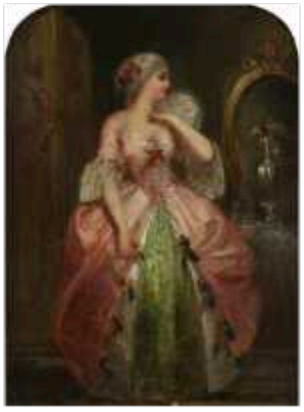
PLEA FOR MODERN WORKS

Their collection of water colours presented a fairly comprehensive review of that typical British medium, and owed its strength in a large measure to the Dodgson bequest which formed a most valuable nucleus for the collection of English water colours.

Although they had many excellent examples of the greatest water colour paintings there were outstanding exceptions e.g. George Barrett and J.S. Cotman. They had no examples of the pre-Raphaelite period, and the collection would be materially strengthened by the addition of work by certain of the more modern painters such as D.S. McColl, C.J. Holmes, D.Y. Cameron and Wilson Steer. So far as the formation of a thoroughly representative British collection of water colours was concerned the course to be followed was simple and clear. Their proper display, however, presented a more difficult problem.

The oil paintings in the large gallery were most varied in type, school and nationality of origin. Roughly they might be divided into three groups 1; British portraits and genre paintings, 2; landscapes and 3; foreign paintings.

The portraits included examples of the work by Kneller, Reynolds, Romney, Collier, Bundy, Conard and McEvoy. The genre subjects included a modest proportion of popular paintings of which the most outstanding were, E. Longs "Dianna or Christ", Albert Moore's "The Winds and the Seasons", Marcus Stones "Two's Company", J. Charlton's "Balaclava" and good examples of the work of Ansdell, La Thangue, A.J. Munnings, S. Cursiter and E.A. Hornel.



Examples of artworks bequeathed by Mrs Dodgson in 1884:
Portrait of Mrs Dodgson by Charles Herbert Ogg; John Bostock: "The Rehearsal," Augustus Jules Bouvier: "The Tpoilet" and "Figure Study."(oil paintings); J M W Turner: "The Heights of Jubberah."

GIFT THAT WOULD BE WELCOMED

The gallery possessed a few landscape paintings of the earlier painters of the last century. There were good examples of the work of more modern painters such as Frank Brangwyn, Oliver Hall, H. Moore, E. Stott, B. Priestmas, Edwin Ellis, J. Olson, and Clarence Whaite.

The foreign paintings showed a marked tendency towards the lesser known modern Dutch masters such as, D. Hoog, D. Bock, Jansen, De Haas, and the Belgian J.B. Clays. Of contemporary paintings executed during the last 20 years there was scarcely an example to be seen. It would be noted that the collection has a certain variety and quality.

The main stream through which additions had been acquired had been through gifts and bequests. Where possible the committee had tried to influence the various donors to give pictures which would in some measure add to the nucleus already possessed or to fill in gaps which were felt to be a weakness of the collection.

Among the outstanding British painters of the last 40 years were, Sargent, John, Orpen, McEvoy, Brangwyn, Cameron, Munnings, Sickert, Steer, Mathew Smith, Nicholson, Russell, Rothenstein, Lavary, Laura Knight, Connard, Ethel Walker, Hornel, Arnesby Brown, Mrs. Swinnerton, C.J. Holmes, Henry Tonks, Clausen, Le Thangue, E. Stott and Mark Fisher.

Examples of artworks acquired after John Yates's 1937 report:
Watercolours - J M W Turner: The Falls of Terni," Myles Birket Foster: "The Rialto, Venice" (bequeathed by E L Hartley),
Oil paintings - Laura Knight: "Ready to Show" (donated by Mrs H V Wolstenholme, 1938) and Charles John Holmes: "Seven Chimneys" (donated by R B Lewis, 1969)

The committee had welcomed and encouraged gifts of paintings by these artists of whom so far they only possessed works by eight. All the pictures and their frames, with one exception, the portrait of Mr. Cunningham (which should be removed) were in good order and condition.

The tendency of all the more enlightened galleries today", proceeded Mr. Yates, "is to avoid overcrowded walls and to allow each exhibited picture a reasonable amount of wall space. Both our galleries and the staircase are not only grievously overcrowded but we have encroached on the walls of the museum. Every effort should be directed in the future to remedy this matter by storing a number of the pictures and exhibiting only a reasonable quantity hung under proper conditions. Such measures would need to be carried out with the greatest care.

