

# Woodend Creative Workspace, Scarborough

**Woodend, once the home of the Sitwell family, has been transformed from a declining museum into a vibrant workhub at the centre of Scarborough's new creative business cluster**

## The building

Woodend was originally the family home of the Sitwells, whose shared literary output graces the walls of the beautifully preserved old library. The Sitwells left after bombing raids by the German Navy and zeppelins destroyed nearby homes in the First World War.

Woodend became a natural history museum but fell into disrepair, virtually ignored until Scarborough's renaissance programme saw a chance to turn it into a centre for the town's fast growing colony of creative entrepreneurs.



Scarborough has seen repeated exoduses of its wealthier residents over the last few hundred years. One followed the arrival of the first railway in the 1840s, bringing mass tourism and ending the appeal of the gentrified seaside town's remote beauty. The art deco revival (still evident in some hotels) also petered out, leaving the town largely dependent upon seasonal working class tourism until its renaissance as a leader in creative enterprise.

The idea for a workhub came in 2005. A coastal town renaissance programme was being funded by RDA Yorkshire Forward. Locally the council chose to kill a few birds with one stone, using the programme to co-fund Woodend's conversion for a new use that respected the building's heritage.

Director Andrew Clay came eight months before the centre opened in April 2008. 'A delayed opening allowed the project to be very carefully thought through, responding to detailed market research. There was a group of hardcore creatives in the local Creative Coast Network here already, with 140 members. We cultivated them and built up connections with photographers, writers, artists etc. But we also aimed for key anchor tenants such as the BBC, which now has a studio here,' Clay says.

## What's special

'Woodend is completely unique in Scarborough and most of this part of Yorkshire,' says Clay. 'We've got a heritage building, some of the best quality workspace in the town and we reach a good range of sectors not just the creatives.'

'Other offices in town tend to be above shops or you have to go out to the business park. Neither of these appeal to people like our space does. We offer a place to collaborate, not just to take a room. And nowhere else facilitates networking like we do. Our everyday tenants were previously at home or in shabby places, even condemned buildings. Woodend has changed everything for them.'

Scarborough's traditional sectors, fishing and tourism, he says, are either flagging or seasonal and in decline. 'This was an opportunity to brand the town an exciting place for relocating creative businesses, lured by stunning scenery, the coast and cheaper premises and housing.' It was ideal for freelancers and creative businesses wanting out of the larger northern cities – people with young families returning to Scarborough or choosing it because they came here on holiday as children or for weekend breaks. 'Returners as well as relocaters. Plus there is surfing here!' Clay says.

## Management

Creative Industries Centre Trust Ltd, a not-for-profit company, was set up by the council to run the centre after its refurbishment in 2008. It has a board with 11 directors and is currently chaired by former councillor Sheila Kettlewell. Articles of association guarantee a place to two education reps (from Yorkshire Coast College and Hull University) and a councillor. The chief executive of the local theatre is also on the board. Andrew Clay, the director, formerly ran the Round Foundry Media Centre in Leeds and previously worked as a creative consultant at another Yorkshire workhub, Huddersfield Media Centre.

The company advertised the director post at over £40k to attract a relocating director. 'I think it was important for them not to recruit someone who commutes and leaves after short period,' says Clay, who lives happily in Scarborough now with his family.



## Tony Bartholomew

[www.bartpics.co.uk](http://www.bartpics.co.uk)

Tony Bartholomew is a photographer who went freelance in 1995 after years working as a staff photographer for newspapers, including the *Northern Echo*. A large room at the top of his house served as his office until 2008 when he relocated to the newly opened Woodend.

'Working at home suited me but when I saw Woodend I thought I'd give it a go,' he said. 'The rents were low enough that I figured just one extra job a month would pay the rent.'

Another attraction was the prospect of attracting new business and some regular clients were also moving to Woodend. An unexpected change has been his own attitude to work. 'It has given me a slight kick-start and I'm doing things like running a photography workshop, which I'd never have done at home.'

Tony rents an office and with his work almost entirely digital no longer needs a dark room. 'Most of my work is done on location so I rarely need a studio but I can rent a room if I need one.' Other benefits, he notes, include reception signing for his deliveries and the social events. If Woodend hadn't come along, Tony says he'd still be working at home, disappointing his small son. 'He has his eye on my old office.'

## Gillies/Jones

[www.gilliesjonesglass.co.uk](http://www.gilliesjonesglass.co.uk)

Negotiations are in hand over funding for a permanent exhibition space at Woodend, a move that would allow Woodend to extend its support for local artists. If successful, one of the first exhibitions would star internationally renowned glassmakers Gillies Jones, also sometime collaborators with Tony Bartholomew.

Tony first came across the Gillies Jones studio 15 years ago. 'I was working on the Yorkshire Moors shortly after they opened their studio and was intrigued,' he recalls. His first photographs of their work, for the *Yorkshire Post*, have been followed up over the years by other combined efforts including their first major catalogue. 'Tony's eye sees parts of the process even I don't see,' Kate Jones says.

Kate and Stephen Gillies work in a former blacksmith's forge just 20 metres from their cottage in the village of Rosedale. Their live/work set up is ideal, says Kate. 'Winter's our creative time and our studio's open seven days a week. So in the lighter summer months we get lots of people coming to the door,' Kate said. 'Our children go to the village school and we don't usually blow glass after three, so we're very much working with the rhythm of the seasons and the children.' Many orders are placed online and Parcelforce beats a regular track to the forge door. They are frequent visitors to Woodend. 'I've seen a massive change in Tony since he's been there and we've been exploring using one of the website designers there,' Kate says. 'You do feel a kind of buzz there. It has a really forward energy about it.'

