funder for the shutters later.)

I received the keys on Thursday and we are currently beavering away in the background to do what is required to open up our new studios, hopefully on the lifting of COVID restrictions on 17th May.

Running Two Centres

We wouldn't normally have taken up a new lease just yet, as we still have 14 months left until the next opt-out point on our existing lease for Gibson Street. However, your committee has decided that this is too good an opportunity to pass up. So, until June 2012 (at least) we will be operating two Centres!

The new studios will become our prestige premises, which we will use for our painting workshops/classes and an elite gallery (for quality, large, sellable paintings + guest artists)

Our existing premises at Gibson Street will be used for Craftwork, Children's club, 'messy arts' (pottery, etc.), hire to other users (Ellington Art Club, Creative Arts North East, etc.), table top sales, promotional activities, etc. as well as a gallery for members' paintings and craftwork (more accessible art and smaller paintings).



COVID Workshops

As mentioned above, we are planning on re-opening in the week beginning 17th May, subject to the COVID regulations being lifted. Even then, we will just be able to operate the 'rule of six' workshops, as we did towards the end of last year.

In between working on Front Street, I will put together a plan for the workshops. But, it is likely to be based on the rota which we were operating before the lockdown. I will get something to you all in the next week, or so. Meanwhile, please let me know if you would like to change the times of your sessions, or, in fact, if you now feel comfortable to join us after your vaccinations, etc.

On the assumption that we manage to get the Front Street studios ready in time, we will be holding the painting workshops there. The craft workshops will stay at Gibson Street. But, I will let you know the details nearer the time.

Committee Meeting

We held a committee meeting last week where we went through the plans for Front Street and we will have another on 10th May, a week before the scheduled re-opening to make sure that everything is in order.

As usual, the minutes of the meeting, together with these newsletters will be posted on our website www.newbigginartscentre.org

Fundraising

We are very grateful to Her Majesty's Government (via Northumberland County Council) for the COVID relief grants for our forced closures during the lockdowns. As well as covering the cost of rent and utilities until we can open again these grants have given us a financial buffer to allow us to embark on our strategic improvements, including Front Street.

As mentioned above, the NCC Community Chest grant has been re-allocated for the set-up of Front Street and the 'small' grant from Newbiggin Town Council will provide us with roller blinds to cover up the shop displays when not being used.

But, the big news is that we have just been advised that we have been awarded a VERY substantial grant from the Coalfields Community Investment Programme. This is to cover a fair proportion of our core running costs as well as some strategic purchases to support our improvement plans.

I won't give too many details. So they will all be nice surprises when you see them appear at our Centre(s)!

And we still have a few more applications going through the review process and several yet to be submitted.



NEWBIGGIN ARTS CENTRE

To summarise, we are in a VERY healthy position at the moment and our supporters are all playing their part in providing their share of the funds which we need to supply our services to the community without having to charge you all ridiculously high fees.

These things don't come easy and I would like to thank Heather and the other committee members for the support which they have given me to get to the fantastic position that we are in today.

Painting Exhibitions

Although our 'Winter' exhibition didn't see much light of day due to the lockdown, we are not discouraged. We are going to have a fresh new exhibition for the re-opening.

The exhibition, to be held over both our studios – Front Street and Gibson Street – will be themed "Out of COVID".

We are looking for **your best paintings** from your portfolio; ANY subject, painted whenever, but it would be really great if we could include some which were painted during the lockdown and if they covered the subjects of 'Spring' or 'A new beginning'.

You can put them up for sale (and we did sell quite a few last year, even though we were closed for most of the year) or, if you would prefer to have them back after the exhibition, we can mark them 'Not for Sale'. The main thing is that we put on show the quality paintings which you have produced; to demonstrate the standard that many of us have achieved in such a short time of coming together; but also to encourage more people to take advantage of the facilities and services which we provide.

Please bring your paintings to Front Street any time from 4th May onwards. You should find either me, or one of the other volunteers working away at getting the studio ready for the big opening.

On that subject; if any of you are at a loose end and want something to do, please drop in to Front Street and offer to lend a hand. There will probably be plenty of little things which will need doing. However, we do seem to have most things in hand, so won't be putting together a work schedule like we did when we were refurbishing Gibson Street.

Well, that's enough from me for now. Please let me know if you want to join us in the 'rule of six' workshops, whether you want to help with the work and if you want any more details. AND DON'T FORGET.... To bring in your paintings for the first exhibition of 2021!



Stay safe and healthy!
Steve Wilkinson





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