

# Haalin' the Lines

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20,000 Voices Choir members credit: Jason Thompson

*Haalin' the Lines celebrates the heritage and history of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea through the production of songs and oral histories gathered from the Newbiggin Genealogy project<sup>1</sup>.*

Bringing together a partnership including local musicians, choir members and performers, the project celebrates real life historical events which paint a picture of the way of life for the mining and fishing communities in the town. Through the Newbiggin Genealogy project the local community has been actively involved in developing the songs which have been performed at a series of events across South East Northumberland.

## Project Information

### Project aims

The project aimed to create a series of songs inspired by the stories and oral histories gathered from the Newbiggin Genealogy project and bring together local musicians and choir members to perform these at a series of events across South East Northumberland. By drawing on real life historical events and involving local people in the process of developing the lyrics and songs, the project has provided a clear contribution to the mission of bait to create long-term change in levels of arts participation driven by the creativity and ambition of the local community.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.myheritage.com/site-224055511/newbiggin-by-the-sea-genealogy-project-community-tree>

## Target participants

Haalin' the Lines has involved and engaged a wide range of participants in the development and delivery of the project including members of the Newbiggin Genealogy project, local musicians and choir members. Through a series of performances delivered at local venues, including the annual Northumberland Miners' Picnic held at Woodhorn Museum in Ashington, the project has also been able to showcase the songs to local audiences. The project provided an opportunity for progression for choir members from 20,000 Voices following their participation in bait's Big Sing performed with The Unthanks at the 2014 Miners' Picnic.

## Project partners

The key partners in the project included:

- **bait** Creative People and Places programme as commissioner and project manager. Creative Producer **Juliet Hardy** as Project Lead and Creative Connector **Paul McDougal** assigned to provide project management support;
- **Newbiggin Genealogy project**, an initiative led by local people and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund which aims to record every single person who ever lived in the town;
- **20,000 Voices**<sup>2</sup>, an organisation that promotes, supports and develops participation in singing across Northumberland and the North East including Director Graham Coatman.
- Newbiggin-by-the-Sea based **Jayess Newbiggin Brass Band**<sup>3</sup>;
- Newcastle upon Tyne based musician and composer **Tim Dalling**<sup>4</sup>;
- Newbiggin-by-the-Sea born soprano **Susan Robertson**;
- Arranger **Ken Patterson**; and
- Musical Director **Richard Scott**.

## Project activities

The project commenced with a development phase (November 2014 to February 2015) which enabled lead performer and musician Tim Dalling to consult with members of the Genealogy project, local musicians and community members. This culminated in a sharing event hosted at Newbiggin Maritime Centre which provided an opportunity for members of the Genealogy project to listen to performances by Jayess Newbiggin Brass Band and Tim as well as suggesting local stories and events that could form the basis of the new songs and oral histories.

It was initially intended that members of the Genealogy project would take a lead role in devising the lyrics and performing the songs, however members felt more comfortable contributing ideas with Tim Dalling penning the lyrics and seeking feedback from members at scheduled workshops. This process has ensured that members of the Genealogy project have been able to actively contribute to the shaping of the songs by providing suggestions and advice on local dialect to ensure that the songs resonate with the Newbiggin-by-the-Sea community.

The final phase of the project (March to June 2015) included the production of music scores using the output from the workshop sessions and rehearsals involving choir members from 20,000

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.20000voices.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.jayessnewbigginband.co.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.timdalling.co.uk/>

Voices and an ensemble from Jayess Newbiggin Brass Band. The project provided an opportunity for members of both participating choirs and the brass band to extend themselves beyond their usual routines and perform new songs that celebrate local heritage.

## **Key challenges**

The project has addressed a number of challenges:

- Coordinating the wide range of partners and participants involved in different aspects of the development and delivery of the project. Effective project management and leadership has been essential;
- Building the confidence of participants to engage in a creative process that may be outside their comfort zone and normal routines;
- Developing authentic songs that are able to establish a genuine connection with the local community but also have a wider appeal; and
- Balancing the different aspirations and motivations of each partner.

