



A Word from our Chair

Newbiggin Arts Centre means so much to everyone involved; participants, tutors, volunteers and Trustees. It has brought happiness and a sense of wellbeing to everyone who takes part. From my personal perspective, I am so pleased that we are bringing so much to so many. Long may it continue!

Five years ago, we could hardly have imagined just how far Newbiggin Arts Centre would come. What began as a small Wednesday evening club has grown into a vibrant, welcoming community built around creativity, friendship and wellbeing.

So, we have produced this special edition of our newsletter, celebrating five wonderful years of NAC.

We hope you enjoy looking back at some of the memories, milestones and people who have helped make the Centre what it is today - and, of course, celebrating everything that lies ahead.

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FIVE YEARS, TWO STUDIOS & ONE VERY FAMOUS TOILET!
Celebrating the people, stories and creativity behind Newbiggin Arts Centre

Friday 24th July was a very special day at Newbiggin Arts Centre as we celebrated our fifth anniversary - and what a celebration it was!

There was a fantastic turnout, with just the right number of people to make the afternoon feel lively without losing the opportunity to chat, catch up and get to know a few more people. Despite the heat, everyone seemed determined to enjoy themselves, with good food, bubbles, laughter and plenty of stories being shared.

We were delighted to welcome Mayor Jan Casey and Councillor Alison Sunderland, and we would like to thank them for taking the time to celebrate this milestone with us.

Of course, an anniversary is always a good excuse for a few thank-yous - and there are so many people who deserve one.

The people behind the scenes

Events like this don't just happen. A huge amount of work goes on behind the scenes, and we are particularly grateful to Wendy, our Studio Manager, who somehow manages to keep us all on track while supporting our wonderful team of volunteers and keeping the Centres running day to day.



We are also delighted to welcome Heather Mills, our new Volunteer Co-ordinator. Heather is already getting to know our volunteers, helping to bring everyone together, looking at how we can better support and organise our existing volunteer team, and keeping an eye out for new people who might like to get involved. We're really pleased to have Heather helping us to strengthen the volunteer side of NAC as we look towards the next five years.

A special thank you also goes to our exhibition team, who came in early and worked hard to get our current exhibition installed in time for the celebrations. Featuring the wonderful work of our Thursday Evening Club, it really is well worth a visit, so if you haven't seen it yet, do pop in and take a look!

We'd also like to say a huge thank you to our volunteer cleaners, who gave us a head start by getting everything ship-shape, allowing the rest of us to concentrate on the preparations. Their contribution may have been behind the scenes, but it made a real difference.

Of course, what would any celebration be without food? We all know that good conversation, friendship and creativity are important at Newbiggin Arts Centre - but a plate of something delicious in your hand certainly helps!



We decided that canapés were the way to go rather than a full buffet, and it turned out to be a great choice. There was plenty to eat, nobody had to queue up with a plate and, most importantly, everyone could keep chatting, mingling and enjoying themselves. After all,

you can't run an arts centre on creativity alone! So, a huge thank you to our wonderful volunteer team who prepared all the food.

We must also give a special mention to Gladys Campbell, who made the wonderful little cakes decorated with paint palettes. They looked fantastic - and tasted even better!

We'd also like to extend a very special thank you to Pat Mole, one of our photography class participants, who volunteered to take photographs throughout the afternoon.

Pat did a brilliant job of capturing the atmosphere, people and special moments of our celebration - giving us photographs that will help us remember the day for years to come. Well done, Pat, and thank you!



A celebration of our people



It was particularly lovely to see some of our past and current interns at the celebration. Each has brought something different to Newbiggin Arts Centre; and what has struck us time and again is how their enthusiasm and passion for the Centre have gone far beyond the duties they originally came here to undertake.

Our current art intern Pablo gave us a demonstration of his origami skills. It looked deceptively simple - until you tried to follow along!

We were also treated to a demonstration by one of our tutors, Gary, who generously stood up and showed us some of his beautiful charcoal work.

It's no wonder his pupils are so fond of him!





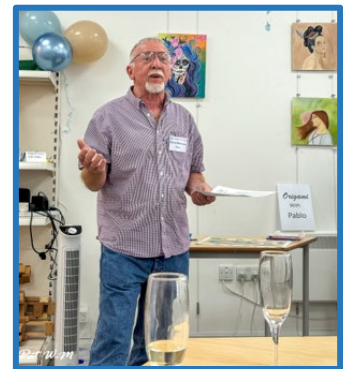
Our Vice Chair, April Dobson, also had her first proper initiation into an NAC anniversary celebration and shared her vision for the future of the Centre. We aren't going to reveal too much just yet — you'll have to wait and see what April and the rest of us have in store!

And then there was Steve...

Steve, of course, gave his obligatory speech — and, in the interests of keeping everyone happy, we did our best to keep it short!

Once the formalities were over, however, it was time to turn the tables and recognise the person who has been at the heart of so much of what has happened at Newbiggin Arts Centre over the past five years. So we did...!

To say Steve was surprised - and moved - by what happened next would be something of an understatement.



