

**Report created February
2020 by
The Evaluator**





is an Edwardian theatre, built over a hundred years ago and originally called The Municipal Hall. The original design comprised three structures: a theatre, a public library, and a technical school. From a conservation survey carried out in 2017 by Purcell, we know that when it was built, “the local government expressed civic pride in the town development, and an interest in the improvement of the local people”. Purcell also thought that the Municipal Hall was of “high local significance due to its community associations and connection to the civic history of Colne”. It is interesting to note that since opening, there has been absolutely no period of disuse, either as a theatre or as a community space. Therefore, it remains as “significant culturally and historically today as when it was built.”

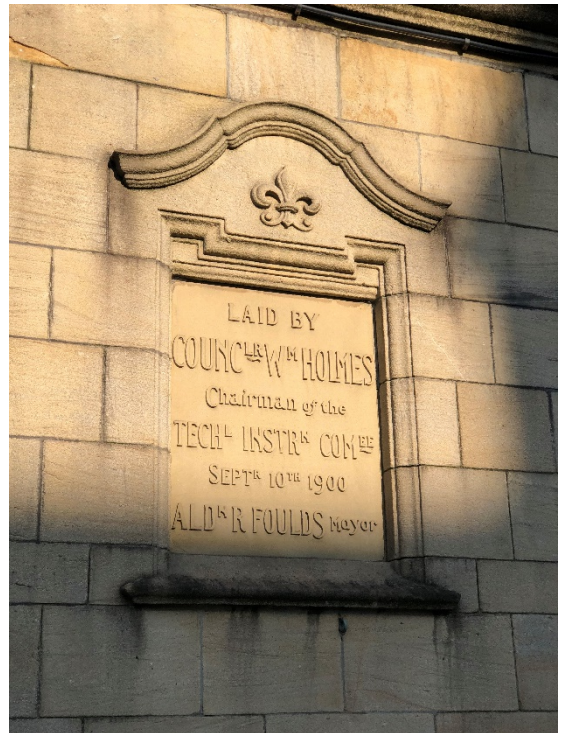
Although the building itself is not Listed, it does have local heritage interest and, as part of the Conservation area, it does have Statutory Protection. The Albert Road Conservation area includes the Muni as one of its key buildings, and is a key area of heritage in the locality. We aim to show how important it is that these buildings are retained, both in terms of traditional built heritage (which is further explained in the Purcell report), but also in terms of oral history and anecdotal heritage - which is collated here in this report.

With the Muni having such an important and lengthy heritage, when we embarked upon our memory search it was anticipated that we may well uncover some equally significant and potentially life changing stories. However, the more people we talked to about the Muni and their associated memories, what we found was a plethora of incredibly happy stories: feel good moments. The stories evoked warmth, smiles, and laughter. The Muni revealed itself to be a meeting place, a melting pot, a place where the people of Colne could come together. With such a vast array of memories, and in order to try to bring a sense of order to the stories we garnered, we decided to create a memory map A-Z.

The following two pages represent an info-graphic summary of the stories we uncovered during the primary research

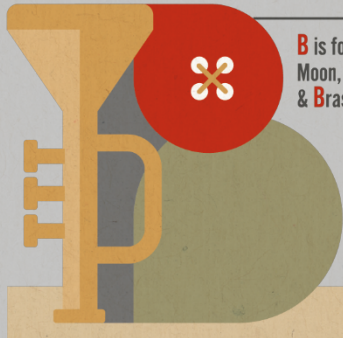


carried out between October 2019 and January 2020. These images are designed to be printed and used within The Muni itself.

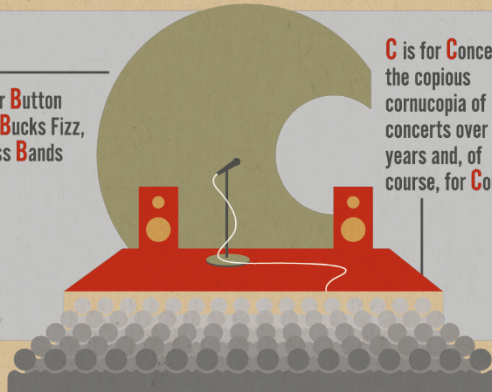


COLNE MUNI A-Z

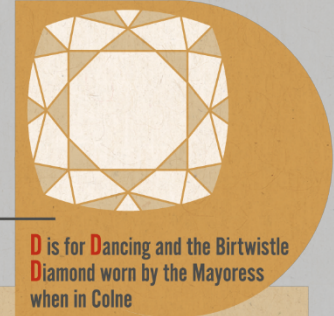
A is for **A**mazing **A**coustics & **A**lma's Meals on Wheels, run from the Muni for many years



B is for **B**utton Moon, **B**ucks Fizz, & **B**rass **B**ands



C is for **C**oncerts, the copious cornucopia of concerts over the years and, of course, for **C**olne



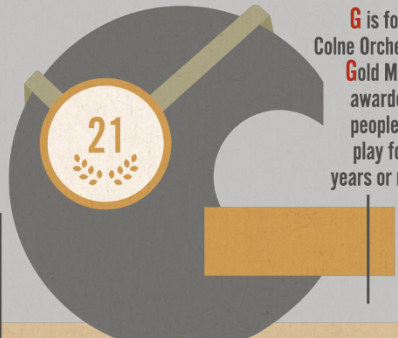
D is for **D**ancing and the Birtwistle **D**iamond worn by the Mayoress when in Colne



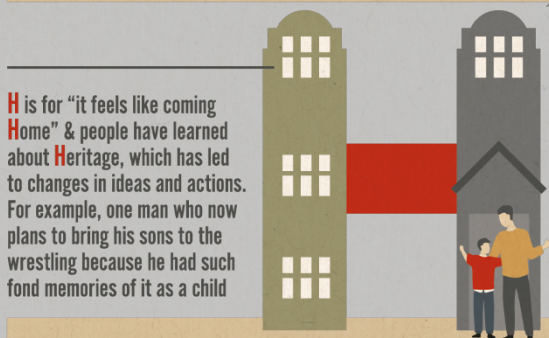
E is for the **E**xhibition that went awry & Mr Ramsay, the **E**scaping **E**agle



F is for **F**amous **F**aces, **B**lues Festivals and **B**eer Festivals



G is for the Colne Orchestra **G**old Medal, awarded to people who play for 21 years or more



H is for "it feels like coming **H**ome" & people have learned about **H**eritage, which has led to changes in ideas and actions. For example, one man who now plans to bring his sons to the wrestling because he had such fond memories of it as a child



I is for **I**nsects and the fears that this important heritage institution needs work!



J is for **J**ulian Lloyd Webber & **K**atherine **J**enkins amongst all the other 'just quality' musicians and performers



K is for **K**en **D**odd and his shows that lasted all night!



