

Always Been Here Activity Report

This report outlines the progress of 'Always Been Here.' We have successfully initiated the delivery phase, meeting all key objectives related to our community workshops and engagement. To date, the project has engaged over **40** participants from the local LGBTQ+ community through its community engagement workshops, which span the project as a whole and focus on the intersection of creative arts and heritage discourse.

There is little data specifically addressing the broader social experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in Scarborough, which is in itself a telling absence. The closest relevant insight comes from a 2020 survey conducted by Healthwatch North Yorkshire, which, while covering the whole of North Yorkshire, does include Scarborough within its research scope.

Findings from this regional study highlight persistent inequalities in access to inclusive services for LGBTQ+ people, including experiences of exclusion, limited understanding among providers, and a reluctance to disclose identity. In response, this project seeks to address these challenges by fostering welcoming, community-led environments where participants can share experiences safely, build connections, and engage meaningfully with local heritage.

The Exhibition: Always Been Here

'Always Been Here' ran from 16th September to 7th January 2024. This exhibition was a community-engaged project featuring written testimonies from community members who attended drop-in sessions, sharing their reflections on the Scarborough Museums and Galleries collection. The group consisted of 5–8 participants at a time, who were warmly invited to engage with the space during our designated sessions on a drop-in basis. The project focused on community-engaged activity to create a selection of DIY artworks centred on accessible craft. This section of the exhibition, titled the 'Queer Infoshop,' displayed a range of community-made artworks and featured a guest appearance from the grassroots group Scarborough Zine Library. One particularly notable piece in the show was the 'Queer Quilt,' which became an 'anchor' for the project's engagement over time, a lasting symbol of the conversations and time spent together.

During its tenure at the Scarborough Art Gallery from September 2023 to January 2024, the exhibition attracted **4,453 visitors**. This substantial footfall underscores the community's engagement with the installation and its success in reaching a wide audience.

We also received assistance from our intern, Kelly To, during the exhibition, who helped with the research for some of the included artworks. She was with us for the duration of 12 weeks, some of which encompassed this project delivery:

"By working on this project, I have gained a deeper understanding of the importance of preserving and documenting queer history. It has reinforced the significance of recognising and honouring the contributions and struggles of LGBTQ+ individuals within a local context. The project has also highlighted the role of research in shedding light on hidden narratives and promoting inclusivity and representation within historical accounts."

In addition to discussing items in the archive, participants were encouraged and invited to bring in their own objects to reflect on their personal experiences and histories. These objects included prom dresses, books, makeup kits, flags, and badges. This invite fostered a unique and powerful element of cross-generational queer experience. For example, one participant brought in a section of the original Greenham Common fence alongside their own badges, serving as a moving testament to the lived history of the people involved.

"I am straight, so I don't have to think about issues like this so much. It's good, though, that I have today and that Scarborough can wear its heart on its sleeve. We all need to embrace differences and try to understand." - Quote from the feedback of the Always Been Here exhibition.

Having achieved its goals as Scarborough's inaugural queer-community-led exhibition, the project now provides a vital internal benchmark for navigating the complexities of large-scale organisational partnerships. This experience has refined our strategic focus, ensuring that future collaborations are supported with a clearer understanding of our core objectives.

Alongside the exhibition run on 10th November 2023, we worked closely with Scarborough Film Festival to deliver a pop-up screening titled *Queer Shorts, Liquid Thoughts*, featuring seven films exploring themes of queerness, fluidity, and water. The event attracted an audience of **42** attendees and also included a guided tour of both exhibition spaces.

Community engagement

To ensure a long-term legacy, we designed and delivered a programme of participatory workshops linked to the project's outcome, including a series of patch-making sessions for the Queer Quilt, which served as both a creative output and a storytelling tool. Through textile practice, participants shared personal narratives and reflections, often focusing on diverse symbols and the iconography of seaside culture.

The resulting quilt comprises 42 individual patches, created either by participants themselves or on behalf of organisations, businesses, and charities. Together, these contributions formed a powerful snapshot of Scarborough's community at that moment. The quilt went on to become one of the most well-received elements of the exhibition and has become an important part of the Crescent Arts archive.

Alongside *Always Been Here*, we invited Professor Jason Edwards to produce an essay entitled 'On Queering Scarborough Art Gallery.' In this piece, he makes impactful and evocative connections between the paintings and sculptures in the collection, with particular focus on the work of William Etty. The essay was printed and distributed freely throughout the exhibition. Within the essay, Jason expands on these hidden themes. The essay has now been included in the Scarborough Museums Archives, the Crescent Arts collection and the University of York online database.

