# THE ASSOCIATION FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGE

FOUNDED 1958

## OUR CHARITABLE WORK & IMPACT AT STAPLEFORD GRANARY

MAY 2024 - JULY 2025

STAPLEFORD GRANARY
MUSIC • ART • CULTURE

**BECOME CURIOUS. STAY CURIOUS.**

Stapleford Granary is wholly owned and operated by
The Association for Cultural Exchange, registered charity 279567

# OUR HISTORY, OUR PRESENT

## 1958

**The Association for Cultural Exchange is a groundbreaking charity** established in 1958. Our founder, Philip Brooke Barnes, set up the charity to promote lifelong cultural education.

The spirit of change and optimism that characterised the late 1950s permeates our charity. Philip's model of education was progressive and forward thinking. He believed in hands-on, experiential ways of learning. His study tours encouraged observation, discussion and debate, field work, curiosity, exploration and questioning. It was a model that moved away from a traditional, literature-based education towards a more socially-conscious one. For decades, ACE (as it is affectionately known) made it possible for groups of people with enquiring minds to travel throughout the UK, Europe and the world, to learn about art, architecture, literature, design, music and natural history under expert tutelage.

## 2009

**In 2009, the charity purchased Stapleford Granary** in south Cambridgeshire as an arts centre 'home'. At the same time, ACE Cultural Tours was restructured as a business (owned by the parent charity) and continues to operate its acclaimed expert-led tours to this day.

With ACE Cultural Tours helping to provide financial support, charitable activity moved to Stapleford Granary. Now the owner of a beautiful building, the charity had exciting potential to connect with a community, build relations with regional and national partners, and establish itself as a unique, vibrant centre for the arts .

## 2020 & BEYOND

**The RIBA award-winning renovation of Stapleford Granary** was masterminded by Paul Barnes, son of Philip. Today, it is a thriving, much-loved and admired regional arts venue, with an annual footfall of around 70,000.

Through Stapleford Granary arts centre, we deliver the founding aims of the charity with the same spirit of progress, enquiry and innovation. Much of our programming mirrors the cultural themes of the Tours; art, music, literature, and the natural world. All of our work is underpinned by a desire to educate; to help people become and remain curious throughout their lives.

# OUR WORK & IMPACT

Image: Stapleford Granary Concert Hall

## 2025 IN NUMBERS

- 70,000 annual footfall
- 131 musicians from UK and Europe performed in 43 concerts, attended by over 4060 people (87% of all tickets sold)
- 45 school visits to Stapleford Granary
- 1250 children attended our art workshops
- 62 artists exhibited here in 7 main site exhibitions, plus smaller installations
- 5560 of our exhibition booklets were taken up by visitors

## LIVE MUSIC AT STAPLEFORD GRANARY

Our **flagship live chamber-scale music programme** presents the finest artists of national and international renown to local audiences and those travelling from further afield. Our concert programme comprises classical, folk and jazz. Visiting artists in 2025 included pianists Leon McCawley and Danny Driver; The Marian Consort, Pixels Ensemble, Apollo Saxophone Quartet, Fibonacci Quartet, Elias Quartet; jazz musicians Joe Webb, Matt Ford, Misha Mullov-Abbado and James Taylor; folk artists Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne, Eliza Carthy, John Spiers, Lady Maisery, VRï and The Jeremiahs.

We hold around 45 concerts per year featuring established masters and much-loved repertoire alongside new voices and lesser-known music. Concerts in the Granary's intimate hall are a unique experience, allowing everyone to be in close proximity to the artists, and to meet and talk to them afterwards in the bar. We offer special pre-concert talks for some events, and in the summer months our jazz and folk concerts are held outdoors under a 300 square meter stretch tent; a relaxed setting which particularly suits families or those who are not regular concert goers.

**'I come here to be taken out of myself, to see from another perspective, to learn and feel inspired'**

**- visitor feedback**

## VISUAL ART AT STAPLEFORD GRANARY

We are not a conventional gallery, but we are renowned for exhibiting curious collections, lesser-known highly-distinctive voices, photography, illustration and thought-provoking juxtapositions which delight and surprise. Art and artefacts are exhibited around the site, and are freely accessible to everyone who visits Stapleford Granary. We have a strong focus on immersive displays and we use stories and interactives (booklets, crafts, reading corners, talks) to engage the widest demographic of visitors.

In 2025, we curated 7 main site exhibitions (group shows and individual artists); and we supported local and emerging artists via smaller installations. Mandy Payne's Brutalist miniatures were widely admired by regular and new visitors, and the project ignited keen interest in the brutalist buildings in Cambridge. Johnny Boatfield's *Great Small Miracles Exhibition* drew large crowds to peer though magnifying glasses at the minutely detailed work of one of the UK's finest (and least-known) draughtsmen. Well-attended artist talks featured throughout the year, and we were proud to celebrate the exquisite work of a local Edwardian artist and historian, Fanny Wale, creating the first ever print exhibition of her pictures alongside a book launch. COLONY - an outdoor installation of seven huge other-wordly spheres that emit a sonic hum - attracted a new audience, drawn to the strange, tactile and autonomous nature of the work. Our in-house exhibition publications for adults and children are provided free to visitors and are widely praised.

