

Cowpen Quay Community Association

The Buffalo – A Historic Blyth Landmark

First Origins and The Original Red Bull

The origins of the Buffalo Community Centre can be traced back to an old coaching in hotel known as the Red Bull, situated on what was Keelman's Row, part of the historic main road to Blyth town centre that later became Regent Street. The name reflects the popularity of western themed motels and cowboy style influences of the 1700's as wild west stories flooded from the shipyards from the forging of North America.

By the middle of the 19th century, the premises had become known as the Buffalo Inn, serving the growing population of Cowpen Quay at a time when Blyth was expanding rapidly through its port, railways, coal trade and shipbuilding industries.

The Buffalo was much more than a public house and became an established local meeting place. During the period when John Crawford was landlord, the Associated Shipwrights' Society regularly met there, giving the building a direct connection to Blyth's important shipbuilding and working heritage. It was used also for many things such as the Guild of the Buffalos meeting place, and as a Coroners Inquest Office, these include cases involving seafarers, industrial workers and local residents. Its repeated use for inquests shows that the Buffalo was a recognised place where important civic and legal matters were conducted.

The Buffalo Community Centre
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We are a safe reporting centre



(Original Buffalo Inn date unkown)

Rebuilt as the Buffalo Hotel

In approximately 1898, the premises were acquired by Thomas Gray, who proposed replacing the older inn with a much larger and grander hotel. The original building was demolished and by the end of 1899, the new Buffalo Hotel had opened. This is substantially the building that remains today. The stables block which is located at the back of the main building, is still from the original pub. As the name sake suggests, until fairly recently it was a stables block where merchant traders would tie up their horses for a nights stay.

The Buffalo was designed by the same architect as its sister building, the former Thoroton Hotel in Blyth. The relationship between the two can still be seen in their brick construction, decorative sandstone work, elaborate rooflines and particularly their distinctive and unique corner turrets. The Buffalo's turret remains one of its most recognisable features. Its importance is perhaps even greater today because so many of the surrounding Victorian houses, shops and businesses have disappeared. The building now stands as a highly visible reminder of the former appearance and activity of Regent Street and Cowpen Quay.

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The sandstone especially is mirrored throughout the other of Blyth's conservation area heritage, such as the Kings Head and Port Commissioners Office. The building comprises of 4 floors with original beer cellar still in tact.

The Buffalo plays an interesting surviving architectural connection from Blyth's Victorian period, with their scale and design reflecting the confidence and prosperity created by the rapid growth of the town, its need for hotel stays, and a relaxation spot at the end of a hard days graft.



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The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service
The MBE for volunteer groups

Modern History and More Than 50 Years of Community Service

The Buffalo's tradition of bringing people together continues through its present use as the Buffalo Community Centre.

Cowpen Quay Community Association was established in 1974, when a small group of local mothers founded a youth club in St John's Hall. From those beginnings, the organisation developed into a well established charity serving Cowpen Quay, Croft, and the surrounding Blyth area. In 2024, we celebrated our 50th anniversary, and the Buffalo remains one of the busiest community centres in the whole of Northumberland and is used by a huge variety of people and organisations.

Today it hosts youth sessions, SEND activities (special educational needs a disabilities), social and support groups, exercise and wellbeing sessions, community meetings, training, celebrations, events and activities for older people. We also provide affordable space for voluntary organisations and smaller local groups that may otherwise struggle to find somewhere suitable to meet.

This is one of the things that makes the Buffalo particularly special to us. It has never been a building for just one group or one generation. Children, young people, families, disabled people, older residents, volunteers and organisations all use and share the centre. A great history can be found when talking to the members that use the pub, you can judge an age of the people coming in whether they remember it as a place they come to youth club, or older if a place they come to drink in. We even now have young people attend our youth project whose grandparents also attended when they were younger the same youth club. We outlive many of the schools and many other charitable organisations in the town. The many anecdotes we hear include from cultural events held, band practice, lock ins, dance competitions, and even on an incident in a early 2000's meeting with physical altercation across tables between town councillors and Northumberland county council discussing plans for Blyth. We have seen it all, we are woven into the fabric of the community, and it extends the whole town.

Many of the people who now work or volunteer here first attended the Buffalo themselves when they were younger. The building has therefore supported generations of local people while continuing to adapt to what the community needs today. Our longest serving trustee Foster Burt was an original founding member of the groups charity and every member of the board was born in Blyth.

Our work was nationally recognised in 2011, when Cowpen Quay Community Association received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest national honour awarded to voluntary groups. We hope in the future to put plans in for a kings award.

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Why We Believe It Deserves a Blue Plaque

We believe the Buffalo deserves a blue plaque because so many different parts of Blyth's history come together in one surviving building.

It has connections with the early development of Cowpen Quay, Blyth's keelmen and maritime heritage, its shipbuilding workforce, historic inns and meeting places, coroners' inquests and the architectural ambition of Victorian Blyth.

Its distinctive turret and relationship with the Thoroton Hotel make it an important part of the town's surviving architecture, while its appearances in published histories and its growing reputation within local folklore especially on its ghost hunting tales continue to keep people interested in its story.

Most importantly, the Buffalo is still serving its original wider purpose of bringing people together. Today it is home to a charity that has served the community for more than 50 years and continues to welcome a wide range of groups, services and generations through its doors.

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A blue plaque would recognise that remarkable journey: from the Red Bull and Buffalo Inn, through its rebuilding as the Buffalo Hotel in 1899, to its present-day role as the Buffalo Community Centre and home of Cowpen Quay Community Association.

The Buffalo is not only a surviving landmark from Blyth's past; it remains a busy and much loved part of the town today. For these reasons, we believe it deserves to have its place in Blyth's history formally recognised with a blue plaque.

We would appreciate the plaque stating something along the lines of, but we are open to change

THE BUFFALO

Historic site of the Red Bull and Buffalo Inn.
Rebuilt in 1899 as the Buffalo Hotel.
Home of Cowpen Quay Community Association Charity
serving the people of Blyth since 1974.

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