This part of the project was to be delivered by the learning team at Scarborough Museums and Galleries as part of the project as part of the partnership strategy between the two organisations, due to some initial changes, i.e., the learning team having little response or interest in the resources developed for schools.

The Scarborough Museums and Galleries learning team developed two lesson plans, one for KS2 and KS3 children. In the final quarter of 2023, the SMG learning team held a Teacher's forum with attendees from local Primary schools. The team made new connections with teachers from Barrowcliffe School, a previously non-engaging school where 55.3% of children receive free school meals.

The initial feedback from the teachers' forum event was as follows:

- The team had planned to host a school workshop entitled 'The Art of Activism' to support the *Always Been Here* exhibition. Several schools booked onto the workshops but then changed their booking to other workshops. Discussions with the teachers at Barrowcliffe School attending the forum stated that homophobia is prevalent in the parent body and that fears about backlash from parents if the schools were to teach about LGBTQ+ would prevent them from visiting our 'Art of Activism' workshop.
- Despite not having the turnout for the workshops the learning team had hoped for, 'Art of Activism,' the team did deliver CPD to teachers during the teacher Forum about creative ways to teach LGBTQ+ through the museum's venues and activities surrounding literacy and art in the hopes they can teach the teachers the skills needed to transfer information.



- Regarding schools struggling to cover the costs of coaches to the Scarborough Museums and Galleries venues, and with the rising cost of living, the deputy head at Barrowcliffe stated that 'most parents at our school won't see the value in visiting the gallery and won't pay for their child to come.'

Through discussions with teachers at Barrowcliffe School at the event, it became apparent that it was important for the team to ensure every child at Barrowcliffe School could visit the venues and take part in a workshop.

“Several self-led school visits also took place during the run time of the exhibition. One class on a self-led visit didn't want to enter the exhibition because they claimed they ‘didn't want to open a can of worms’ around teaching the children about LGBTQ+ people. This is a situation that the Learning Team could have prevented by helping the class interpret the exhibition and access its themes in a supported way.” -

Previous member of the Scarborough Museums and Galleries staff.

This highlighted the real issue of the reluctance between schools and parents. On reflection, there were concerns about this part of the project being too ambitious, given the current political climate and the ongoing tensions about delivering LGBTQ+ and specifically trans-related learning materials to schools. There was a unanimous feeling that the town and its governing bodies just weren't ready for this kind of content, despite the learning team's efforts to engage local schools. Despite this, the schools were actually engaging with the exhibition at the time, just without the specific planned resources designed for them. The resistance from the parent body aligns with Healthwatch findings that discrimination in North Yorkshire is a systemic issue that creates barriers to inclusive practice.

In response to our ongoing engagement, we commissioned Kit Heyam to support the development of an LGBTQ+ toolkit designed as a flexible, optional resource for engagement with ages 10 and above. Positioned beyond Key Stage 2, it offers a more expansive and well-rounded framework for use across schools, educational settings, and other institutions. Importantly, the toolkit is not limited to young people alone; it is intended to be accessible to a broader audience, including families. It is grounded in the values of community connection and local heritage, while placing a strong emphasis on fostering empowerment within those contexts.

The project successfully delivered the first-ever queer community exhibition in Scarborough. Participants felt immense pride and a sense of "majesty" in the final display, noting its importance in the town's shifting cultural landscape. Additionally, Crescent's involvement in the early stages was highly valued for providing a safe space where queer individuals could connect and share lived experiences. As the project evolved, it moved toward being truly 'community owned,' with queer lived experiences at the helm.

Despite being established as a partnership project, responsibility for the remainder of delivery was ultimately entrusted to Crescent Arts. This decision was influenced by the community group's experience of inconsistency within Scarborough Museums and Galleries, largely due to frequent staff turnover, including the departure of both the curator and CEO within an eight-month period, who had been key points of contact throughout the project. As a result, the group felt it was more appropriate for Crescent Arts to take full responsibility for the project's continuation.

Over the course of the project, we have hosted several workshops that have yielded incredibly successful results. Building on these successes, we organised pop-up displays in community spaces to debut the quilt. 'Quilt As Folk' was a featured display at Scarborough Public Library in September 2024, beginning with an opening workshop on the first day of the exhibition, attended by several of our regular workshop members. The interpretation also offered context regarding the legacy of the Always Been Here exhibition and the ongoing work.