L is for the Colne **L**uther **G**reenwood Memorial Festival, a friendly festival of song taking place annually since 1900

M is for the **M**ayor, the **M**ayor's Christmas Teas, the **M**ayor's Ball, and **M**emories



O is for Colne Orchestra, established in 1891 and still going strong today

P is for Peter Kay, Plays & Parties

Q is for AntiQues Roadshow, and the Questions we asked; what is your earliest memory of the Muni? People had so many we had to be specific

R is for Ranulph Fiennes, who told tales of travelling from Pole to Pole to a hardy audience, who had to brave the local bad weather to listen

S is for the proper Stage which so many people have stood upon, and the memories Shared here

T is for the Titanic, whose bandmaster, Wallace Hartley, reportedly died while playing as the ship sank. Wallace lived in Colne and is buried in the local cemetery

U is for the Unbroken stretch of being a theatre since opening! The mUni & the sense of commUnity have been going on since 1900 without a gap. It was even used during the war to hold recruitment drives for soldiers

V is for Violin, a StradiVarius no less, played by Nicola Benedetti during a sold-out performance

W is for Wrestling and the wealth of stories and fond memories of it

X is for the fire eXtinguisher used to ruin the Mayors ball! (It was only a small fire!)

Y is for Russ ConwaY, the drunken pianist who couldn't remember the notes and had to be carried off the stage

Z is for this A to Z needed to share the wide range of memories of this very special Colne institution!

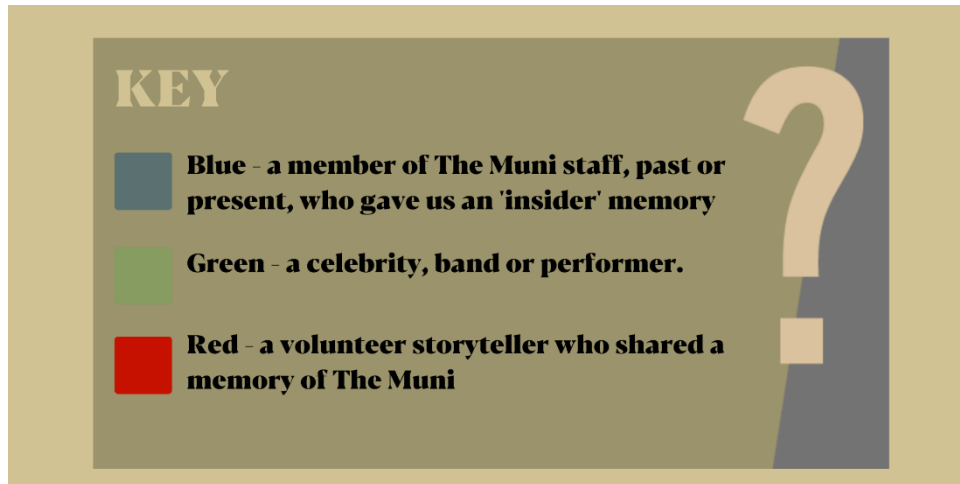
This A-Z has been funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and this Heritage has been identified and better explained.

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The Evaluator

The wealth and breadth of memories is as diverse and far reaching as the range of events that have taken place at the Muni over its incredible history. In order to access these memories, however big or small - but all just as significant - a range of events took place. These were to include telephone conversations, face-to-face meetings, focus groups, emails, interviews and social media chats. To bring some order to the vast array of memories, an A-Z Memory Map has been created. Some letters generate more than one idea, whilst others proved to suit a more conceptual thought and understanding of heritage. As we travel through the alphabet on our memory journey, a picture soon emerges of a warm, welcoming, and truly special place - one that holds an incredible range of memories for many people.

Allow us to explain a little more, and take you through the stories in more detail.



Throughout this report, in order to keep the memories flowing and preserve the heritage uncovered, we have used a colour code.



A is the first letter, and also the first to attach itself to more than one significant idea, starting with **A** is for Acoustics. It wasn't enough to just say acoustics, the adjective 'amazing' seemed to permanently attach itself and the two words together tripped effortlessly off the tongue. People told us that the acoustics made The Muni more special than other local venues, **"It's always good singing here; good acoustics"**, **Alan** told us, a member of the Arion choir who loved performing at The Muni, in particular singing in front of the stage rather than on it! **Graham**, from Colne Orchestra who played violin at the Muni over a hundred times in various concerts, and also conducted, enthused about how good the acoustics are in the theatre, **"great acoustics, acoustics matters a lot"** he explained. **Geoff**, a local historian whose name will appear in many memories, also talked about the acoustics

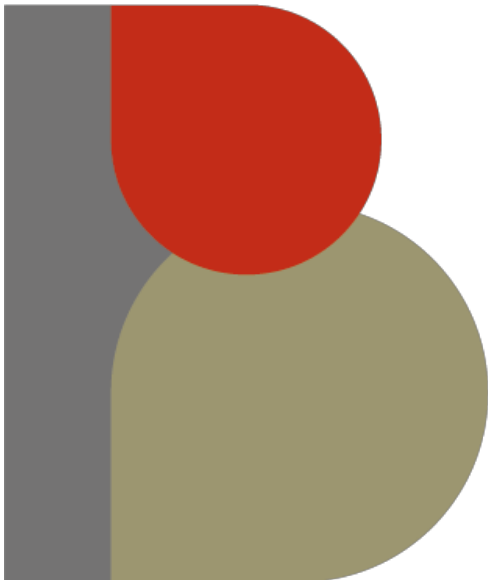
saying, **"The acoustics are some of the best". "It's the acoustics of this place; it's a big thing isn't it?"**

The Nelson Arion Male Voice Choir

HERITAGE

The Nelson Arion Male Voice Choir was formed in 1887 and has performed across the world, although the choir regularly performs choral music in East Lancashire, where it is based

Alma is our last 'A'. Alma Pickles ran Meals on Wheels from the kitchen in the Muni for many years. A driver would come to pick them up, and we can just imagine the number of mouths she will have fed! Alma's husband Tommy was the caretaker at the time. Alma also had the Colunio café where she used to **"do meals for the acts at night!"** She used to make large meat and potato pies and a pudding. We wonder if any of the celebrities tucking into their pies knew that the elderly local people had just the same tea, also delivered to them.



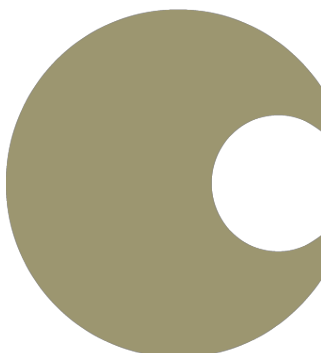
B is a large category with so many memories attached to it. Let's start with **Button Moon**, a very popular Children's TV show in the 80s. The puppet show version came to Colne, to The Muni, a strong memory for **Denice**, and many others. It was the most common early memory of The Muni, mostly remembered by people who were very young and had an overall impression rather than specific stories to tell. We do know that people often started to visit the Muni very early in their life.