"Donors often expect their gifts to be constantly exhibited in the gallery. But it is impossible that this can be done if we follow the example of the progressive galleries of the country. In such galleries every effort is made to prevent any overcrowding. The pictures stored for the time being should, as occasion warrants be exhibited in substitution for those already hung. This would provide a welcome change and lead to greater interest in the gallery.

Our present storage accommodation only permits this policy to be adopted in a relatively small degree. This problem of storage has seriously limited the possibility of using the galleries for exhibitions. The holding of frequent exhibitions is one of the most important duties of the committee. Though the local public may be aware through literature and illustration of certain tendencies in modern art, few have had the opportunity of seeing actual examples. Opportunities should be provided for those interested to see and study examples of modern works of art. If we cannot afford to purchase we should at any rate obtain them by loan".

COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITIONS

"These periodical exhibitions shall not be limited to pictures. Every phase of modern art should be dealt with, e.g. architecture, textiles, photography, glass, pottery, furniture etc. Past exhibitions have generally been composed of loans from public galleries or private collections. No exhibition of contemporary work has ever been held, with the result that probably few of our townsfolk have any first knowledge of what is being done day to day in the world of art.

"One of the essentials of our town which is in the main dependent on the designing, manufacturing and sale of textiles is that it shall be fully aware as possible of the movements of contemporary art. The art gallery should do its part to provide the required information in this matter. The cost of each exhibition varies according to certain factors, but roughly it might be estimated that a small one limited to the water colour gallery would cost £20, while a larger one to include both galleries would cost under a £100. Societies exist which provide exhibitions already formed for the purpose of loan provincial galleries.

"Many galleries have a screen set apart on which is exhibited the "Picture of the month". The picture is one selected from the local collection to which the attention of the public is invited. Additional illustrations of the artists work and information can be presented at the same time."

Mr. Yates urged that the committee should do its utmost to guide potential testators and generously disposed donors to give paintings and drawings which would amplify the present collection and make it more comprehensive. It should neither encourage, or accept works which tended to lower the existing standard.

MR. HAWORTHS SERVICES

For many years almost all purchases had been acquired through Mr. R. Haworth, a local dealer in works of art. The committee had always felt deeply grateful to him for his keen personal interest in obtaining and offering (often as donations) suitable paintings and drawings to the gallery, and it was hoped that the committee would have the advantage of his services for many years to come. In assisting to fill the gaps in the water colour collection his highly specialized knowledge of that medium was invaluable.

Many of the provincial galleries who had funds to spend for that purpose either purchased paintings and drawings from the exhibitions they held in their own galleries or arranged for the visit of the members of the committee to exhibitions held elsewhere.

The largest and most comprehensive exhibition held in the provinces was the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition, and it was submitted that, whether the committee had funds to spend or not, it should pay a visit to that exhibition. With the limited funds at the disposal of the committee it was not possible to obtain a representative collection which would indicate the modern movement in painting. All the more progressive galleries made an annual subscription to the Contemporary Arts Association, which was an association supported by voluntary funds with object of the purchase and loan or gift to public galleries of painting of our own day. An annual subscription of five guineas made to that association would probably prove a good investment.

BLACKBURN ARTIST

The most famous living artist born in Blackburn was T.C. Dugdale. The committee had not as yet been successful in obtaining one of his paintings, but it was felt that an example of his work should be represented in the gallery. The committee had in the past been glad to obtain examples of the work of those local artists whose work was of such merit that it had been frequently hung in exhibitions of a recognized high standard..

Developments since 1937

Since John Yates wrote his report, there have been significant additions to the art collection, most notably the bequest of English watercolours by E. L. Hartley in 1954, which contains many splendid examples, including six by J.M.W. Turner as well as works by John Sell Cotman and David Young Cameron, on Yates's wish list and others by William Callow, George Clausen, J R Cozens, David Cox, Myles Birket Foster, Thomas Girtin, James Holland, Samuel Palmer, Samuel Prout, David Roberts and Archibald Thorburn, all of which I think, would have been welcomed by him.