For those who don't know Steve quite so well, he is the ultimate 'doer'. Over the years he has applied for funding, managed the finances, sought out and developed partnerships, dealt with landlords and suppliers, travelled countless miles on behalf of the Centre and, perhaps most importantly, undertaken an extraordinary amount of DIY.

Which brings us neatly to the subject of the toilet. Our Gibson Street toilet has achieved something of a legendary status over the years. Steve has spent many an unpleasant hour dealing with blocked drains and plumbing problems - including, we suspect, the removal of what could only be described as 'oil paint bergs' from collapsed drains!

So we thought he deserved a little reminder of his plumbing past.

With the help of Jinine and Safron, our pottery leads at Gibson Street, Sue Case set about making a small replica of the infamous loo. It isn't perfect - but then again, neither is our plumbing!



A few brushes were added, and the miniature loo was presented to Steve alongside the gift we knew would be very welcome: a bottle of red wine. His fondness for red wine is certainly no secret, and after all the travelling, hard work and problem-solving he has put into the Arts Centre over the years, it was very well deserved.

We think the little loo went down rather well! (Also, just to let you know, Sue Case isn't getting away with this without further consequences - next week she will be joining the Saturday morning club to improve her pottery skills!)

It wasn't over yet, there was another surprise in store!

Steve

He sees a problem, takes the lead,
No matter what the hour or need,
He rolls his sleeves up, gets it fixed,
With grit and kindness finely mixed.
A finance guru, sharp and wise,
With grant-aficionado eyes,
He finds the funds, secures the means,
The engine driving behind the scenes,
From early light to fading sun,
His tireless work is never done;
He clocks the hours both here and home,
No matter where his duties roam.
So watch out for this driven soul –
An OAP who's in control!
Determined, fierce, and standing tall,
He brings his best to give his all.
Our NAC Jack of all trades is he,
Leading the way for all to see.
In diverse hats he takes his stride,
With dedication as his guide.
And when the final task is through,
He knows exactly what to do:
To pour a glass, unwind, recline
And savour a good bottle of wine.

Talents aren't always obvious, and we discovered that our Trustee for Exhibitions, Sue Andrew, already known to us as a brilliant artist, has another talent that had been kept remarkably quiet: she is also a poet!

Sue created and presented a poem especially for Steve which perfectly captured the man behind so much of what happens at Newbiggin Arts Centre.

We think it's safe to say that everyone loved it - and that it captured Steve perfectly.

From one Wednesday night to a community of creativity

Looking around the room on Friday, it was hard to believe just how far we have come.

The story of Newbiggin Arts Centre actually begins before there was a charity at all.

Back in 2014, the organisation started as a Wednesday night club and a children's club on Friday evenings, operating from the "People's House" on Woodhorn Road. One of those founding members was Sue Case, our longest-serving Trustee, who is still very much part of the story today.

Curious to see the journey for yourself? Our visual history brings the last five years to life, from those early Wednesday nights to the thriving arts community we have today. Take a look and see just how far we've come!

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/16bWoWaKnMgZA2Kl9nVsqYigJ5jNVUP7B/view?usp=sharing>

In August 2015, the Little Gem Art & Craft Gallery charity was formed. We started modestly, with just one watercolour class each week, led by Brian.



By June 2017, we had moved to Gibson Street, where the craft club was established in 2018. Later that year Keith started the oils club, and in 2018 we held our very first exhibition of members' work at Gibson Street.

Then came acrylics, with Steve starting acrylic clubs in 2020.

Then....came COVID.

What could have been simply a difficult interruption became an opportunity to do something positive. During the enforced break, Gibson Street was completely refurbished. Our first newsletter appeared in March 2020, helping us to stay connected with our members at a time when we couldn't be together.



In August 2020, Brian stepped down as Chair and Steve was voted into the role. Two months later, in October, we changed our name to Newbiggin Arts Centre and launched our website.

In February 2021 we introduced card payments, and then an exciting new opportunity arrived. Front Street became available in April 2021.

We negotiated a great deal with our landlords, Advance Northumberland, and used a combination of grant funding, including funding for Gibson Street shutters and COVID grants, to establish our second Studio.

The official opening of Front Street took place on 26th July 2021.

At that point, following COVID, we were welcoming perhaps 12–20 participants a week. Today, that figure is closer to 200.



Front Street 'Opening' ceremony 26th July 2021

Building something together



Club through the eyes of a professional photographer - 2021

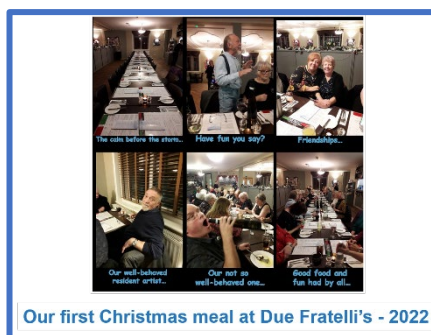
The years since have been a story of gradually building our capabilities and, importantly, building a community.

