

NORTH SHIELDS  
FISH QUAY

 **OUR STORY**

**S**  **FAR**

**& HOW YOU CAN HELP  
US GO FURTHER**

**| HERITAGE CENTRE | GALLERY | COMMUNITY SPACE | CAFE | SHOP |**

The Old Low Light, in the heart of North Shields Fish Quay, has a fascinating history going back hundreds of years and is now playing its part in the area's regeneration.

Following major renovation, it opened in 2015 as a heritage centre, run by a charity, with a café, gift shop, gallery and space for community groups. Its rebirth was driven by local people who wanted to celebrate the area's history in a development that reflected the wishes of the community.

Read on to find out more about its past, what has been achieved in recent years and how you can help us to make sure that the Old Low Light continues to be a beacon for the local area long into the future.



# OUR STORY SO FAR

The Old Low Light, which stands within the walls of Clifford's Fort, is the oldest surviving building on the Fish Quay, largely dating from the early 18th century.

An important part of the town's rich seafaring heritage, it was originally one of a pair of leading lights guiding ships through the treacherous mouth of the river Tyne. Over the years it has been used in different ways including as an alms house providing support for poor and sick mariners, storage for the fishing industry on the Fish Quay, a training centre for deep sea fishermen and, until 2011, was the base for maritime volunteers.

In 2013 much needed restoration work was carried out by the Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust, North Tyneside Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Since 2015 it has been a thriving heritage centre, with a café, gift shop, gallery, space for community groups and a balcony from which people can enjoy spectacular views of the river. The building and its outside area offer a unique location for outside events, from heritage open days to classic car gatherings and live music shows.

Development of the heritage centre was driven by different groups of local enthusiasts, including two former teachers who set up a group informally called The Netties, who planned to bring stories of the past to life and inspire children to find out more about the history of North Shields.



Before long, links were made with other local groups, including FISH (Folk Interested in Shields Harbour), who also had a passion to celebrate the story of North Shields and the Fish Quay in particular.

When the opportunity arose to use the Old Low Light as a heritage centre and to make their vision a reality, the growing group of Netties set up a charity, called The Net North Shields. A board of trustees was appointed whose skills and interests would help achieve The Net's ambition. The Net and North Tyneside Council then secured funding from the European Union's Coastal Communities Fund. This meant professional help could be brought in, including from the North of England Civic Trust, lawyers, accountants, architects, specialist shop-fitters and designers.

Ideas were shared with the community and local groups, including naturalists, historians, teachers, fishermen and businesses, directly involving them in the development of the heritage centre.

A design company took the views gathered from the community, working closely with local groups, to make sure the development of the Old Low Light heritage centre was in keeping with with the shared ideas.



Left: The Old Low Light before restoration in 2013. Above: The Old Low Light after its transformation.



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# WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED

**The Old Low Light is still managed by The Net's board of trustees. With a small team of staff and support from more than 200 volunteers, it goes from strength to strength.**

North Tyneside Council, the owners of the building, lease it long term to Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust which The Net pays rent to annually.

Our vision was to develop a heritage centre with the local community that would:

- preserve an iconic building on the Fish Quay for the benefit of the public;
- inspire local people and those from further afield to find out more about the history of North Shields, its Fish Quay and its natural environment;
- provide recreation and leisure facilities to enrich lives and encourage healthy living.

We are succeeding in these aims and so much more.

Since 2015 we have:

Welcomed over  
**110,000**  
visitors



Organised more than  
**150**  
community events at the Old Low Light and on the Fish Quay.

During 2017-18 worked closely with **The North Shields Fishermen's Heritage Project** to help them raise funds for an iconic memorial statue.



Helped local businesses, artisans and artists to grow and, in doing so have supported efforts to regenerate the area. Our shop holds stock by local artisans and authors and our café uses local products. We source services locally wherever we can.



Worked closely with **local schools and community groups** to develop their knowledge of local history and traditional skills. In 2017 and 2018 worked with North Tyneside Council to provide a summer school for local children.



Helped **79** people into employment, by developing their skills and helping them gain experience through volunteering at the Old Low Light.



Promoted **healthy living** with regular guided walks for local people and visitors to enjoy wildlife, the beautiful coastal area and its history. We have also worked with local fitness instructors to plan regular exercise and meditation classes.