Additions to the oil paintings have been less notable, but do include works by Laura Knight, Ambrose McEvoy, Ethel Walker, Charles John Holmes and Henry Herbert La Thangue, all of whom were mentioned by Yates in his recommendations. A fine portrait by the Blackburn-born Thomas Cantrell Duckworth was acquired in 1955 and is illustrated on the front page of this issue.

Since the Second World War the range of material in the Art Gallery has been greatly increased by other significant art acquisitions including the Lewis Collection of Japanese prints, the Hart Collection of books and manuscripts and the Icon Collection. Membership of the Contemporary Art Society has resulted in acquisitions of minor works, mainly prints, by major contemporary artists.

It is interesting that the arrangement of the oil paintings in the gallery today is almost identical to that at the time of the report in 1937. Yates wanted to see a more spacious display, but it is now very similar to its pre-war arrangement. The amount of display space for pictures is much the same as it was in Yates's time; for a while, there were two large temporary exhibition galleries in the Lewis Textile Museum in Exchange Street and downstairs in the former library after 1976, but the closure of the Lewis Museum in 2006 effectively eliminated both. Temporary exhibitions , such as the current Art Open, now occupy the Watercolour Gallery, and the watercolours are rarely seen. The situation for storage of the pictures has improved since the Library moved to new premises, allowing expansion of the Museum into the former library rooms and use of former museum space as storage.

A couple of final points: I find it extraordinary that John Yates did not mention *Mother and Child (Cherries)* by Frederick, Lord Leighton amongst the best pictures in the art gallery. It can be seen on display in the 1937 photograph and is one of the most sought-after and borrowed pictures in the collection. I am not aware of any great slump in his reputation at the time. Perhaps the omission is in the newspaper report rather than Yates's original report.

Secondly, what a contrast with current local arts reporting; it is difficult to imagine the detail of local art administration receiving such extensive coverage today.

MM

Almshouses of Blackburn

by Ian Ferris

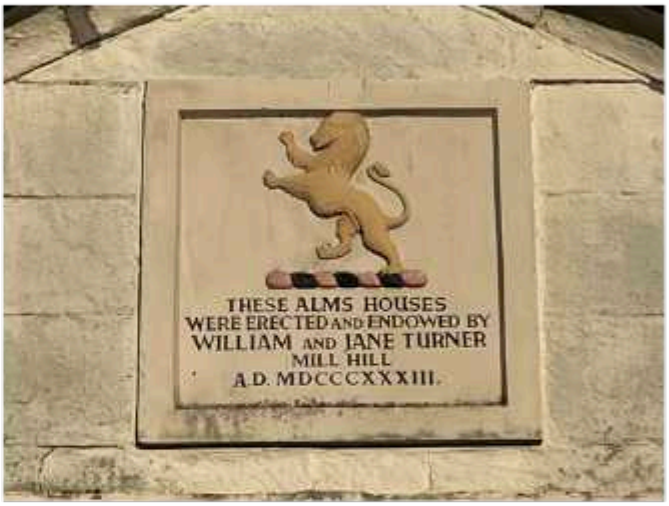
Almshouses in Britain have a long history dating back to medieval times when religious orders took responsibility for the poor, old and distressed.

The legal basis for civil almshouses and workhouses in England was the Act for the Relief of the Poor. They generally have charitable status and aim to support the continued independence of their residents but importantly the occupants have no security of tenure being solely dependent upon the goodwill of the administering trustees.

At a time of a severe shortage of affordable rental accommodation it might seem that the small numbers of almshouse units can have little impact but as research has shown the longevity of their impact has benefited hundreds of people over the centuries not just the immediate recipients and in some rural areas, almshouses are the only provider of accommodation for those in need.

Interestingly there appears to be only two almshouses in Blackburn and none in Darwen. Whilst researching this topic at Blackburn reference library the staff were also surprised and felt this might be an area of research for one of the Cotton Town volunteers whose work was used for this article.

Both the Blackburn almshouses are from Victorian times an era when housing became a serious social problem as people flooding into the urban areas looking for work. The terrible and insanitary conditions in which they lived inspired wealthy philanthropists to endow almshouses, generally for their local area and in groups of 6-12 dwellings. It is estimated that some 30% of current almshouses were founded during this period.



The oldest of the these in Blackburn is the Grade II listed (November 1951) Turners Almshouses at 58, 60, 62 and 64 Bank Top although originally there were six in number.