With a total of 4 persons attending that specific workshop, they described the environment as comfortable, cosy, safe, and welcoming, offering an enjoyable and relaxing experience with the freedom to craft, talk, and meet new



people. The project facilitated meeting new people, being part of a wider community project and narrative, and connecting with other community members. Participants valued the opportunity to be creative with purpose, to express themselves through quilting, and to contribute to an important project using engaging practices relevant to LGBTQ+ culture. They highlighted that seeing previous contributions to the quilt was joyful and actively worked to help the project grow.

“Lovely fabrics, and being a part of a community project. Meeting new people. Really good, thanks Joel.”

“Comfortable atmosphere. Fun to take part in. Important project. Good, enjoyable and relaxing.”

“Freedom to craft, talk meet new people. Welcoming, inclusive, freedom to express myself through quilting.”

“Seeing previous contributions to the quilt as it currently is, working to make it grow with other community members. Also being creative with purpose! Cosy, safe, engaging and connected.”

In the same month, we also held a pop-up stall at Scarborough Pride in 2024, where we had **6** participants in attendance. This provided a fantastic platform to promote the quilt's legacy and engagement by inviting the public to create their own pieces in response. Respondents highly valued the complete freedom of choice in what to put on the quilt, the range of materials available, and the encouragement to experiment. The experience and atmosphere were consistently described as welcoming, chatty, and fun. One future suggestion expressed interest in more workshops in different locations and mentioned "other queer community art projects" as something they enjoyed and wanted to be more a part of.

“Enjoyed the range of materials that could be used. Welcoming, chatty, fun. I would like more workshops in different locations.”

“The complete freedom of what to put on the quilt. Fun. Other queer community art projects.”



We created a three-week temporary exhibition from 5th to 26th September 2025. This exhibition drew **47** people on opening night and **706** overall. Through ongoing community engagement surrounding the queer quilt, we wanted to shine a spotlight on the object alongside other contemporary examples of queer quilting.

‘Still Here: An Exhibition About Heritage, Craft and Community’ invited other artists to **guest-spot** their quilts alongside our own. Including works by Andi Walker, whose challenging quilt explored the AIDS epidemic. Florian Hynam’s quilt explored vintage queer archival material and how DIY crafts sit within archives. E.L. West, whose quilt explores the history of the Greenham Common peace camp and the lives of the women who lived and protested at RAF Greenham Common, Berkshire, in the 1980s, which also references one of items within the *Always Been Here* exhibition. And Tiegna Handley, whose work makes a visual pun on the idea of ‘tourist’ culture of seaside spaces and also references gender dysphoria.

Within this exhibition, we debuted **‘Scarborough Quilt Stories,’** which highlighted specific interpretations from participants who wanted to delve a little deeper into the ideas behind their designs and why they designed them as they did. These included the following reflections of the project:

- ***“Labrys axe. The double headed axe, which has its roots in Greek Sapphic mythology, was an important part of my coming out in the 1980s. It helped me feel strong and that there was no***

shame in being a woman who loves women. For me it is a symbol of love – of lesbian pride, lesbian strength and lesbian power.”

- *“Living in suburban Scarborough as a bisexual woman with a male partner means navigating daily invisibility. Every neighbourly chat poses a challenge: do I out myself, or stay hidden in the assumed straightness? But on my bench, feet crossed, staring out to sea - I can just be. The exclamation “Oh hello!” is a simple everyday greeting. But tilt your head, raise an eyebrow, and suddenly “Oh hello!” becomes...something else... A signal. A cheeky invitation. A moment of recognition. A connection between me and you. “Oh hello! I see you... are you seeing me too?”*
- *“Having witnessed first-hand the prejudice directed at my family and friends in the queer community, I strongly believe the world should be a more inclusive place. If we as individuals are ourselves ‘all inclusive’, then we can collectively make the world a better place for everyone.”*

We also gave a tour of this exhibition to Anglolang, a British Council-accredited English Language school, engaging with a group of 28 students aged 16-19 as part of a wider tour of all cultural venues, events and artists within Scarborough.

Eco-awareness and sustainability are at the core of our working processes, shaping how we operate and deliver on our mission, vision, and values. Throughout the project, we have championed practices that ensure we are operating in the most sustainable way possible. For example, we prioritise sourcing workshop and event supplies from local retailers rather than online organisations when possible, which directly supports our local economy and environment. We also encourage freelancers to use public transport and to reuse in-house materials for our workshops whenever possible, such as scrap fabric bundles.

To ensure these values are deeply embedded in our practices going forward, we commissioned local cultural practitioner Martha Cattell to produce a ‘Good Practice Charter.’ This document outlines how we operate as a socially engaged arts organisation with minimal environmental impact. On a wider organisational level, in September 2024, we announced our alliance with the national movement [Culture Declares Emergency](#), a growing community of artists and organisations that declare a climate and ecological emergency.