## **Outcomes and impact - what changed as a result?**

### **Project outcomes**

Haalin' the Lines has produced a series of songs and oral histories that have been inspired by the heritage and history of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea. As a result of the development process the local community has a clear sense of ownership of the new material which has been performed at a number of local venues and events including the Northumberland Miners' Picnic which attracted an audience of around 3,000 people. A second performance at St Mark's United Reform Church in Newbiggin, now a community activity centre, was a sell-out attracting an audience of around 100 people and a subsequent unanticipated performance held a few weeks later at St Bartholomew's Church in Newbiggin was also a sell-out with an audience of 150 people.

### **Project impact**

Participation in the project has strengthened the sense of pride and community felt by members of the Genealogy project. The process of contributing ideas and stories in the development of the songs has proven to be an enjoyable and rewarding experience, enabling the work of the group to be showcased to wider audiences. It has enabled the project to establish links to local choir groups and generated interest in future collaborations and creative projects. Over 100 people have been involved in delivering the project.

**“I'm a great believer that art inspires. At its purest it can inspire other artistic endeavour. I have felt truly inspired by what we achieved and the performance.”**

**Newbiggin Genealogy Project**

For partners Haalin' the Lines has provided an opportunity to collaborate for the first time on an innovative creative project. The experience has generated interest and enthusiasm in exploring future opportunities. The project has also enabled the choirs and Jayess Newbiggin Brass Band to perform to new audiences and raise their profile both within the local community and beyond.

**“Lovely experience working with other choirs / musicians. Comradeship and friendship.”**

20,000 Voices

Through the project members of the choirs and the brass ensemble have learned new skills and gained experience outside of the usual repertoire of their group. This has provided many with the motivation to get involved in similar creative projects.

**“I think the sense of achievement from all was palpable after the event, and I got quite a number of emotional reactions from the singers, who had got so fully involved, and only then, I think, had the reality of the journey we’ve all taken been felt. From the choir’s point of view it has been a really rewarding experience, and they have progressed enormously from start to finish.”**

20,000 Voices

**“It was a tremendous experience. It’s an amazing gift to be able to take an idea and bring all those stories of our families and friends to life. The performance was superb and it was great fun. A true community effort, and an absolute joy to be a part of.”**

Jayess Newbiggin Brass Band

The project has been well received by the community and, as a result of local demand, additional performances were scheduled. The stories and events covered in the songs have shone a light on the history and heritage of the town and a way of life that has shaped the spirit of the people from Newbiggin-by-the-Sea. Audience members expressed the sense of pride that the project has created in their local community and a confidence to raise the profile of the town as a place for people to live, visit and work.

**“I really enjoyed hearing the stories in the company of last night’s audience and seeing their reactions and recognition of the characters they knew.”**

20,000 Voices

Legacy

- The positive experience of working collaboratively has provided partners with the ambition and motivation to pursue future opportunities inspired by the project. Partners have highlighted the considerable potential to both schedule further performances of the songs and also to evolve the project to engage new audiences in different contexts. bait has supported

progression for Jayess Newbiggin Brass Band which will be participating in a masterclass delivered by Mnozil Brass<sup>5</sup> leading to a larger scale project in 2016.

- There is a collective desire to broaden the audience base for the songs and stories, in particular to engage children and young people in a creative process that also enables them to make a connection with their local heritage. Partners are also interested in exploring the use of different art forms to bring to life some of the stories and events covered in Haalin' the Lines, including, for example, musical theatre or poetry.
- Involvement in the project has provided partners with a motivation to pursue funding opportunities to develop these creative ideas into arts activities and events that can inspire and engage future audiences across South East Northumberland and beyond.
- The relevance of the project to the heritage and cultural tradition of Northumberland was recognised by the production team behind the ITV documentary series 'Tales from Northumberland with Robson Green'. The second public performance held at St Mark's United Reform Church was recorded by the production team and will be featured as part of the third series of this popular, nationally broadcast programme.