Eurovision winners **Bucks Fizz** figured in many of the interviews; people remember them performing at the Muni circa 1983. **"Bucks Fizz were amazing, Jay the female singer grabbed my hand,"** and **Michelle** still loves the band to this day. **Jessica** remembers seeing the band, aged 11: **"yeh, I think they did the skirt trick"** where the two female singers had their skirts ripped off on stage. **"Even had a pic in The Colne Times!"** **Michelle** was at the front and, to this day, still remembers the skirt she wore to the show - a brown, flowery one she had made in sewing class at school. **"Oh the memories! I'd give 'owt to go back"**. The ladies also remembered seeing **Tight Fit** at around the same time, but were most put out that they mimed through all of their songs!

Brass Bands also cropped up regularly in lots of our conversations. **Alan**, Secretary of the Arion Choir and member for 44 years, remembers the Brass Bands being part of the Christmas Cracker concert (which still happens to this day. One of our memory sharing events took place on the same day as the Christmas Cracker performance) and says they have been **"amazing"**. All the greats have played, including **Brighouse & Rastrick*** and **Black Dyke Band****. **"In the 1980s there was always a waiting list to come and perform at the Christmas Cracker"**.

***The Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band was formed in 1881. It is based in Brighouse, in Calderdale, West Yorkshire. In 1977, the band reached number 2 in the UK Singles Chart with their recording of "The Floral Dance"**

**** Black Dyke Band, formerly John Foster & Son Black Dyke Mills Band, is one of the oldest and best-known brass bands in the world. The band is best known for recording the soundtrack to the BBC gardening makeover series Ground Force in 1997**



Concerts, and oh so many different concerts, a veritable cornucopia indeed! Neil remembers his first concert here which was **Saxon**, (a heavy metal band), in 1989. **"They came with 2 big 'artics' {articulated lorries} and their own kitchen"**. On many other occasions, he remembers having to chase equipment down the road (as the Muni is on a hill) but the visiting bands hadn't realised.

One band he remembers well was **Terrorvision***. Their music was so loud, and rocking so much, they had to actually strap the speakers to the heating system! Neil now runs his own company, hiring out equipment for gigs, but as a child, he remembers coming to the Muni with his dad, who worked there, **"so it's because of my dad and because of the Muni that I now do what I do"**.

Mildred, who at 91 is the oldest person we talked to, told us about the many celebrity concerts at the Muni during the war. Apparently, the best solo singers of the time attended, and once a month, on a Sunday there would be a different performance – solos, duets, quartets. The concerts were packed. She remembers seeing **Isobel Baillie** the soprano on one occasion, and also remembers

*** Terrorvision are an English rock band formed in 1987 (originally as The Spoilt Bratz) in Keighley, and initially disbanded in 2001. The group reformed in 2005 (Bookogs)**

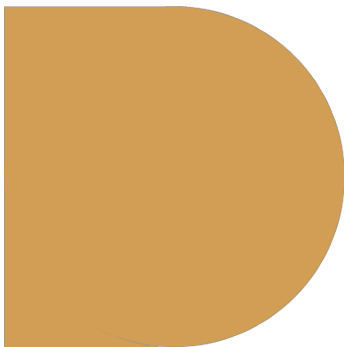
Dame Isobel Baillie, DBE (9 March 1895 – 24 September 1983) was a Scottish soprano, popular in opera, oratorio and lieder. She was regarded as one of the 20th century's great oratorio singers.



discussing the concerts in the Sixth Form the following week. **Mildred** really enjoyed reminiscing and, at the age of 91, pointed out that she doesn't gallivant anymore! However, she was previously a very loyal supporter who told us **"it brings back many happy memories to talk about it"**.

Beverley, originally from Nelson and Barnoldswick and now living very happily in a Hampshire village with three grown up boys, remembers one particularly special concert – **The Milltown Brothers**, an Indie Band from Colne who were tipped for stardom in the 1990s. She went with a then 'male friend' who annoyed her by being late. Whilst waiting for him to turn up she met his friend there. They have now been happily married for 18 years, together for 24. She still has the ticket from that night, as it's so special for her.

Our alphabet would not be complete without, of course, a C for Colne: hometown of the Muni itself.



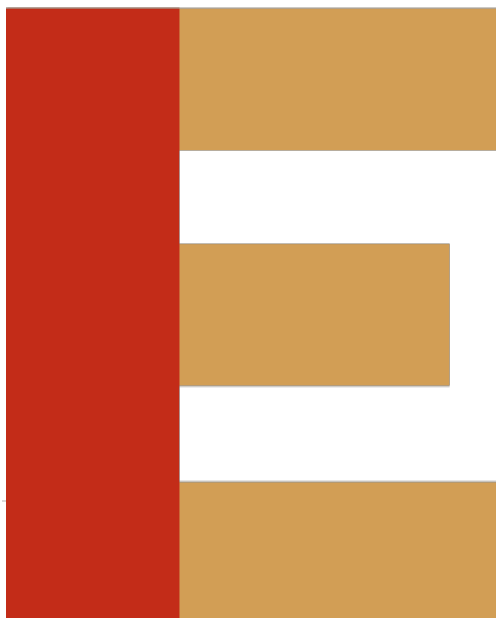
D is for **Dancing**, and a variety of dances to boot! **Graham** remembers country dancing at the Muni age 9; all the schools in the area came and performed in the evening.

Mildred also remembers country dancing at the Muni through being a member of the Church Drama Society, although she professes to only being interested in the drama. Some people remember as children coming to dances with their mum and dad.

Steven remembers Scottish country dancing in the late 1960s **"with my elasticated tie on"**. He laughingly says how he used to hate it, having to cross arms and skip around the perimeter with all the parents watching, and crying when he was made to dance with a certain girl!

Janet remembers ballroom dancing with her Grandma Nora in the 1960s and really loving it! Somebody else talking about dancing stated what they thought was the obvious when they said, **"where else can you hold a large dance?** (not in other venues, several names mentioned) **..... It's a proper floor"** **"oh Christ aye, lovely dances"**.

Thanks to Jackie, we have a lovely story about a diamond no less! The Birtwistle **Diamond**, which as the Mayor, you could only wear it when you came to Colne and to the Muni. **"So, we used this venue as much as we could!"** The diamond was a gift from Peter Birtwistle who made his fortune in Canada. He left a diamond ring, only to be worn by the Mayor and only in Colne. Since then the diamond has been reset into a necklace. **Ken**, the current Mayor explains; **"The Birtwistle diamond is a four-carat diamond, a bequest to the people of Colne. It was mounted into a ring, but over the years as mayors change year on year, and due to the costs and impracticability of resizing, it was decided to incorporate it into the Mayoress' Pendant instead."**



Exhibitions brings us to **E**, albeit an exhibition which never actually happened. Let me explain: William Holt was a well-known writer, but he was also an artist. He did wonderful paintings, similar in style to Lowry. He was booked for an exhibition and local historian **Geoff**, was really looking forward to it and to seeing his work. He did these great big murals depicting Lancashire. When they got to the Muni, the paintings were too big to fit through the door! **"I can see them now, in the wagon, these bloody great big paintings! They could hardly see them in half..."** And that was why the exhibition never actually took place - it had to be cancelled. The artist was absolutely devastated to have a week-long exhibition cancelled.

