

## Another example of the extensive coverage the Museum and Art Gallery received in the local press, this time more than a century ago!

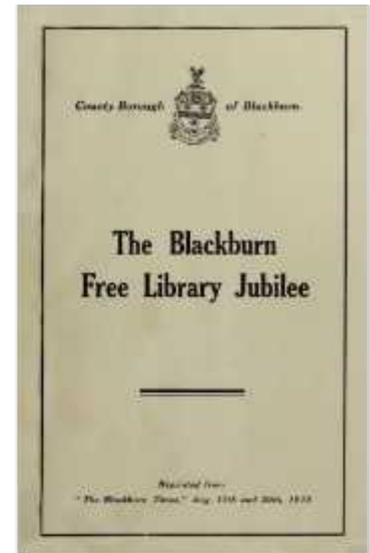
In the last issue of Tela (February 2025, p8) was reprinted a long article from the Blackburn Times on John Yates's critical survey of the Art Gallery in 1937. Here is another, even older example of the detailed coverage of local topics which used to appear in the Blackburn press.

In 1912, The Blackburn Weekly Telegraph published a series of long, detailed and well illustrated pieces about the council's services. Below is a transcript of the sixth in the series, dealing with the Library, Museum and Art Gallery. The illustrations in the original photocopy were unsuitable for inclusion, so I have substituted similar and in some cases, identical, photographs from the 1910 pamphlet *Blackburn Free Library Jubilee* reprinted from the Blackburn Times.

The photographs below show the exterior of the building as originally built, before the removal of the roof gables over the windows and some of the interior arrangements in its early years.

My thanks once again to Philip Crompton for bringing an interesting item to my attention, and to Blackburn Library for making these vital pieces of local history available to us.

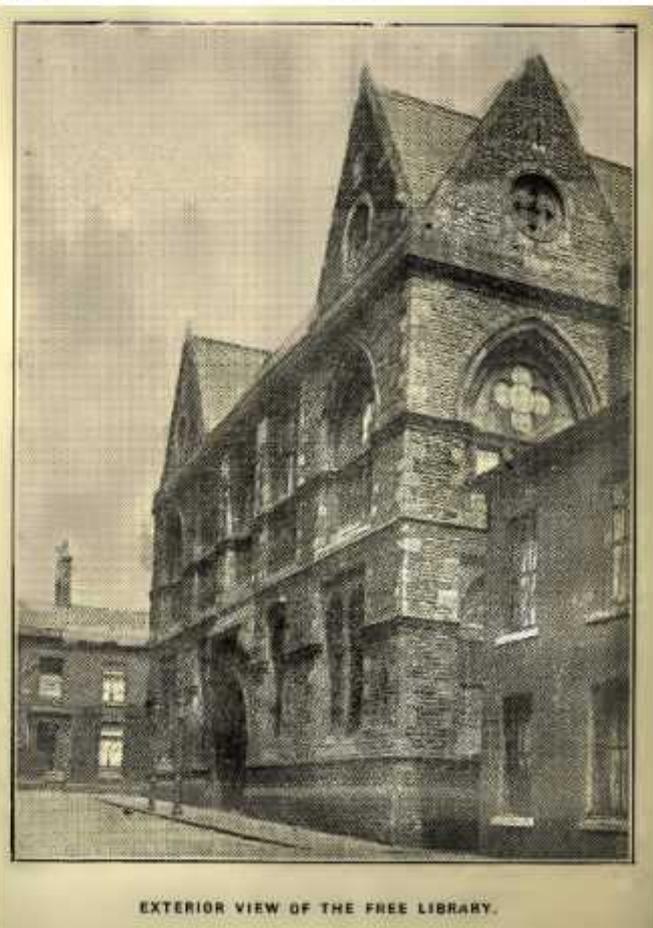
Mike Millward



BLACKBURN WEEKLY TELEGRAPH, SATURDAY, MARCH 30, 1912.