## Lessons learnt

Key areas of learning which can inform ongoing and similar activities across south east Northumberland include:

- One of the key success factors in the project has been its ability to tap into existing local infrastructure and interest. Engaging and supporting the Newbiggin Genealogy project has ensured that the project made an immediate connection with the local community and heritage of the town. This has helped to broaden the appeal of the project beyond those that currently engage in the arts by ensuring that it is regarded as culturally relevant<sup>6</sup>.
- bait has played a pivotal role in brokering links between partners. When combined with an open brief approach and a willingness to take a risk, the project has had both the space to evolve and the flexibility to embrace opportunities. This has also helped to instil a shared sense of ownership and facilitated a stronger partnership approach.
- Partners have been committed to delivering a high quality arts event from the outset. Central to this has been a need to balance a desire for inclusivity (for participants) with a need to maintain quality standards. Effective leadership by each partner has ensured that an appropriate balance has been achieved, whilst at the same time realising the potential for the project to motivate respective members to progress their art form. The use of bait's Quality Framework has also aided the project in achieving high quality standards in relation to the project's product, creative process and quality of experience for participants.
- Professional input to the musical arrangement and the production of the music scores has been significant in providing the performers with the support, confidence and inspiration to deliver high quality performances.
- The timescale required to schedule sufficient rehearsals should not be underestimated. Under the banner of 20,000 Voices, five local community choirs have participated in the project. Different choirs can have different approaches to learning new songs, for example, using music scores or learning by ear. Consequently the process needs to retain a degree of flexibility but at

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mnozilbrass.at/en/>

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion on the importance of demonstrating relevance to engage new participants see Arts Council Wales (2008)- 'Arts and Public Engagement, Patterns, processes and levers for change' and RAND (2001)- 'A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts'. Authors Kevin F. McCarthy, Kimberly J. Jinnett

the same time ensure coordination and progress within the project timescales.

- It is important to recognise potential sensitivities arising from projects that bring together paid artists with volunteer groups and performers. Making a contribution to cover the costs and reflect the contribution of volunteer groups is an important aspect of maintaining an effective and motivated partnership. Commissioners need to ensure that there is a transparency of process and funding when working with paid artists and volunteers. Supporting progression for volunteers to engage in future creative challenges is often well received as a gesture to recognise their valued contribution.

- Projects which involve the production of new lyrics and music may need to consider issues around copyright, royalties and licensing, in particular where there is a desire to create a longer-term legacy. Whilst it is not always appropriate or possible to address this at the outset, it should be factored into the management and review of the project.

- The success, or otherwise, of partnership projects can sometimes hinge on the experience, personality and interpersonal skills of the lead artist. With regards to Haalin' the Lines, the lead performer Tim Dalling has played an indispensable role in inspiring, motivating and encouraging participants in both the process of developing and performing the songs. Fundamentally projects succeed or fail on the strength of key individuals, and as such, the lesson may be as simple as selecting the right artist and creating the right environment for them to work.

## Replicability

The following are highlighted as top tips for replicating this project:

- Establish a quality connection with the local community drawing on interests, passions and existing groups;
- Be willing to take a risk and adopt an open-brief approach to enable projects to evolve and embrace opportunities; and
- Effective brokerage between partners is an integral part of managing ambitions, expectations and interests and creating a shared sense of ownership.

## Documentation



Images (above left) Choirs with Robson Green from Tales of Northumberland credit: Wansbeck Voices (above right) Tim Dalling working with members of Newbiggin Genealogy Project credit: Jason Thompson

Watch the performance of Haalin The Lines (credit Jason Thompson):  
<https://www.facebook.com/jasonthompson1969/videos/10152857745750216/>

## **Evidence of progress against Theory of Change**

### **Ambition: to make a change in levels of participation in quality arts activity**

Haalin' the Lines has been highly successful in making a connection with the Newbiggin-by-the-Sea community. Nearly all of the choir members surveyed following the performances felt that the songs were effective in reflecting and celebrating the history and character of the town. As such, the project has successfully combined different art forms to celebrate the local heritage and history of the community.