Creative Greenhouse Commission

Alongside ‘Always Been Here’, which sat within Scarborough Art Gallery, queer Artist Garth Gratrix was commissioned through the ‘Creative Greenhouse’ programme, which was part of our NPO partnership with Scarborough Museums and Galleries.

The work with Garth was purposeful in its efforts to capture a wider audience for SMG and Crescent Arts, with the decision to widen both programmes to incorporate more diverse and underrepresented audiences. This was initially seen as an opportunity to engage and work with the local community. Cheeky Felicia presented a collection of works that explore abstract and formal relationships to queer identity, readings and the queerings of space, form and materials. Garth used William Etty’s 1820 painting, *Man Lying Face Down*, as an inspiration for the exhibition, drawing on the collection’s response.

The legacy of this was that the painting was subsequently featured in the exhibition ‘**Collection Spotlight: Code & Conduct**’, a collaborative endeavour between the Grundy and artist Garth Gratrix. Together, they curated a selection of works that resonate with the core themes explored throughout *Flamboyant Flamingos*. In addition to this painting, the exhibition showcases further works by Gratrix alongside William Etty’s *Man Lying Face Down* (c.1820), which had been generously loaned from the Scarborough Museums and Galleries collection.

During this process, it became clear that the wider Scarborough community is less open to individuals from the queer community than in other parts of the country, such as the nearby cities of York and Leeds. People from the queer community feel that, in general, there is a lot of prejudice towards them. The project lead for the separate connecting coastal cultures project reported receiving challenging feedback from a local building tenant regarding the exhibition. In conclusion, although the LGBTQ+ community welcomed the exhibitions, two nearby LGBTQ+ exhibitions running concurrently may have been overwhelming for the regular museum audience, who have little knowledge or experience of queer cultures.

During this period, a productive cross-pollination occurred between several concurrent initiatives. Notably, through the **Connecting Coastal Communities** project, artist Garth Gratrix was engaged to facilitate an "inspiration session" for a select cohort of **8** emerging creative practitioners. As part of this professional development, the group also conducted site visits to both exhibition venues to further ground their learning in practice.

Garth's exhibition attracted **3,210** visitors and garnered press coverage, including a commission from Corridor8. The ongoing effects of this were new audience engagement, including visits from other artist development programmes such as the '**inter_change 24/25**' cohort from Humber Street - Hull. The exhibition successfully engaged contemporary art audiences from local cities who came to Scarborough to experience small-town heritage.

This has proven evident through one of our core community group participants, Lel Meynell, who is a current Scarborough Resident. Lel was involved in the original focus groups and has since participated in other queer heritage projects outside of Scarborough their involvement in this exhibition:

"It was a joy to be involved in co-curating the exhibition. I got to know the gallery and team in a 'behind the scenes' way which expanded my own knowledge and engagement with art. I also met people I had not met before which helped my own feelings of being a part of a community. One of the people I met was Kate Genever. Kate is running her own queer heritage research project in Hull (where I was born and grew up). I had come out in the 1980s into Thatcherism, the AIDS crisis and rampant homophobia. So, through working with the 'Always been here' team - a valuable project in its own right - a door was opened to contribute to other visibility and heritage archive projects so that LGBTQ - and in my own case, specifically Lesbian history, is not lost."

Queer Community Engagement Role

We commissioned **Kit Heyam** from an open call, which attracted **17** applications, a writer, specialist in Queer Trans Histories, academic, and heritage practitioner, as our Queer Community Officer to deliver two queer heritage workshops in time for February 2026 LGBTQ+ History Month. The first was a 'Blue Plaque' workshop, where we invited participants into a safe space to talk about their experiences and transcribe them onto "blue plaques." These were then taken out into the streets and placed on walls and at locations of historical or emotional significance to community members.

To promote these workshops across our social media channels, we produced two videos, which achieved a combined total of 1,711 views. Notably, 34.9% and 26.1% of those views came from non-followers, indicating a strong reach beyond our existing audience. These results were supported by Kit's involvement in creating the promotional video content.



The second session was a timeline workshop inspired by the local histories of Edward II and Piers Gaveston at Scarborough Castle, as well as by the concept of medieval marginalia. The idea was to encourage participants to

observe the timeline and transcribe where their own histories sit alongside "hidden" or overlooked histories in Scarborough; the workshop became a great opportunity to share parts of history we weren't previously aware of. We also recruited **Matt Cooper** to document this workshop, which included filming interview snippets with the participants. This commented very effectively on the vanishing number of spaces in Scarborough, specifically with queer heritage, for example, the closure of two queer venues within the past seven years, for a town which doesn't have many. The impact of this is felt significantly.