## Tariffs

Typical rents for a 150 square foot unit at the centre are £160 per month. The council is keen for the centre to nurture new business so Woodend offers a 30% discount to start-up businesses for the first six months.

Virtual office services cost £50 per month for phone answering or £25 per month for post (£75 both). Clients who buy broadband get free wifi.

There is also a good range of meeting rooms, including the famous Sitwell Library. A contemporary conference room seats 50.

## The finances

The building, owned by the local authority, was renovated for a capital cost of around £6 million. The managing company has taken out a 30-year lease, with a peppercorn rent. Running costs are around £250,000 per annum.

'We have 90% occupancy which is what it should be – having a little space available is always good,' says Clay. 'The first priority was letting physical space to get the income flowing. Now we are expanding our reach to the more hidden home-based businesses in and surrounding Scarborough.'

## Staff

- 1 director FT
- 1 finance/admin FT
- 1 building/events mgr FT
- 1 receptionist PT
- 1 maintenance PT
- 2 PT cleaners.

## Businesses and members

52 units with 35 physical businesses (some taking more than one space). These range from 150 square foot to 650 square foot. Many of these businesses have home-based staff or make part use of their space. There are five virtual members – the next phase of the centre's work is to expand this group. A university-run incubator has taken space in the building. And Woodend is also home to BBC York radio studio.

## The challenges

Woodend has had to prove its wider economic benefit to the town, especially to those who see the creative sector as contributing more to the arts than business. We've comprehensively dismissed those "all this money for arty farty people" complaints you naturally expect in a project like this,' says Andrew Clay.

### Lindsey Tyson

[www.lindseytyson.co.uk](http://www.lindseytyson.co.uk)

Lindsey Tyson is a textile designer and artist who went freelance after years designing fabrics for the automotive trade. 'I worked in Belgium as a freelancer for a while and did the design from home. I left so I could be at home more but the room I was using is now a child's bedroom and I come here instead, even in the evening.' Lindsey has for the past six months rented a double studio space at Woodend where she creates vibrantly coloured textiles – some functional, some decorative, some both. 'I make scarves and wraps to sell and some cards and paintings.

'I also do workshops in felt making every month and teach art on Thursday and Friday mornings. The workshops pay my rent and business rates. It's easier to work at home because you don't have the overheads. But I can't fit all my stuff there now and I'd need somewhere for my workshops,' she says. 'There aren't many places in Scarborough big enough. This place also has such lovely views and you can walk outside with your lunch. I'd be devastated if I had to give it up!'



One recent idea was to extend the reach of its Wimax broadband with a line of sight connection to the Crown Spa Hotel on the hill opposite. 'This will make fast broadband available to other businesses in different sectors,' says Clay (pictured right). 'The technology we have brought into Scarborough can be rolled out to benefit tourism as well as year-round creatives.'

'The council initially wanted Woodend to feed through growing businesses that would then take space on the business parks. 'This is not happening yet, which suggests we all need a better understanding of the type and size of workspace creative businesses seek,' he says.

Woodend first concentrated on core income – tenanted space. It now wants to extend its membership and virtual services to the diaspora of home-based businesses in this part of Yorkshire. 'We need to do some outreach and a mapping exercise of hidden home-based businesses that might like to be members of the Woodend community,' Clay says. 'We are also looking to better exploit uses of our art gallery and performance spaces, with a funding application to the Arts Council to do a creative programme.'



There are other ideas in the pipeline too. 'We want to reach creative retailers, for example the jet jewellery makers of Whitby. One idea might be for them sell at Woodend, with us taking a small commission on any sales.'

The biggest challenge, however, might be whether the council is willing to carry on capitalising on the town's impressive EU award for enterprise.

## Jason Birkin

### Duo Design

Jason and his business partner Rosie are a new company offering graphic design and illustration – and fresh out of college. 'We really didn't expect to come straight out to work for ourselves,' says Jason. 'We heard about Woodend and it was a really good opportunity. It's why we started the business. We wouldn't have done it otherwise – I'd planned to take a year out before going on to university to study graphics or illustration and Rosie was looking for work.'

The team are tucked into a small attic room thought to have been the butler's retreat. In one corner sits a colour printer – donated by Jason's uncle – which has proved a useful source of income. 'We can do large format, good quality printing for other people in the building as well as for ourselves,' Jason says. Being newcomers, they face the twin problems of finding clients and building up a portfolio but the work is starting to come in. 'We've done the Christmas menus and posters for a pub near where Rosie lives and we've just printed some posters for web designers 8-legged. It's really exciting seeing your designs in use.' Business support is part of their rental deal.

'Business Link were very helpful before we started,' Jason says. 'And Andrew Clay and one of the receptionists set up a meeting for us with one of the big designers in this area and he's now like a friend. He gave us lots of advice.' Both he and Rosie are working one day a week from home. 'We try to be here as much as we can because people will come to see us at an office. But we don't always need the facilities and sometimes it's not worth paying for transport. It's more relaxing at home but it can get a bit lonely.' Both are also working part-time. 'I work in the kitchen of a hotel and Rosie works as a waitress so there's money on the side if we need it,' Jason says. 'Our Business Link adviser says lots of young businesses do this. The whole business idea is scary but exciting at the same time.'