E is also for Eagle: a particular eagle named Mr Ramsay, who appeared at the Muni. **“I went with my dad to see ‘Mr Ramsay’ when he appeared at the Muni. I had no idea who he was and couldn’t believe it – he was a Golden Eagle. Sat there on this chap’s shoulder; he’d reared him from a chick”, Geoff explains, laughingly.** Well, the eagle escaped and was flying around the hall for about 20 minutes. He couldn’t catch it; the commotion was hilarious. There were ladies in posh dresses who were panicking and worrying about getting **“defaced”**. This great big eagle was flying around the hall. **“It was absolutely marvellous”**. Eventually he managed to catch it with a butterfly net!



Famous names and faces have visited The Muni in abundance over the years. One member of staff, Tony, tells us that Jools Holland brings back good memories; he really got the place rocking, yet Ike Turner, the American musician, was **“boored”**.

Keith remembers seeing Hinge and Bracket. They were very quick witted and, although it was posh and ‘Southern’, they involved the audience and everybody

loved it.

Keith also mentioned his latest and most recent visit was to see Henning Wehn, the German comic. **“It was excellent! He made you think as well as having a laugh.”** Lots of people had attended many events at The Muni, it was part of their life: throughout their life, a constant and reliable part of going out.

Dr Evadne Hinge and Dame Hilda Bracket were the stage names of George Logan and Patrick Fyffe respectively. The characters of Hinge (somewhat brittle and acerbic) and Bracket (more flamboyant) were elderly intellectual female musicians; in these personae the male Logan and Fyffe played and sang songs to comic effect.

'Have a Go' was a BBC Radio show that ran from 1946 to 1967 presented by Wilfrid Pickles and his wife Mabel. It was the first quiz show in Britain to offer cash prizes

Geoff recalls doing the Wilfred Pickles BBC radio competition “Have a Go” at the Muni, he didn’t win, but Mrs. Brown from Colne did! She won £2 10 shillings, which was a lot of money then - the equivalent of a week’s wage!

He can list Bob Monkhouse and Lonnie Donnegan amongst the famous faces he saw at the Muni, but one name he also remembers

Sir Cyril Smith MBE was a British Liberal Member of Parliament for Rochdale. After his death, numerous allegations of child sexual abuse by Smith emerged, leading the police to believe that Smith was a serial sex offender.

seeing is **Cyril Smith MP**. As he says, we all now know what an evil man he was, but back then he came to talk at the Muni. **Geoff** remembers going along just to heckle, as he was Liberal and **Geoff** was staunch Labour in those days. The most memorable event of the whole evening was when **Cyril Smith** got wedged trying to get up the steps to the stage; he was a very large man, and genuinely got stuck. **“We were rolling about laughing, until his minders came to help and the next thing we see is him appearing through the trap door in the stage as if he was in panto; he just popped up! The minders had been forced to take him underneath the stage to get him up there!”**

Another famous face to perform at the Muni was **Kathleen Ferrier**, an English contralto with an international reputation. She sang there during the war and **Geoff** regrets not seeing her, as he was too young at the time. He remembers what a huge star she was, and how everyone bought her records. He never did get to see her as she died in 1953.

The list of famous names goes on as we hear another wonderful memory from **Geoff** who, incidentally, was made a Freeman of Colne, which he describes as “a huge honour”. **Geoff** also wrote 10 books about Colne, and used to have a newspaper column. **Geoff** truly had a treasure trove of memories. Another famous face he remembers meeting at the Muni was **Sir Peter Scott**, son of Scott of the Antarctic. This was back in 1950, when **Geoff** was eight years old, and he asked for his autograph. And now, all those years on, he still has his book, and remembers him as one of the nicest people, who went out of their way to be kind and make you feel special.

Alongside the autograph, Sir Peter wrote, **“Whatever you do, sonny, do it well”**, and **Geoff** has never forgotten it.

Geoff believes the Muni has had good shows on for 120 years: there’s a good atmosphere and it **“holds a fascination for people”**.

Our next F brings us to **The Blues Festival**, which features prominently in many memories probably because it is still on every year and all ages are welcome.

Tony agrees it’s the main thing now. He remembers one particular Blues singer who had agreed to play as long as he was picked up from Manchester Airport in a white limo and for there to be a McDonald’s waiting for him when he arrived: **“we had to time it right so it was still hot”**.

The **Blues Festival** attracts people from all over the country yet, when you go, you see the same gang you haven’t seen since the Festival last year. One lady from Colne, **Anne**, remembers being part of the team that started the blues, **“which is my fondest memory coz we started something special”**. She remembers working on the catering side of things at the Silverman Hall for events at the Muni from 1987, making teas and coffees, and working on the door and the box office. She met many famous people, and it’s even where she met her husband. He used to come to the shows: **“one of the ladies on the box office set us up together”**, she remembers, and the rest, as they say, is history. They still go regularly and have never missed a **Blues Festival**! She is still living locally and, in fact, her son held his wedding reception at The Muni: **“so it holds a special place in my heart.”**

And our final ‘F’ is the Beer Festival; it’s a very popular annual occurrence. From the way people were talking, I suspect most people in Colne will be familiar with the Beer Festival. It offers over 100 beers and, of course, there is the charity aspect, raising lots of money for Pendleside Hospice - a local charity. People come to the festival, and get the last train back after sampling the many drinks on offer.



“65 years later I can still remember him smiling at me”.

Local historian, **Geoff**, describing the day he got **Sir Peter Scott's** autograph.



G is for **Gold Medal**, for 21 years of performing with the Colne Orchestra. **Graham**, who we chatted to at the Muni, remembers receiving his gold medal - and it was actually made of real gold! It

was a well-deserved award given to those who had performed with the orchestra for 21 years. Although in actual fact, he clearly remembers it being closer to 40 years, when you took into account that he'd taken a couple of breaks, and that they'd also lost track with their counting!



“It feels like coming Home”. Throughout the series of interviews, one feature that was crucial to capture here in this memory map was an overwhelming feeling of belonging, of being comfortable, of being welcome, a feeling of coming ‘Home’. Tony who has worked at the Muni for many years told us how he loved the place, **“I’m dedicated to it”**. In a rather emotional moment, he told us **“it’s not my second home; to be honest it’s more like my first home sometimes”**. Other people have wondered aloud where they would go if they didn’t have the Muni, or where they would have gone. And the local aspect has been important to people: **“It draws people in”**, and many people agreed, **“You feel comfortable here”**.