Erected and endowed by William and Jane Turner of Mill Hill, in 1833 the listing also includes not only the buildings but the front garden walls.

William Turner was one of the Borough's first MP's in 1832 and together with his wife lived at Mill Hill House on the present-day site of St Peter's RC Primary School. Both are buried in St John's churchyard, Blackburn.

Historic England describes the six houses as single storey stone cottages in a terrace, with quoins, hipped slate roof, cornice, and centre pediment containing an inscribed stone with date 1833. Six doors, six windows, all with pointed arches and labels in Gothic style.

Each property originally had two rooms with the front gardens separated from the road by iron palisades.

On top of the two central houses is a pediment on which in stone is carved the figure of a lion - Mrs Turner's crest.

"These Alms-houses were erected and endowed by William and Jane Turner. Mill Hill."

Mrs Turner was described by the local press, the Blackburn Alfred, as a 'benevolent foundress' when she opened the Almshouses on Wednesday 12 February 1834. Such was the importance of the occasion that the bells of the parish church rang out in celebration throughout the day.

Not only was accommodation provided but Mrs Turner supplied all the furniture to the widows, aged 58-82, who were granted an allowance of 3 shillings per week. The local paper then totally ignored confidentiality and named the first occupiers of the properties, their age and previous address!

Alice Heyes, 79 (Queen Street)
Mary Ainsworth 58 (Redlam)
Betty Bennett 82 (Limbrick)
Widow Suart 81 (Grimshaw Park)
Molly Green 67 (Chapel Street)
Jane Dinsdale 69 (John Street)
Ellen Barlow 69 (St Johns)

As an aside at number 82 Bank Top was a different form of social philanthropy, The Turner's Arms named after William, although it's hard to imagine any of the almshouse residents taking advantage of this! The pub was demolished in 1986.

Just over a mile away are the Nancy Derbyshire Trust almshouses founded August 26 1893 and opened by Mrs Hargreaves, June 20 1895.

These are a block of six one storey houses, with accommodation for two people built on a site near St. Silas church off Preston New Road. The reason for the two-person occupancy was because it was likely that most of the tenants would be elderly women who it was felt should not live alone.

There was a good living room at the front with bay windows, an entrance porch, two bedrooms and a small kitchen and scullery. The floors were laid with wood blocks and the fittings and finishing were of good quality.

Unlike the Turners almshouses the site here was large enough for enclosed individual front gardens and open space at the rear. The large square space between the homes and the wall of the church site was landscaped with grass plots, walks and borders of flower beds, shrubs and young trees.

The benefactress was Miss Nancy Derbyshire of Limefield, Preston New Road and the trustees were Miss Derbyshire, Messrs Thomas Alexander Aspden, Henry Richards, Herbert James Whiteley (the Mayor at the time), James Hargreaves (Chairman and Treasurer) and George Porter (clerk).

Miss Derbyshire and her sister owned two confectioners shops one on Darwen Street and one on Corporation Street. Nancy made a lot of her money from providing loans to prominent people in Blackburn. She was also well known for her support of the orphanage at Wilpshire and had donated £400 towards the cost of the land on which it came to be built.

Nancy was a shrewd business woman and apart from funding the whole scheme put aside a large sum of money well invested. This would provide a yearly income to be distributed in regular weekly pensions to each of the occupiers so as to alleviate any financial stress on the twelve deserving persons.

The golden anniversary of the almshouses was celebrated in 1946 with the tenants being taken on a trip to Waddington.

'Reading Dorothy Whipple: A Blackburn Literary Landmark': A Being Human Festival Event at Blackburn Central Library, Saturday 9th November, 2024

Cynthia Johnston

The Being Human Festival, a national festival of the Humanities funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy, returned to Blackburn on Saturday 9th November with focus on the Blackburn-born author, Dorothy Whipple. Held at the Blackburn Central Library in the Hornby Theatre, the event brought together members of reading groups in and around Blackburn and Darwen to discuss Dorothy Whipple's 1934 novel, They Knew Mr Knight. There were just under 70 attendees who enjoyed an afternoon of lively discussion of their reactions to the book followed by a viewing of the 1946 film of the novel. The afternoon was punctuated by delicious tea and cakes of a wide variety created by The Pepperpot Catering Company.