The process of involving members of the local community in the development and performance of the songs has been effective in engaging a wider audience through word of mouth promotion to friends and family members. The performances have raised the profile of local choirs and Jayess Newbiggin Brass Band which has the potential to both attract new members and also new audiences for future performances.

The project has been successful in deepening participation by increasing current participants' levels of involvement, most notably members of the choir and local musicians. The project has also broadened participation by encouraging more people with an interest in the arts to get involved. Anecdotal evidence from members of the Genealogy project and people attending the performances also suggests that the project has been able to diversify participation by attracting different kinds of people to get involved either as participants or audience members.

Whilst it is too early to make an assessment of the project's success in contributing to long-term change in levels of arts participation in South East Northumberland, the creative ideas and opportunities being explored as part of the legacy offer considerable potential to engage a wider audience in arts activities inspired by the songs and oral histories created by Haalin' the Lines. The positive experience of being involved in the project has also ensured that the large number of participants have become enthusiastic advocates for arts, which will assist in the process of engaging the local community in future opportunities.

### **Ambition: to involve local people**

The involvement of local people in the process of creating new songs and oral histories inspired by local events and stories has been central to the design of the project. Members of the Genealogy project have played an active role throughout as part of sharing events and workshop sessions with lead artist Tim Dalling. Involving local choirs through 20,000 Voices and brass musicians through Jayess Newbiggin Brass Band has retained the local appeal of the project and also allowed many participants to realise their ambition to work on innovative creative projects which differ from their traditional activities. Responding to a brief survey of choir members following the final performance of the project, nearly half of participants reported that they felt they had been able to contribute a lot to the development of the songs and projects with an equal number indicating that they had been able to contribute a little.

### **Ambition: to demonstrate the benefits to well-being of quality arts activity**

Participants and audience members reported a range of positive benefits including the sense of pride and community instilled due to their participation and their enjoyment of the songs and stories retold and performed by local people. More broadly a range of publications highlight the positive impact of music participation. Evidence indicates that music enables people to participate in activities that are stimulating and personally meaningful and can provide a source of social

cohesion and social contact.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>

## **Ambition: to leave a sustainable legacy of enhanced capacity, resources and infrastructure for the arts in south east Northumberland**

The collaborative nature of Haalin' the Lines has enabled existing groups to come together to contribute to the production and performance of a range of songs and stories. The positive experience reported by participating choir members, musicians and members of the Genealogy project has provided both momentum and motivation to explore new opportunities. All choir members responding to the survey following the performances stated that they would recommend the project to family and friends. Several members also indicated that the project has inspired them and given them ideas for other creative projects. Just over two thirds of choir members stated that they would definitely participate in similar projects again and the remainder that they probably would.

The brokerage role delivered by bait has been instrumental in forging and strengthening links between local groups. This provides considerable potential for partners to continue their collaborative work both in the context of evolving the Haalin' the Lines project and exploring new creative activities. However, an ongoing brokerage and facilitation role is likely to be necessary to ensure that the partnership links developed are maintained for the benefit of the local community.

The resources generated by the project, including the lyrics, music scores and video/audio recordings of the performances can also provide the basis for a wide range of arts activities across South East Northumberland.

Researched and written by Consilium Research as part of the evaluation of bait (2015)  
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### **Our Funders**



### **Our Consortium**

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8 Bungay, H., Clift, S. and Skingley, A. (2010) The Silver Song Club Project: A sense of wellbeing through participatory singing, Journal of Applied Arts and Health, 1, 2, 165-178.

9 Clift, S. and Hancox, G.(2010) The Significance of Choral Singing for Sustaining Psychological Wellbeing: Findings from a survey of choristers in England, Australia and Germany, Music Performance Research, 3, 1, 79- 96.

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