What also can’t be overlooked is the overwhelming sense of community, and how the Muni figures strongly as being such a part of people’s community: **“it’s been part of our life for so long”**. There seems to be a general consensus amongst the people we spoke to that it all starts with schools, and school visits to the Muni. The excitement at visiting with school as a child was very evident as people remembered coming from a very young age, maybe 8 or 9, and these visits continuing through their teenage years until they became ‘familiar’ with it. And with the Library being next door, and passing the building on the street, these things all added to the sense of familiarity, the sense of ‘coming home’ when you walked through the doors. This isn’t just true of the building; the familiarity also extends to the audience. **“You always meet someone you know”**, Dave says, and nods of agreement echo around the room.

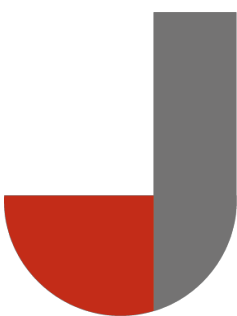
H is also for **Heritage**, and the lovely stories we have been told about how people’s ideas have been influenced by their memories. Andrew is now planning to bring his sons to the wrestling, having remembered how he used to love watching it in the mid ‘90s: **“I bet my young boys would love it.”**

A dark grey rectangular graphic with the word 'HERITAGE' in large, bold, yellow capital letters at the top. Below it, in white text, is the quote: **“People have learned about Heritage, which has led to changes in ideas and actions, for example, one man who now plans to bring his sons to the wrestling because he had such fond memories of it as a child”**.

I is for **Insects** - probably not what we were expecting!

But what an enduring memory nevertheless. Tony remembers all too well the millions of insects, namely cockroaches, which blighted the building, and how you’d switch the lights on and hear them all scurry away. **“We had to vacuum them up.”** He was happy to report that there are none at all now.

Nevertheless, it certainly gives cause for concern, and does indicate this important building needs some care and attention if it is to be preserved for the future.



J brings us to two well-known names, **Julian Lloyd Webber** and **Katherine Jenkins**. Both names cropped up several times throughout our interviews and meetings.

Alan was most disappointed at not seeing **Katherine Jenkins**; in fact, he went so far as to say it's his biggest regret. He missed her by a day. **Tony** was quick to add **"I met her; she was lovely"**.

Continuing his

thoughts, he told us about his most impressive Muni memory, which was seeing **Julian Lloyd Webber** and his wife, who is a princess. They brought their Saluki dog with them, and he remembers the dog running around backstage.

Julian Lloyd Webber was married to Zohra Mahmoud Ghazi, an exiled Afghan princess and great-niece of the last king of Afghanistan, Mohammed Zahir Shah from 1989-1998



Ken Dodd deserves a letter all to himself! He is referenced throughout, and he seems to have really found himself a place in people's hearts and memories. **Tony** tells us he did two shows, and the second one only started at midnight! **Tony** himself didn't get home until 8am the following morning. He remembers **Ken Dodd** wanted to spend time chatting after he eventually finished; he needed the time to wind down after his show. **Tony** and **Ken** share the same surname, **Tony** remembers **Ken Dodd** telling him **"we're not related, so don't think you're getting any of my money!"**

Geoff recalled just how hilarious he found **Ken Dodd**. He remembers going to see him with his wife and two colleagues. **"It went on and on and on"**. **Ken Dodd** himself knew how long his show was, and told the audience **"well, there's no more buses or trains now so we might as well stay all night"**.

The Mayoress at the time remembers meeting **Ken Dodd** downstairs at the Muni, and being the proud recipient of a coveted tickling stick, which **Ken Dodd** kindly gifted to everybody in the Mayoress' party.

But the funniest must be the letter of complaint. Despite his shows being loved by the audiences, **Philip**, who we spoke to through social media, wishes he had kept the letter, which he believes to be the best letter of complaint ever. A lady in the audience had to write to complain after seeing the show because **Ken Dodd** didn't finish his act until after the last bus to Burnley had gone! **"So the lady blamed us for them missing their bus home!!!!"**

K should also be for **Key** facts relating to the Muni. The Muni was originally called The Municipal Hall but became known more affectionately as the Muni more recently. It was originally designed as three structures: a theatre, a public library, and a technical school. Today, part of the school on the first floor is used as dressing rooms for the theatre. The Library was moved to a neighbouring building and, since 1907, this area has been incorporated into the Theatre where today it is used as the bar. An extension to the original building created a second bar area. As far as the history of the building and its use is concerned, we can see from a conservation survey carried out in 2017 by Purcell that **“The building has remained in use as a Theatre and community space since its opening and is therefore as significant culturally and historically today as when it was built”**.



The Luther Greenwood Memorial Festival is the sole contender for our letter 'L'. So many people remember one aspect or another of this hugely important event for the people of Colne and the surrounding area, but one lady in particular shared her incredibly special memories with us. **Mildred** was Chairman of the Festival for many years, and at the age of 91, she still holds the position of Vice Chair.

The competitive festival would attract adjudicators for the speech and drama competitions from all over the North of England, and even Northern Ireland, remembers **Mildred**. She was markedly disappointed when she adds that although it was this aspect of the festival with which she was most heavily involved, it doesn't exist anymore. Well, this one particular year, a very famous chap came, a television personality, (**Mildred** wishes she could remember his name), but he wouldn't stay at any of the hotels in Colne - oh no. He insisted on staying at The Kirby Hotel in Burnley - the best hotel in the area. **Mildred** remembers how she and Mr Carter, the Chair at the time, had to chauffeur him back and forth between the Muni in Colne and his hotel.

If you close your eyes, an evocative visual emerges from **Mildred's** memory of one adjudicator. Attired in full evening dress, complete with black cloak and a cane. As he took to the stage, his cloak would swirl with a flurry and a swoosh before taking its place beside the cane on an adjacent chair. **“It was very striking”**.

The Festival required **Mildred** to cater for all the visiting teams, so at the end of each evening she would do a tea for everyone, with a team contribution of 10 shillings each. And on the hour, every hour there was to be a tray of tea for the judges, **“they were insistent on that!”** **Mildred** remembers her journey with the tea tray, as there was a way underneath the Muni with access from the Lesser Muni; she would have to go up and down stairs and along the passageway carrying it.

Mildred remembers how children would be excused from school on the Friday to be allowed to compete in the competitions. Some of them were frightened out of their lives! Parents and teachers would be in the audience as the children competed up on the stage - it was the beginning of many a career in speech. **Mildred** recalls that the speeches on Friday were followed by the One Act Plays every night - Monday through to Friday - and this went on until the 1970s. After that, they wouldn't pay enough prize money for it to be worthwhile for people to take part.