Grant funding has enabled us to invest in equipment and facilities, including the shed, LVT flooring, shutters and central heating at Gibson Street, as well as laptops, iPads, TVs, pottery wheels and kilns.

However, funding only tells part of the story. Much of the physical work was carried out by Steve, the Trustees and a small band of volunteers.

From October 2021, Ted Taylor became our resident artist, bringing his own energy and creativity to the Centre.

In December 2022 we had our first Christmas meal at Due Fratelli's — another sign that NAC was becoming about much more than simply attending an art class.



Our first Christmas meal at Due Fratelli's - 2022



Amble Portraiture Weekend – March 2024

In March 2024 we held our first collaborative event, the **Amble Portraiture Weekend with Dovecote Street Arts.**

Then came another major milestone. In May 2024, we were awarded a three-year grant from the National Lottery Community Fund. This funding helps support Wendy, some of our tutors, materials and overheads, and has made an enormous difference to what we are able to offer.

Wendy quickly took over the day-to-day running of the Centres and became a vital source of support for Trustees, volunteers and members alike.

A significant NIECP grant later that year enabled us to bring in more tutors and, importantly, to diversify what we offer.

When Ted left us in July 2024, we knew we had a challenge ahead in finding new tutors and maintaining the range of activities we had developed. However, thanks to Wendy's hard work, the commitment of our tutors and volunteers, and a steady stream of additional grants, we have not only maintained our programme — we have continued to grow it.

Since January 2025 alone, we have introduced 72 new courses and workshops!

And the story keeps growing...

We have been incredibly fortunate to welcome some fantastic interns along the way. Annie joined us in June 2025 and Lara in October, both running workshops and classes and bringing fresh ideas and enthusiasm to the Centre.

We have continued investing in our facilities too, with a ceramics kiln in October 2025, a glass kiln in February 2026 and a craft club shed in March 2026.

It isn't all about traditional art classes. We've had Slow Cooking, quiz nights, Paint and Sip events, and our first music session with Jacob Harrison in February 2026.



First Paint & Sip – December 2023

We've worked with other organisations and groups in our community, including a genealogy project with the Family Centre, creating posters for the Belle Arkle launch and taking part in wellbeing meetings.

In 2026 we welcomed two more fantastic interns — Pablo, our art intern, and Bex, our business intern.

All of this has been made possible through the support of our grant providers, the hard work of our Trustees and volunteers, and of course the dedication of our Studio Manager, Wendy.

So, what happens next?

Five years ago, we could never have predicted where we would be today.

What began as a small Wednesday evening club has become two unique arts centres, an arts community and a social hub serving hundreds of people.

Five Years. So Many Stories.

*2 studios • ~200 regular participants •
72 new courses/workshops since Jan
2025 • 3-year NLCF grant • countless
cups of tea • 1 legendary toilet!*

We aren't finished yet! Over the next five years, we want to explore a membership scheme, optional online booking, greater economic stability, replacement of ageing equipment, even more courses and workshops, a stronger outreach programme and further diversification into areas beyond the visual arts. Who knows? Perhaps one day there might even be an Arts Festival for Newbiggin!

Whatever the future brings, one thing will remain at the heart of everything we do: The wellbeing of our community.

This is because Newbiggin Arts Centre isn't just about art. It's about having somewhere to go, something to do, people to meet, skills to learn, creativity to share and a community to belong to; and that is something worth celebrating.

And finally... a very big thank you to you

As we celebrate five wonderful years of Newbiggin Arts Centre, there is one thing we know for certain: Newbiggin Arts Centre is its people.

To everyone who walks through our doors — to create, learn, share, chat, make friends, try something new or simply enjoy being part of something — thank you. You are at the heart of everything we do.

To our amazing volunteers, who give their time, energy, ideas and enthusiasm so generously, thank you. Your warmth and commitment help make our Arts Centre the welcoming, friendly and inclusive place that it is.



And to our funders, supporters and partners, whose generosity helps us keep the doors open and creativity flowing, thank you. Your support allows us to reach more people, offer more opportunities and continue building a stronger, more connected community.

Above all, thank you for helping us create a place where creativity, friendship, inclusion, wellbeing and belonging can flourish.

Here's to five years of **making, creating, connecting and belonging** — and to **everything still to come**.

**Newbiggin Arts Centre is more than a place to make art.
It's a place to make connections, make memories
and make a difference.**

Thank you for being part of our story.



How to Contact Us

If you want to sign up for a course, provide us feedback, or send us your ideas on what we can do better, we always appreciate hearing from you.

Contact us at:

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27 Gibson Street, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, NE64 6UY
info@newbigginartscentre.org
07766 856 365



Keeping in Touch — Your Choice

We love keeping our community up to date with what's happening at NAC, but we also want to make sure you only hear from us if you're happy to do so.

If at any time you'd prefer not to receive the newsletter or other Arts Centre emails, just let us know and we'll happily remove you from the list — no problem at all.

We're grateful for your support and interest in the Centre, whether you follow every update or just drop in from time to time.