Whipple's novel concerns the rise and fall of a middle-class family set in a fictional midland's industrial town based on Nottingham. Whipple had moved to Nottingham after her marriage to Henry Whipple in Blackburn following his appointment as Director of Education. The Blake family's downfall is precipitated by the ambition and naivety of Tom Blake, when he becomes involved with a Nottingham financier, Lawrence Knight. While the main action of the plot is fuelled by the interactions of Knight and Tom Blake, Whipple develops the influence of female characters in the motivations and decisions of Knight and Blake with perception and empathy. Our readers were impressed by the readability of Whipple's prose, her humour and empathy and perhaps especially by her attention to the lives of her female characters. Whipple was described by her first editor, Lord John Gorrell, as being amongst the 'tribe' of Jane Austen, who was published as well by the firm of John Murray. Even in this novel which is full of drama and incident, Whipple convincingly describes the domestic lives and aspirations of her characters. This Austenesque approach resonated with our readers who found this 1934 novel to be not only relatable but 'unputdownable'.

This Being Human event was organised by Dr Cynthia Johnston of the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London. She was joined by Lucy Evans, Head of Special Collections at the University of London's Senate House Library, and Simon Thomas, consultant for the British Library's Women Writers series. The event was hosted and supported by Mary Painter, Community History Librarian for Blackburn with Darwen Libraries and Adele Karwat, Service Manager Collections and Archives. The Blackburn Museum's Rebecca Johnson, Alfred Cotton and Uncultured Creative Jamie Holman ensured that the technical aspects of the event were safely delivered. Many thanks to Philip Crompton for his loan of the DVD of 'They Knew Mr Knight'.

The Blackburn Central Library team have been awarded a grant by Arts Council England for a Dorothy Whipple event, 'Dorothy Who?' which will take place on 7th June 2025. A documentary short film, literary walks, talks and readings are all part of the planned celebration of this immensely successful Blackburn novelist.

The discovery of a 17th century artist working in the Ribble Valley

Thanks to Patrick Gavin for pointing out an interesting article in the Catholic weekly *The Tablet*,

The article concerns a strange portrait, "Two Ladies with cosmetic patches"which has been the subject of research by Edward Town at the Yale Center for British Art, from which it appears to be the work of Jerome Hesketh, a Catholic priest active in the Ribble Valley during the 17th century. Hesketh seems to have used the role of itinerant painter to hide his actuvuty of saying mass in the houses of recusant families. He had been assistant to William Dobson, court painter to Charles I before the Civil War.

Hesketh was from Goosnargh in the Ribble Valley, where there were many Catholic gentry; he could have moved around with his vestments and apparatus hidden in a secret compartment among his painter's materials.

The painting which sparked the research was acquired in 2023 by Compton Verney in Warwickshire after an export ban imposed in 2020. It is important evidence in the study of attitudes to morality and race, as well as the position of women in society. It is unusual in showing black and white women of apparently equal status side by side. An inscription indicates it in fact signals disapproval of cosmetic patches, and emphasises the superiority of white skin.

There is more about this on the Compton Verney website, and in the review article in The Tablet and elsewhere.

There are about 15 works by or attributed to Hesketh, the latest dated 1660. Many are in the colections of the National Trust at former Catholic house in the North West such as Lyme Park and Sizergh Castle. During the 1670s he spent some time in Paris as confessor to a Benedictine convent. A few years later he was back in England in prison at the time of the Titus Oates plot and later still was the subject of an arrest warrant for involvement in the Lancashire Plot to reinstate James II. He died in 1685.