M is for The Mayor, and the Muni and the many events that brought them together over the years. One example is The Mayor's Christmas Teas. Jackie, who chatted to us at the Muni, was the Mayor's attendant and chauffeur for twenty years. She was only the fourth female in the whole country to hold this position. She told us about the Mayor's Christmas Teas, as this was a strong memory for her associated with the Muni. The sandwiches were always ham salad, and this was what they had for 23 days on the run! Not forgetting the Stork spread they used on the bread. The events were free for the over 60s.

Kathy, who used to make tea "for the old folks" who came to the Mayor's Christmas Teas, described the meals: along with the ham salad sandwiches there was a pre-packed trifle and a chocolate bar from the Mayor. It used to be free, she remembers, but when people had to start paying, they got hot food instead.

"A Bit of a Do" was the new name given to the Mayor's Christmas teas. People used to come to Colne because it was free. "It's a lovely place, the Muni" so lots of people used to come. The staff at the time remember eating all the leftovers.

The Mayor's Ball also provoked lots of lovely Memories, with stories of dressing up very smartly in a dress suit, and lining up to be introduced to, and meet, the Mayor: **"it were great you know"**. Some people remembered the Mayor's Ball being at a different venue in the past, but they were so happy it had returned to the Muni saying, **"no comparison to having them here"**.



N is for Numbers, which in themselves tell a story. The Muni can hold around 600 people sitting down, and 800 standing.

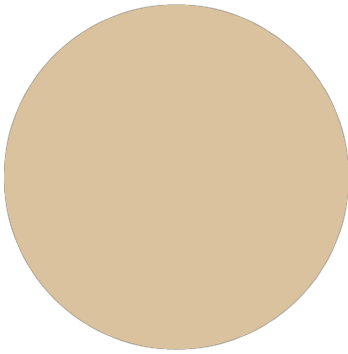
We spoke to 60 people locally who shared their memories in this A-Z. The people we spoke to had visited between 10 and 700 times in their lifetime.

On average, the Muni receives 47,000 visitors a year.

Altogether, we estimate that Nearly Six Million people have visited The Muni.

Pendle Leisure Trust, the current managers, are keen to make sure the building is ready and sound enough for the Next Six Million.





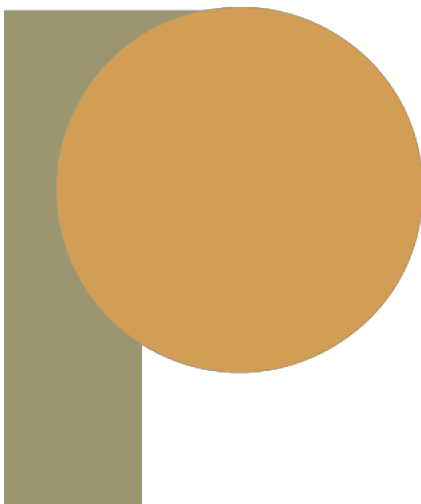
O is for **Orchestra**. Speaking to **Graham** at the Muni, he told us all about his memories of both playing in the Colne Orchestra, and conducting the Orchestra. **Sue** would come to see her husband play first violin - but left it rather late, only starting to come along when he was presented with his medal for 21 years with the Orchestra! He tells us with pride how he sat in the same seat as **Wallace Hartley*** – they both played first violin.

Graham remembers how they changed the format of the Colne Orchestra in the past 20 years, by seating people around tables instead of in audience rows. Food would be served, and you could meet the musicians after the performance. They received some

comments telling them it was the best concert they'd ever heard! Afterwards the bar would be open and the whole evening would be a lovely social event too, with a good bar and good prices.

HERITAGE

***Wallace Hartley was an English violinist and bandleader on the RMS Titanic on its maiden voyage. Born in Colne, he became famous for leading the eight-member band as the ship sank on 15 April 1912. He died in the sinking and is buried in Colne.**



Peter Kay may well be the most mentioned name that everybody remembers performing at the Muni. He performed there in his early days - “before he got big”, remembers **Tony**, for a fee of £40 and to an audience of about 20 people and, interestingly, it was in the Lesser Muni. After that, he came back and played the big hall twice - that was when he was getting big - and he sold out instantly. **“He was a nice chap, we had a brew together”**. **Tony** remembers.

Plays is another of our **P**'s, and they pop up in many of the stories we heard. Firstly, a truly lovely story from a very proud dad. **Chris** remembers coming to the Muni to watch his daughter, an actor, in a play about ‘The Accrington Pals’. It was in 2014 to mark the centenary of World War 1. **“Well, I cried; I did, honest.”**

“He’s always been a big softie”, his friend replied, but the emotion he showed at sharing his memory was felt throughout the room. And the icing on the cake of this story is that his daughter is getting married at the Muni this summer.

Her husband-to-be is in a band, and they’ve both played at the Muni; it means a lot to them: **“He’s played here, she’s played here”**.

P is also for **Party**, and **Geoff** was happy to tell us about the parties he’s had at the Muni, saying the Muni has given him some of the happiest days of his life and he’s been going for over 70 years! His dad had two pet shops in Colne, and

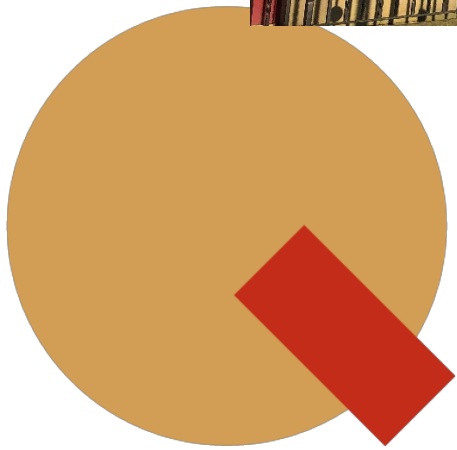
when he had a good run of selling budgies, which he often did, he would make a lot of money, and he would throw parties at the Muni for him and invite the whole street. He has vivid memories of his birthday parties there in 1949, 1950 and 1951.

Sue's first memory of the Muni was as a daffodil in a play aged 6 or 7 - 60 years ago now. People often started coming to the Muni when they were very little. As I write this report, I remember my 3 year-old son has just attended the Muni for the first time ever.

He came to see the Pantomime. Of course, P is also for Panto. Happening as we spoke to people, the 2020 pantomime was Aladdin. Oh yes it was!



THE MUNI



Q leads us to one memory, which really made me chuckle. The Antiques Roadshow came to The Muni twice over the years and is a big memory for several of the people we spoke to. **“It were packed that day,”** Dave explained. Eric Knowles was one of the presenters and he is a ‘local lad’. One of them was proudly presented with **“a tiger mi dad brought back from Japan”**. It was obviously a very treasured possession and expected to be worth quite a lot of money! **“I thought it was {going to be worth} a million quid”**. The disappointment at being told it was worth precisely £4.99 was still evident.