Hosted **18** exhibitions with strong local themes covering art, heritage, maritime and fishing traditions, as well as the river and the natural world. Many of these were organised by our volunteers.



Worked with a number of **community groups** including Changing Lives, a group for women who have been victims of crime. Run support groups including Flow, a community interest group which provides facilities for adults with additional needs.



Finally, we are delighted that the Old Low Light is being seen as a community venue by local people, groups and organisations. Our rooms are hired for weddings, birthday parties and family occasions. Some businesses have held away days here for their staff and a number of community groups use the building as a base.

This high level of use by local people, groups and organisations, shows how important partnership working is to us, as highlighted in a study on collaborative working by Newcastle University. It has also been recognised by North Tyneside Council. Our café, with its regular live music sessions, is also very popular.

# OUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE



**We want to build on these achievements and ensure that the Old Low Light continues to be an asset for the community long into the future.**

**The Net is a charity and every penny counts.**

It costs **£480 a day to keep the Old Low Light open** and to continue to provide the range of services and facilities that local people have come to rely on. While much of this is covered through the café, shop and fund raising activities, **we still need to raise at least £1,000 a month - £12,000 a year** - to help keep the Old Low Light running.

In 2019 our priorities are to:

## Become self-sufficient

We want to cover all our costs. All of our income is used to keep the centre running and to help with future developments. We will continue to apply for grants but we need to look for new ways to boost our funds. This will include encouraging more people to visit exhibitions in our gallery, holding fundraising and promotional events for potential sponsors and targeting local businesses to seek their support.

## Continue to encourage healthy living

We want to encourage people to be active in a way that suits them, so they maintain their healthier lifestyle.



## Continue to support our volunteers

Our work depends on the selfless support of many volunteers, who come from all walks of life. They include people with disabilities and two-thirds are over 55. While we couldn't function without our volunteers, we also want them to benefit. This includes supporting some of them to develop their skills and experience to help them find jobs. We hope to recruit a volunteer coordinator to help us make the most of their skills and enthusiasm as well as recruit new volunteers.



## Keep the Old Low Light well maintained and open to the public

As a Grade 2 listed building, the Old Low Light needs ongoing work to keep it in a good state of repair and open to people from the local community and further afield. In particular, we need to paint the outside of the building and complete some other external work. This will be expensive because it will require scaffolding and other specialist equipment due to the height of the building and awkward access.

We would also like to repair and develop the outside Drying Ground to use for our educational and event programmes.

## Help strengthen the local community

We want to keep working with the community, schools and local people to deliver exhibitions and events that they want and can be proud of. We also need to continue providing a community space for local groups.



# HOW YOU CAN HELP



## Become a Network Member of the Old Low Light

This means that for a small membership fee you can enjoy free entry into our exhibitions and the viewing gallery all year round.

## Become a volunteer

Opportunities offer variety with flexibility about commitment and are designed to inspire and benefit those taking part, as much as supporting the Old Low Light. There is a whole range of things you can do to help us - welcome our visitors at the 'front of house', work in the café, be a gallery guide or support our IT. We are also looking for people with the right practical skills to help with building maintenance jobs.



## Support us financially

We welcome partnerships with corporate sponsors and would be delighted to work with organisations and businesses to agree a package of rewards in return for financial support.

We also appreciate smaller donations from individuals and organisations, for which we can offer rewards such as free annual membership and free admission to preview events and selected ticketed events.

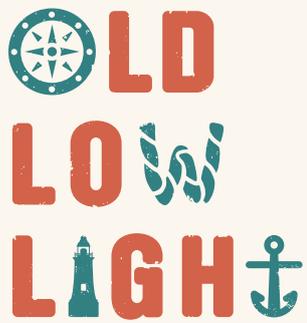
Please find out more from our website [www.oldlowlight.co.uk](http://www.oldlowlight.co.uk) or by ringing **0191 257 4506**



## Visit the Old Low Light

Find out more about the North Shields story in our heritage gallery. Our changing exhibition programme means there is always something new to see. Attend one of our events, treat yourself to one of the locally sourced gifts in our shop or enjoy a delicious hot drink or snack in our café. Income from admissions to our exhibitions and events, food served in the café or from sales in the shop, all help directly with our running costs. The gallery is open every day from 10-5pm in the summer and from 10-4pm in the winter.





NORTH SHIELDS  
FISH QUAY

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