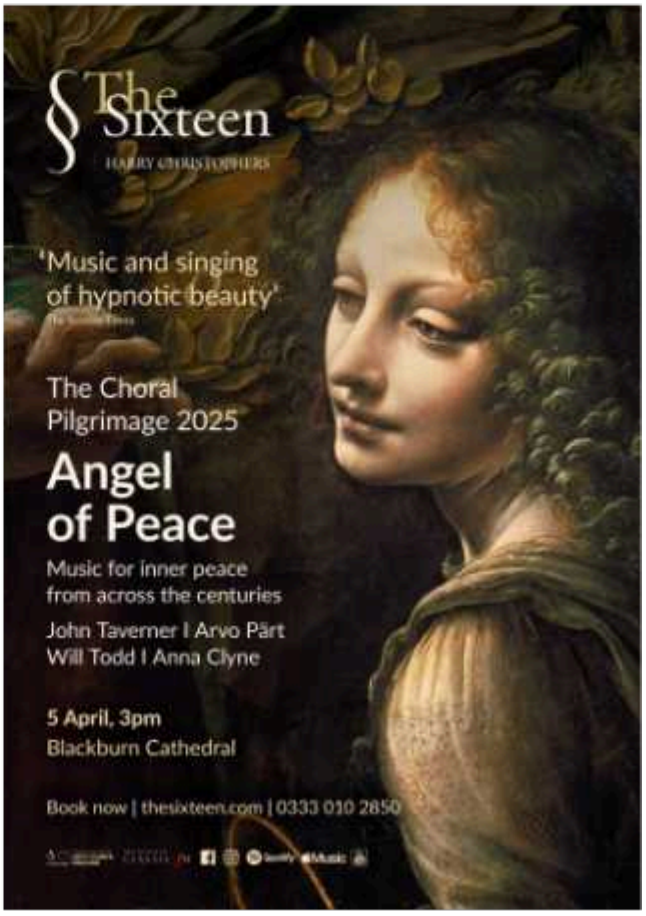
You may be interested in this Musical event at Blackburn Cathedral by The Sixteen

The Choral Pilgrimage 2025
Angel of Peace

5 April, 3pm

PROGRAMME
Hildegard of Bingen: *Ave, generosa*
Arvo Pärt: *Tribute to Caesar*
Will Todd: *I shall be an angel of peace*
John Taverner: *Gaude plurimum*
Hildegard of Bingen: *Ave, generosa*
Arvo Pärt: *Da pacem Domine*
Anna Clyne: *Orbits* (New commission, world premiere)
Arvo Pärt: *Magnificat*
John Taverner: *O splendor gloriae*

Booking and more details
thesixteen.com 0333 010 2850



The Friends of Blackburn Museum & Art Gallery is a registered charity founded in 1982 with the aim of promoting and supporting the Museum.

Subscriptions for the year are: Individual membership £15, or £25 for two members at the same address. Student members: £3. Guest fee: £3 per meeting.

COMMITTEE MATTERS

Acoustics at Meetings continue to occupy the thoughts of the committee. Audibility at recent meetings seems to have improved, judging by opinions expressed by members. This maybe the result of us getting used to the new equipment, and using it more effectively. We are still looking into the practicability of a loop system to work with hearing aids.

Last year the Blackburn Society of Antiquaries transferred to the Friends £3,635.36, being the residual funds at their winding up. Since then, Joy Heffernan, our late President, has bequeathed £1000. The committee would like these sums to form the basis of a special fund, and are discussing the best way to proceed.

We have so far not succeeded in finding a speaker for the 2025 David Shipway Lecture: We would be pleased to have any ideas from members, especially for speakers you have heard in the flesh.

The dispersal of the large collection of pictures and prints by Peter Cunliffe continue to occupy the committee, so far without any resolution. Suggestions on how to proceed include having a print sale day and selling prints on Ebay.

Possibilities for outings during 2025 continue to be discussed, and it is intended to arrange at least two group visits in the spring.

We are circulating members with a questionnaire in order to find out what they expect from the Friends. This should have been received with this issue of Tela. Please take the time to complete the questionnaire as best you can.

As usual, the committee welcomes comments and suggestions from members. Contact details appear below.

The next committee meeting takes place on 18th February

Mike Millward, Secretary

Committee Officers and Members

Jeff Cooper,
Ken Ford, Hon Treasurer and Membership Secretary
Rebecca Johnson, Museum Manager, (ex-officio)
Bruce Kitchin
Gillian Mason
Valerie Miles, Chairman
Janet Ross Mills
Mike Millward (Hon Secretary & Newsletter)
Janine Monaghan
Robert M Svarc
John Turkington, (Programme, Outings)
Mike Waters
Raymond Watton

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John Turkington, email jtvst2000@gmail.com
Friends Web Site: www.fobmag.org.uk
Blackburn Museum & Art Gallery: tel. 01254 667130

For up-to-date information about events at the Museum, see the Museum website
https://blackburnmuseum.org.uk/