### BLACKBURN'S ASSETS. VI—THE FREE LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

Having described in turn the tramways, the electricity, gas and water works, and the markets, we come to the end of the trading undertakings owned and controlled by the Corporation, if there is excepted from that category the Cemetery, which is really in the nature of a business venture, since it is conducted on lines intended to make it self-supporting, if, indeed, not profit-bearing. From these concerns it is now convenient to turn aside, and refresh ourselves at that generous fountain of information known as the Free Library - with which, of course, is associated the museum and municipal art gallery. Amongst towns younger in years than Blackburn it is counted something of its distinction nowadays to possess a Free Library for which they are not indebted to private munificence. In our own borough's boyhood the Carnegie millions were not available for this purpose, or possibly the aldermen and councillors of that period (some of whom were inclined to spend the public pounds, as well as the private pence, frugally) might have been tempted to avail themselves of those funds, rather than apply the rates to the setting up of the institution which is now, in the widest meaning of the term, their very own, built and maintained out of their own money. One of the most interesting facts in the early history of the Free Library is that when, in 1853, the proposal to adopt the Public Libraries and Museum Act was



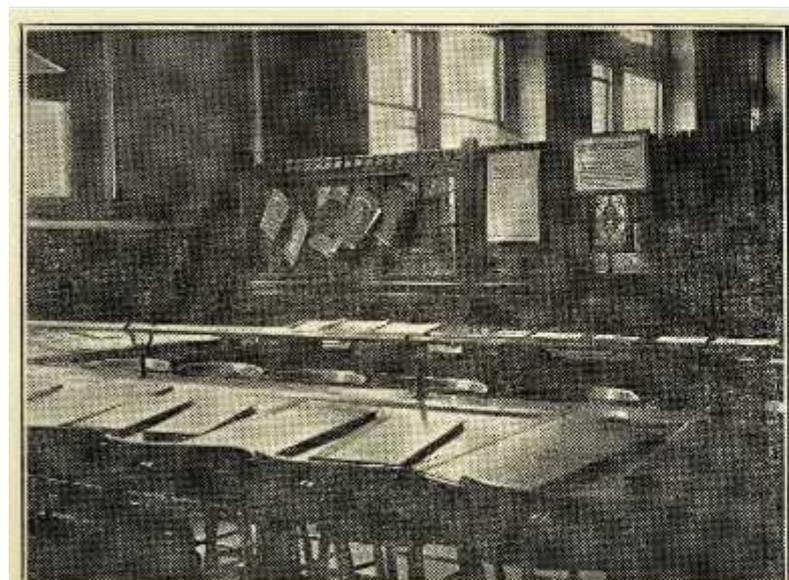
submitted to a town's meeting, only two hands were held up in opposition. A temporary home was found in the Town Hall, two of the earliest donations of books being valuable in character, though somewhat embarrassing in bulk - a complete set of Hansard's "Debates" and other Parliamentary reports from Mr W. Pilkington, M.P. and a set of specification records from the Commissioners of Patents - works for which there is but a very limited inquiry, although they are valuable enough for reference. But other generous gifts speedily enlarged the scope of the Library, and the enthusiasm of the working men of the town in the new movement was evidenced by their collecting £100 for this purpose. The project was financed by the Corporation on the promise of future repayment, and the first Free Library and Museum Committee was appointed on Mayor's Day, 1860. Four years later rooms in the Exchange Hall were rented; in 1872 the foundation-stone of the present Library in Richmond Terrace was laid by Mr Thomas Bury, the Mayor; and in 1874 the building was formally opened by Mr John Pickop, the Mayor of that year, whose interest in the institution was maintained up to the time of his death/ The design and construction of the building, and the important intellectual purpose for which it stands, gives it a claim to a worthier site, and in this respect it is an example of that lack of vision which marred the development of Blackburn in its earlier days. The building cost about £12,000, and its exterior appearance is to a large extent lost because of the difficulty of obtaining from the street a proper view of its elevation. Art, Literature, and Science are symbolised in sculptured decorative treatment, much of which has been added since the building was first opened.

The institution is run on very economical lines, the penny rate allowed by Parliament being expended for Library and Art Gallery purposes, and while the expenditure of one halfpenny in the pound is permissible by law on the museum, only one-half that sum is at present called up.