Kit's delivery was very successful and helped us connect with several grassroots groups and organisations. These included the Age UK over-50s group and Scarborough Big Fringe, a grassroots organisation that kindly helped promote our workshops. We also tapped into the LGBTQ+ Wellbeing Network through the York and Scarborough Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which helped us to share our workshops more widely and effectively.

Challenges

In conclusion, between July 2023 to January 2024 saw Crescent Arts operating without a director for a period of time, with oversight shared between two members of the board of trustees. During this phase, staff hours were significantly reduced, from part-time roles to just half a day per week, which inevitably impacted the organisation's capacity.

As a result, the trustees agreed that Scarborough Museums and Galleries would take on more responsibility for delivering the project's outcomes, which caused a slight disconnect between the governing bodies and the community. While the project was undertaken with genuine care and engaged community members in a thoughtful and meaningful way, this shift in partnership, alongside reduced staff capacity, inevitably influenced timescales and project continuity.

Following the appointment of a new director and the reinstatement of increased staff hours, Crescent Arts resumed a more active role in completing the project's outputs. This included carrying forward the legacy of the work and the relationships built with the community throughout the exhibition's duration and engagement. From the changes, we were placed in a position to account for a small amount of staff time towards the project to keep the project running.

Over the past five years, Crescent Arts has been working closely in partnership with Scarborough Museums and Galleries to deliver a broad programme of artist and community engagement as part of our National Portfolio Activity outcomes for Arts Council England. In April 2025, Scarborough Museums and Galleries announced that they would transition from a private trust to the local authority, and, upon completion of our obligations under our NPO activity outcomes, we would no longer work as closely in partnership with them on future programming.

In reflection, while the project achieved meaningful impact, it did not fully align with the time and resources required within the constraints of the original grant period. Additionally, it became clear that further experience and development in project management would have strengthened delivery. For future projects of a similar scale, it is essential that clear responsibility is held by a single lead organisation, supported by partners who are stable and not undergoing significant structural change. This lead body must also be fully equipped with the necessary skills, capacity, and resources from the outset to ensure effective and consistent delivery.

Evaluation and Conclusion

We hired heritage consultant Ali Bodley to assist with a midway evaluation in February 2024, which then informed us in shaping the programme's future direction. I have included the resulting reports throughout this document; Ali was instrumental in helping us create a blueprint for our operations, keeping the project on track and using the successes of Always Been Here as a baseline to further our community-engaged activity.

Findings from the 'Let's Talk Scarborough' community engagement survey (March 2024) indicate that 20.4% of respondents prioritised regeneration, high streets, and heritage, while a further 18.9% advocated for increased investment in health and wellbeing. In response to these local priorities, our programme was specifically designed to mitigate social isolation, facilitate access to health services, and foster community cohesion. The enduring legacy of this work continues to resonate within the community today.

The survey further highlighted a significant public concern regarding the preservation of heritage venues and the decline of the high street. Addressing these anxieties directly, our heritage workshop, led by Kit, provided a vital platform for participants to document their memories of spaces, one in particular was 'Bacchus'. As a recently closed music and arts venue with a significant history as a queer-inclusive space, recording its legacy served as both an act of cultural preservation and a meaningful connection to Scarborough's diverse social heritage.

Findings from Healthwatch North Yorkshire highlight that LGBTQ+ individuals in the region often face barriers to accessing inclusive and understanding services, including fear of judgment and lack of appropriate support. This reflects the need for safe, community-led spaces such as those created through this project.

The evaluation concluded that while Always Been Here was a major success for LGBTQ+ visibility in Scarborough, the process revealed a significant disconnect between community expectations and institutional practices. The overarching conclusion is that moving forward, any queer cultural work in Scarborough must shift from simple consultation to true co-production. A network of regular workshop attendees should support this to ensure safety, transparency, and community agency.

WORKSHOPS AND EVENTS	ATTENDANCE
ABH Focus Group 1	7
ABH Focus Group 2	5
Liquid Thoughts Screening	42
ABH Evaluation Group 1	3
ABH Evaluation Group 2	3
ABH Evaluation Group 3	3
'Quilt As Folk' Opening workshop	4
Scarborough Pride Workshop	6
Blue Plaque Workshop	5
Out Of The Margins	8

Stats

- Exhibition visitors (in total:) 8,369
- Workshop, focus groups and event attendees: 86
- Workshops, focus groups and events delivered: 10
- Number of films: 2