Q is also for the Questions we asked: ‘What are your earliest memories of the Muni?’, ‘How many times have you visited the Muni?’, and ‘Is the Muni the kind of place that welcomes everybody?’ Were amongst our

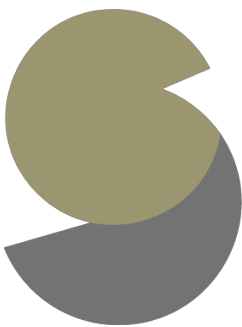
Antiques Roadshow is a British television programme broadcast by



questions. Once people started reminiscing, their stories began to flow easily, and often one person’s memory coincided with that of their friend or prompted another memory by association. The questions formed the basis and starting point of our A-Z journey and the beginnings of our memory map.



R is for **Ranulph Fiennes**, who crops up in a memory from the early 1980s. He visited the Muni after just having completed the Transglobe Expedition – travelling by land from Pole to Pole. There was only a small audience to hear his tales of hardship in the freezing temperatures of the Poles; how he survived travelling across the Sahara Desert; and about his jungle expeditions. As his talk drew to a close, the **Chairman of Pendle’s Leisure Committee** stood up to thank him and found himself forced to apologise for the small turnout – because of the bad weather!



The Stage at the Muni had so many mentions throughout our research that it deserves pride of place and commands the letter ‘S’. **“I’d sooner see it here on a proper stage”**, seemed to be the general consensus. The word ‘proper’ seemed to attach itself almost automatically when people talked about the stage, and the way the words were spoken was almost reverential. **“And having that stage is a big thing..... Having a proper stage”**.

Memories of the huge amount of effort and manpower involved in lifting a grand piano onto the stage - it took around 15 or 20 people - and a laborious process, which involved putting down pieces of wood one after another just to get it up there.

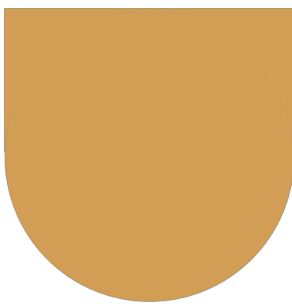
Referring to the children who take part in the music festivals, **“Going on stage, they like going on the stage”**. **“It’s a big stage; you really are a long way up on that stage”**. The sentiment echoes previous comments about how the Muni plays such an important part in people’s lives, starting from childhood and spanning a lifetime. **Chris**, whose daughter is an actor, admits **“I’d rather see my daughter here, on stage here, than (mentions other theatres)..... because the stage is on a higher level”**. The sense of importance due to size and height is significant.



T is for **Titanic**. One lady's first memories of when she moved to Colne was of the **Titanic** exhibition at the Muni: **“it was fantastic”**.

Lauren tells us her first memory is the **Titanic** Exhibition in the main hall.

And **Graham** has incredibly special memories of the Centenary **Titanic** Concert, in which he performed. It was exactly the same concert as the one that was performed 100 years ago. In the centenary year, to mark the occasion, the actor who played **Wallace Hartley** in the **Titanic** film came and performed with them several times.



U is for **Unbroken**: the unbroken period of time from the date of opening right through until the current day, that the Muni has been open. Since 1900 there has been no break at all, even during the war the doors were open for recruitment drives for soldiers.

The feeling of community built up over this period of time was evident throughout so many of our conversations. One little story we heard from **Graham** was about meeting a couple in Majorca and striking up a conversation. Then, at the mention of Colne, the couples simultaneously started talking about the Muni. It was a feeling of familiarity, and the realisation they had a connection - and this connection brings people together.

We heard a lot about how people feel or felt about the place, and this will be garnered from an accumulation of their visits. The following list of little ditties sums it up nicely:

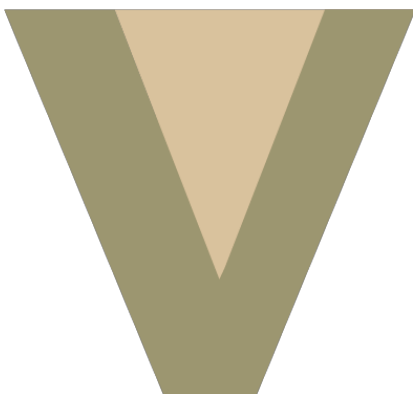
“...and you feel comfortable coming here”

“It’s been part of your life for so long”

“This got you involved in community to start with..... something special”

“When you’re from Colne, you grow up with the Muni”

“It holds a fascination for people”



V is for **Violin**. A father fondly remembers bringing his daughter to see **Nicola Benadetti**, the classical violinist, who was playing in New York, London and at the Muni in Colne! His daughter was a violinist with the Pendle Youth Orchestra and he was really pleased to bring his daughter and give her a chance to see someone play a Stradivarius.



W is for Wrestling. As the alphabet draws towards the end, what an incredible memory to finish on. Wrestling at the Muni seems to have touched the lives of so many people. One of Geoff's favourites was the wrestling. He remembers it being on a Friday or Saturday evening, there were some big names and they attracted huge crowds. It was a shilling to get in back in the day. The likes of Jackie Pallo and Masambula were amongst some of these well-known stars. Geoff remembers going to Colne train station with his pals to meet the wrestling stars off the train. Of course, they didn't know where they were going so the wrestlers would give them sixpence to take them to the Muni and carry their bags. To this day, he still has the sixpence Masambula gave him!

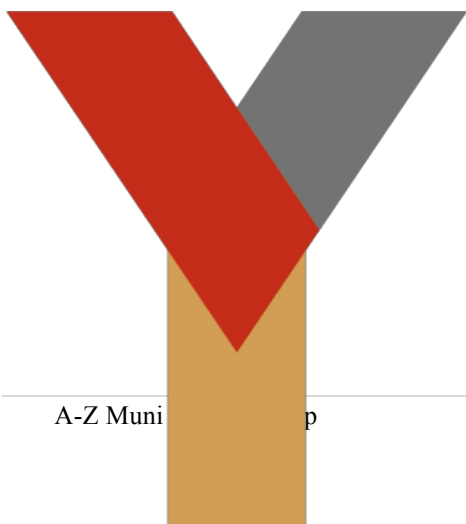
Matthew remembers clearly watching Big Daddy "kick seven bells out of Giant Haystacks". These two names held the biggest rivalry in wrestling.

"I remember coming to the wrestling in 1976", Keith tells us. He remembers ITV World of Sport being filmed at the Muni, with commentator Ken Walton. It was complete mayhem when he saw Giant Haystacks. The middle-aged women fans were apparently the worst, whacking people with their umbrellas.

Geoff and Chris were fans of the wrestling, and remember watching it on the television too. Coming to watch the wrestling at the Muni, they met one of the wrestlers on the stairs. He was wearing leopard-print pants, and stopped to shake hands with them.