How greatly the free library has grown will be gathered from statistics showing the number of books on the shelves and the number of issues in the first year of its establishment, just half a century ago, and during the establishment, just twelve months covered by the last annual report:

	Volumes	Issues
1862	6,817	38,464
1911	50,562	187,325

The aggregate issues in the fifty years number 4,325,748. Fourteen years ago, the establishment of distribution stations in various parts of the town relieved the pressure on the central library, and another useful and popular extension was the setting up of libraries at elementary schools, nearly 38,000 volumes being issued last year to the 37 schools on the list. Analysing the classified table of books issued, the severe critic of taste in literature may perhaps shake his head in disapproval of the fondness for fiction which these figures reveal, but science and art is not neglected, nor is history and travel, politics and commerce; and the lump is further leavened with a good dash of theology and philosophy. And besides, the fiction is of the best. The same catholicity of taste in newspapers is catered for in the reading room, where you find journals of widely differing political views filed on adjoining desks, and as conversation is properly forbidden in this room, Radical and Tory readers never fall out. A score of daily papers - English, Scottish, and Irish - and about a hundred weeklies, besides monthly and bi-monthly magazines and trade journals, are placed in this room, and illustrated periodicals specially appealing to the feminine sex are a feature of the printed matter in

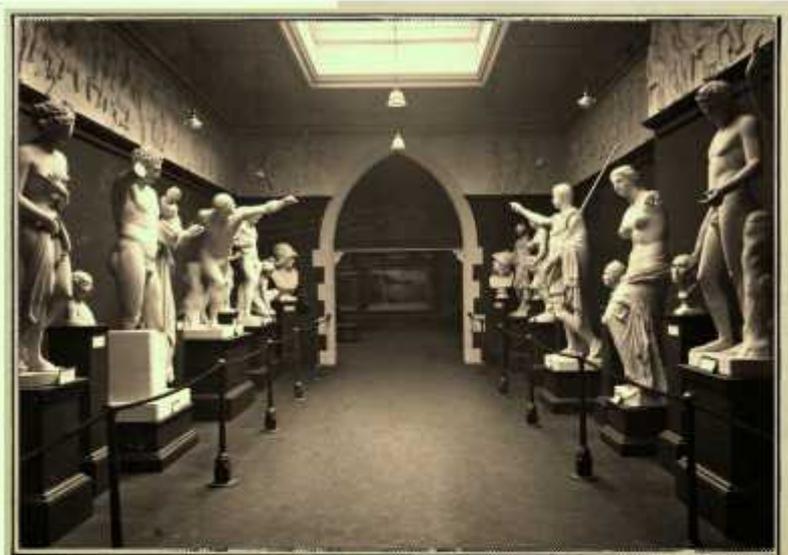


LADIES' NEWSROOM.

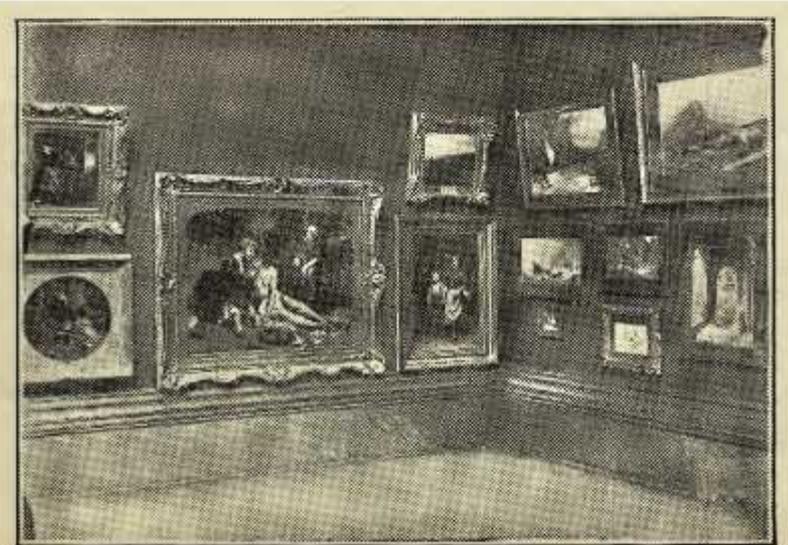
the room set apart for ladies' use. The reference library is one of the most useful departments in the whole institution, and the student and the searcher after general knowledge delves deeply every year into this mine of information. The Museum and the Art Gallery, like the literature side of the institution, are of gradual growth; and both, it may be said, have improved with time, the experience those having control of the management being constantly directed to improving the quality and interest of the exhibits. In the museum they properly fall into two sections, one being devoted to natural history objects, and the other to art as applied to industries; and an endeavour has been made to get away from that depressing dullness that characterises so many museums, and to attract the interest of the casual visitor, as well as to arrest the attention of the inquiring student. The

collection. of birds in the natural history section is an illustration of how success has been achieved in this direction, and although the flora, fauna, and geological examples have perhaps a more limited appeal, they are arranged, so far as is possible, on the same excellent plan. The exhibits in this section are supplemented occasionally by some loan collections of insects, of great interest and value, that might well suggest to persons of leisure in this district taking tip the fascinating study, and eventually balancing the fine collection of birds with one of butterflies, moths, or beetles - or all three - indigenous-to Lancashire.

The industrial arts collection, on the other side of the corridor, is rich in ancient and modern examples of man's handiwork from all parts of the world. The galleries devoted to sculpture and pictorial art represent an addition to the original building, the extensions being made in 1894. The handsome gift of the "Dodgson" picture laid the foundation of what is now a choice collection of oil paintings and water-colours. Some have been acquired by purchase, out of the penny Library rate, but the committee has also been fortunate in its friends. Several handsome gifts have been made to the gallery, and until the permanent collection is sufficient to cover all the wall space pictures are kindly lent from private galleries to fill the bare places. It is no purpose of this article to attempt a full description



STATUARY GALLERY



CORNER OF THE ART GALLERY.

of the treasures in this home of literature, art, and science, but merely to direct attention to the wonderful value it gives for the small outlay involved. It is impossible, of course, to strike a balance, because the benefits conferred upon the six hundred thousand or so people who visit the place in the course of a year are intangible and not to be reckoned by any known system of arithmetic; but as one of the assets of Blackburn it may safely be said that it commands, by common consent, a foremost place in the list. The Mayor (Alderman Crossley) is chairman, and Mr R. J. Howard the vice chairman of a committee that directs the affairs of the institution wisely - and sometimes experimentally - when the public interest and convenience demands it. Sunday opening was tried a few years ago, to test the repeated assurances that there was a general desire for it, but experience did not bear this out, and the practice was discontinued. The personal element enters largely into the smooth working of a public institution of this character. A library is largely what the librarian makes it. First in Mr W. A. Abram, then in Mr David Geddes, and for the past twenty-one years in Mr Richard Ashton, we have been extremely fortunate in our official head, and it is not too much to say of the last named that the interest he always manifests in everything connected with the place impresses one not so much as a performance of duty as a labour of love.



Mr. R. Ashton, the Librarian.  
Photo. by F. Hurson, Blackburn.

# A HOUSE IN KING STREET

## Art and urban archaeology



This watercolour above is the only example in the collection at Blackburn by Arthur Claude Strachan. It is not dated and the donor is unknown.

Strachan (1865-1938) was a British artist better known for sugary romantic scenes of cottages and



peasants, mostly in water-colour. Born in Edinburgh, the son of George Strachan, a successful architect, he was educated in Liverpool, attending the Liverpool Institute and the Liverpool School of Art. He first exhibited work at the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition in 1885, exhibiting regularly until 1905. Between 1891 and 1904 he also exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour and the New Watercolour Society. Presumably he was commissioned to produce this watercolour of the house once owned by Henry Sudell, the richest man in Blackburn.



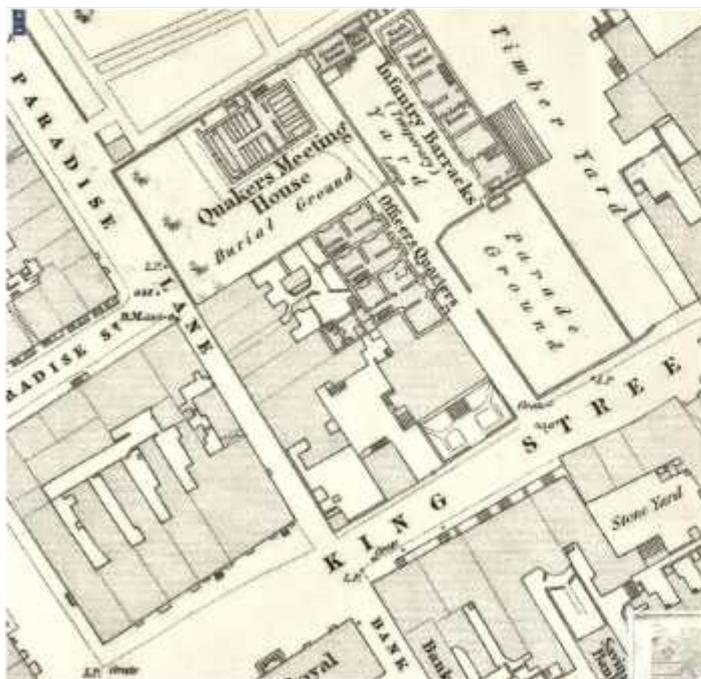
During the 18th century, King Street was where many of the Blackburn gentry lived and in the Victorian period, William Henry Hornby, the first Mayor of Blackburn and a wealthy cotton manufacturer lived in a town house at no 2, and later moved to no 39, the grandest Georgian town house in Blackburn further down the street. Both these houses are still recognisable, but if you search King Street for the fine house in the watercolour, you might be disappointed, although in fact it is still there in disguise.