X is for the fire eXtinguisher used to ruin the Mayor's Ball. Chris remembers, as a firefighter in the 80s, getting a call out to the Muni where a deep fat fryer had caught fire in the kitchen during the Mayor's Ball. Arriving at the scene, the fire crews could only look on in dismay. Someone had been quick to put out the fire using a dry powder extinguisher. "It was like taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut – the very small fire would have been put out so easily just by using a fire blanket. As a result, all the food prepared for the ball was covered in a dry powder coating; it looked like it had icing sugar on it and was, of course, completely ruined!"



Anne shares her enduring memory of our 'Y', Russ Conway, and going to see him play the piano at the Muni, but he was so drunk they had to carry him off the stage - he couldn't even play a note!

Russ Conway was an English popular music pianist. Conway had 20 piano instrumentals in the UK Singles Chart between 1957 and 1963, including two number one hits.



Z is for this incredible A to Z with its far-reaching, vast array of memories of this very special Colne institution.

In this A-Z, we have focussed on the intangible stories of the Muni – the memories. For the people we talked to it is apparent the Muni has played a vital role in their lives. It is to be hoped it will continue to play an important part in the lives of the people of Colne for another hundred years and more.



Conclusion:

Our Memory Map A-Z of the Muni involves individual stories and memories spanning a lifetime and more. What is evident is the important role the building has played in the stories we've heard. The building has historical value; we know that when the Colne Municipal Hall was first built it represented an important civic building in the town. The multi-use building, with a technical school and a library, was designed to improve the town and its inhabitants, to help growth in industry and the local economy. As the building continues to be used today as a theatre and public performance space, referencing the Purcell Architects report, **“it adds to this value as a continuing interest and requirement of the town in the modern day”**.

The stories told in the memory map support the high communal value retained by the Muni. The space has adapted through the years and now makes full use of the building for events and performances, with the added value of the public bars and open plan areas. The long-standing history of the Muni demonstrates the existence of its high communal value.

The Next Six Million Visitors:

In the Colne Municipal Hall conservation Plan Issue 01, written in June 2017 by Purcell, The Muni is identified as 'at risk'. It is also clear that although not a listed building it is a core part of the heritage of the area.

The Purcell report describes it as **“a non-designated heritage asset of significance as part of the development of Colne”**.

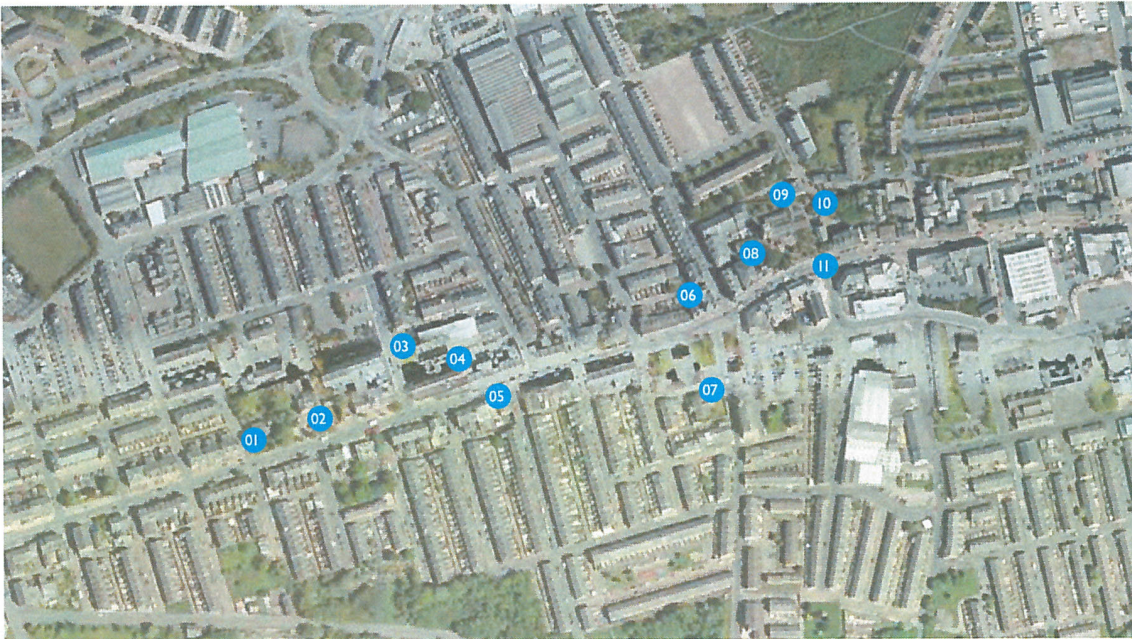
DESIGNATIONS PLAN

- 01 Wallace Hartley Memorial, Grade II, List Entry Number:1423584
- 02 Colne War Memorial, Grade II, List Entry Number:1423588
- 03 Princess House (Formerly Colne Hall), Grade II, List Entry Number:1243194
- 04 Norway House (Formerly Co Operative Emporium), Grade II, List Entry Number:1073411

- 05 Two Telephone Kiosks Outside Head Post Office, Grade II, List Entry Number:1243141
- 06 Town Hall, Grade II, List Entry Number:1073412
- 07 St Bartholomews Church School, Grade II, List Entry Number:1390940
- 08 Shackleton Hall, Grade II, List Entry Number:1243150

- 09 Church Of St Bartholomew, Grade I, List Entry Number:1073414
- 10 Sunday School Adjacent To St Bartholomew's Parish Church, Grade II, List Entry Number:1361694
- 11 Cross In St Bartholomews Churchyard, Grade II, List Entry Number:1243158

This plan is not to scale



Plan showing the designated heritage assets within the setting of Colne Municipal Hall

The Muni sits in between numbers 2 and 3 on this map and is surrounded by important heritage assets. It is our opinion, which we discussed with members of the public during this memory mapping exercise, that the Muni is a centrally significant venue that holds many fond memories, and this is only the first attempt at mapping out the history of everything that happened to people in this venue!

We are convinced that the list above would be an ideal heritage quarter for Colne. Preserving this history is intrinsically valuable for people.

The building has adapted over the years, always there for the people of Colne. It is important it continues to play a pivotal role in the future development of the town. We think it is clear that this is an historic building at the heart of its community.

We found that people loved The Muni, they had many varied fond memories of the place, and we recommend that Pendle Leisure Trust ensures they can safeguard The Muni's future for the **Next Six Million Visits**. Doing that will bolster local pride and preserve a crucial heritage asset, of which people make plenty of use.

About The Evaluator:

This report was written by Kirsty Rose Parker, founder director of The Evaluator and an experienced project manager and evaluator, who previously specialised in arts, regeneration and wellbeing projects. Kirsty has an educational

background in Maths and Economics, which covered many statistical topics, leading to an MA Hons in Economics from the University of Edinburgh.

Kirsty has 16 years of charitable project management experience including working with artists and audiences, and 9 years' experience of arts development. She is trained in negotiation, motivational interviewing and 'social return on investment' and is passionate about helping organisations to run the most effective programmes they can.



The Evaluator

We'll figure it out for you

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