*Above: 26 King Street today;  
Left: Comparison of the right hand sides of 26 and the house in the watercolour.*

No 26 is now the Outdoor Action camping and outdoor clothing shop which has a brick frontage totally unlike the house in the picture. However, a comparison of the right hand side of the two buildings shows great similarities. The large scale 1847 Ordnance Survey map of Blackburn [below with an enlarged detail] shows the site of the house in the watercolour. Paradise Lane runs to the left, leading to the Friends Meeting House as it still does today, and the position of the house and garden looks correct. The building is still much the same in plan on the 1894 OS map, so the enlargement into the garden must date from after that - presumably sometime about 1900.

On entering the shop, ahead of us we see steps leading up to a doorway into the rest of the premises. This is the front door of the original house, and we are standing in the garden.

The proprietors are well aware of the existence of the watercolour and this is not a new discovery. I have not yet got round to looking into the history of the building since the 1840s, but it would be interesting to know how its use changed after that. The other fine houses on King Street have suffered similar fates: no 2 is now in commercial use and until recently, the splendid Hornby House (no 39) was in use as a pharmaceutical warehouse.



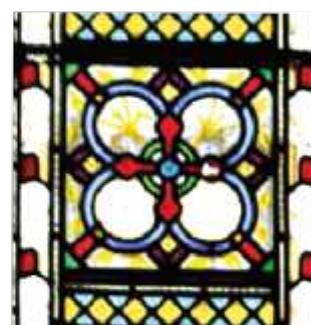
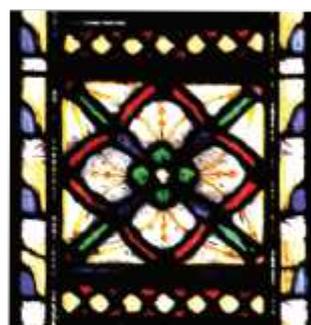
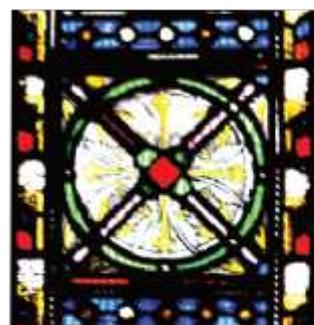
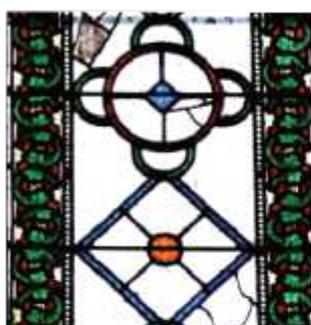
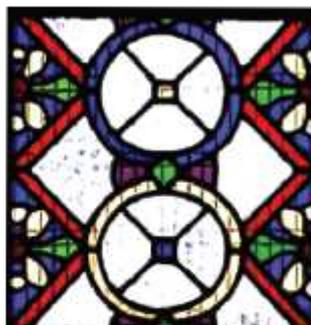
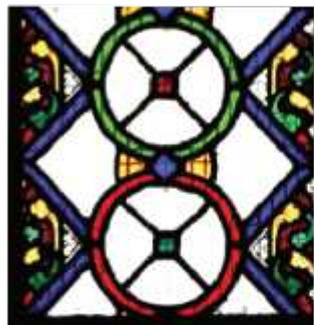
*[Top right] The interior of the shop today, standing in what was the garden, looking towards the front door and steps.*

*[Top left] Large scale OS map of Blackburn 1847 with an enlarged detail [bottom left] showing the site of the house in the watercolour. Paradise Lane runs to the left, leading to the Friends Meeting House as it still does today.*

*The 1894 OS map [bottom right] shows the property plan looking much the same.*

**HOLY TRINITY CHURCH** featured in the previous edition of TELA.  
in an article by Ken Ford. He has added these images

Here are the different geometrical patterns that appear in the church's stained glass windows.



**Friends Garden Party**



The Friends' Garden Party will take place at 36 Parsonage Road on Sunday, 29th June, 2 till 4 pm.

Tickets are available from Mike and Dot Millward, cost £5 or you can pay at the door. This is a social occasion as well as a fund raiser. There will be light refreshments and the usual exciting raffle, this year once more featuring a valuable work of art by a well known artist and member.

Please do come if you can, and bring your friends. Non members are very welcome.



## Peter Cunliffe, Blackburn Artist

The Museum Friends have become the accidental owners of a very large collection of the work of the Blackburn artist Peter Cunliffe, who died suddenly and unexpectedly on his 60th birthday in 2008. After his death, the entire contents of his studio were taken to the Museum and Art Gallery. They include various sized paintings, some quite large, and many prints, often in sizeable editions. Most of the work is abstract and very much of its time in the later 20th century.

Initial superficial research indicates that Cunliffe had some success in Europe during 1980s and 90s, exhibiting in USA, Belgium, Germany and Spain and has works in the collections of the National Art Museum, Oslo, and Trondheim Art Museum, Norway.

Jeff Cooper and Mike Millward spent many hours in the basement listing and photographing the works to create a simple database with almost one thousand individual entries. As many of the works are prints in editions of up to about 25, the actual number of items in the collection is even larger. It was suggested that the works be given to the Friends with a view to eventually finding permanent homes for as many as possible.

More than 15 years later, the overwhelming majority of the works are still housed in the Museum and the Friends are being encouraged by the Museum to do something about it. During the past two years we have contacted many galleries in the North West offering to donate works from the collection. The response has been mixed: The Harris Art Gallery, Preston has accepted a number of prints and negotiations are in progress with two other institutions who have shown keen interest.

At the same time, efforts have been made by the Friends committee to sell some of the works, and a number have been sold for relatively small sums. The money raised goes into the Friends funds. We would like to organise an exhibition of the work locally, with the aim of making his work as widely available as possible to potential owners.

We hope to persuade Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery to accept a representative group of the prints into the permanent collection, and have offered to pay for storage boxes to house such a collection.

Below are details of five of the the works. Members who are interested in acquiring one or more works and would like to see the collection should contact Mike Millward to make arrangements.

Inventory Number 9 [Untitled]  
1400 X 400 mm  
Etched steel with added paint

9



113



Inventory Number 113 *Dignity of Opposition #1*  
760 X 1070 mm  
Screenprint(?),  
Framed

*Dignity of Opposition #1*

2003

2/25

Signed

314



Inventory Number 314 *Ode #2*  
510 X 380 mm  
screenprint

*Ode #2*

1985

1/35

Signed:

Inventory Number 348-01 *Tennis no 1*  
580 X 780 mm  
Etching

*Tennis no 1*

1971

Artists proof

Signed

348-01



Inventory Number P92 *Emblem #4*  
220 X 300 mm  
Wood engraving

*Emblem #4*

1993

Artists proof

Signed

P92



**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**

At the committee meeting in May, Rebecca Johnson, the Museum Manager reported a 25% increase in visitor numbers for 2024/25 to 42,800.

During June a digital interpretation system for the galleries and artworks will go live.

The Galleries are undergoing substantial refurbishment work. The lighting across the entire building will be converted to LED units within the next 12 months. The toilets are due to be refurbished during June and a new ramp is to be installed at the entrance.

The Art Open exhibition at the beginning of the year was a great success with a record number of entries. Volunteers from the Friends helped to administer the submission of entries and collection of works at the end of the exhibition.

Blackburn Rovers 150th anniversary exhibition in partnership with the club and fans. The Premier League trophy was on show for part of the exhibition.

The "Change of Hart" experiment in the Hart Gallery closed in May. An independent evaluation has been undertaken in which a number of Friends members took part.

Following case refurbishment, a series of temporary exhibitions is planned until 2026.

5th July – end of August: Come as You Really Are. A show of hobbyists' work with artist Hetain Patel, ArtAngel and the National Festival of Making.

13th September- 13th December: The Nature of Gothic curated in partnership with Dr Cynthia Johnston. A major exhibition which will include loans from the British Library and elsewhere, including the Bedford Psalter and Pre-Raphaelite paintings together with contemporary commissions.

The permanent Hart Gallery display will re-open in February 2026.

The next committee meeting takes place on 9th September 2025

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](mailto:jtvst2000@gmail.com)

Friends Web Site: [www.fobmag.org.uk](http://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/>