**'Always fresh, always unexpected... the whole space feels like a celebration of the artist's work and I want to take it all in'**

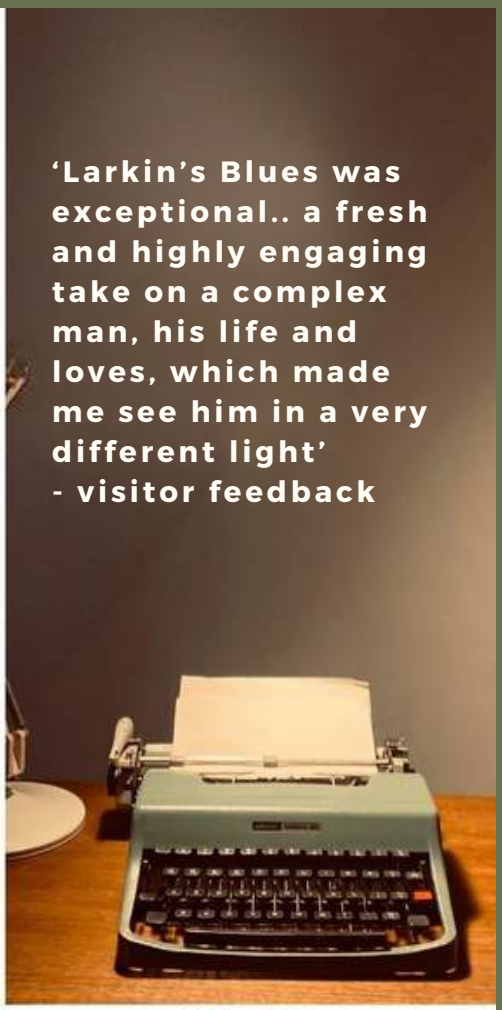
**- visitor feedback**

Image: The Wonderful World of the Ladybird Book Artists (Jan - March 2026)

## LITERATURE AT STAPLEFORD GRANARY

In 2023, the artistic directors at Stapleford Granary launched a new strand of literary programming. We have welcomed poetry readings from Simon Armitage, Wendy Cope, Michael Symmons Roberts and Helen Farish; and we have created in-house productions combining music and poetry (Philip Larkin, A. E. Housman). We are particularly well-placed to curate across art forms; for example, combining Larkin's poetry with his own photography (on loan from the Hull History Archives) and his love of jazz.

In 2026, Andy Lawrence (Theatre of Widdershins) became our first Storyteller-in-Residence, delighting visitors of all ages with his colourful yarns and beautiful puppets. Our cafe has two pop-up libraries (poetry, and children's literature) and visually compelling exhibitions of illustration (The Wonderful World of the Ladybird Book Artists, Dragons and Other Tales) have brought new book-loving audiences to the site.



**'Larkin's Blues was exceptional.. a fresh and highly engaging take on a complex man, his life and loves, which made me see him in a very different light'**
**- visitor feedback**

Image: Larkin's Blues (Philip Larkin weekend: poetry, photography, music)

## ANCIENT HISTORY & THE NATURAL WORLD AT STAPLEFORD GRANARY

Stapleford Granary has a unique and remarkable natural environment, which we are committed to safeguarding. In 2024, we opened up our **historic orchard** (founded 1930) to visitors to enjoy the wildlife and idyllic setting. We have planted more trees, focusing on traditional local varieties so that we can ensure the orchard's continuity and biodiversity. The bumper crop of 2025 apples will be made into Stapleford Granary's own cider in 2026 by award-winning Blue Barrel Cider Company.

Even more significant is our position within the River Granta **chalk stream landscape.** Our little brook was once a part of the Granta's original water course. Because of its poor condition, the Granta has been selected as a pilot project for restoration. We are working with the water company, local environmental groups and other stakeholders to determine how best to contribute to this river restoration project. Whilst much of this work is still exploratory, we embrace the rich educational opportunities to combine the natural world with the arts, highlight the importance of chalk streams in Cambridgeshire, and engage with our local community in the landscape that we all share.

We have created immersive **Discovery Rooms;** pop-up exhibitions, designed to excite curiosity and give young people a direct, experiential and unforgettable connection with the world around us. Discovery Rooms have been the focus for school trips which include expert talks and model making. We introduce young people to collections; fossils, minerals, bones, shells, dinosaur footprints. We explore the inspirational stories of the collectors, the scientists, the writers and the artists; and we learn about the past through observation, experimentation and discussion. We encourage children to explore with their hands, to be inquisitive and allow their curiosity to lead them into a deeper exploration of the subject.

**'We see children exhibiting greater patience and being more willing to figure out the solution to a puzzle when they are invested in the subject. The Discovery Rooms provide a perfect setting for seeking novelty, enjoying uncertainty, and finding that moment of realisation and discovery on your own. Curiosity helps children build more exciting, original and creative ideas.'**

**- Kate Romano, CEO & education lead**

Images: the orchard, the Chalk stream habitat, our Discovery Rooms

## EARLY YEARS AT STAPLEFORD GRANARY

Our **Small Grains programme**, an acclaimed twinning between Stapleford Granary and Stapleford Community Primary School, was founded in 2023. The programme is rare in its high levels of interaction (45 school visits to our arts centre per year). It provides exceptional and well-documented benefits for the pupils, and research opportunities for us to understand the uniqueness of the cultural centre as a rich setting for education, and our role as cultural educators.

In February 2025, as a result of the twinning, Stapleford Community Primary School was awarded Platinum Arts Award (rare for a primary school). During 2025, we expanded our network of schools, and we are now reaching thousands of children across the whole of Anglian Learning, a multi-academy trust comprising 18 schools. In October, we created a piece of immersive theatre - *The Tin Forest* - for over 520 year 4 children. 384 of the participating pupils gained a DISCOVERY Arts Award. In 2026, we will tour our new production *Tiny Concerts* - a powerful combination of chamber music, storytelling and theatre - to 11 schools (2500 children). We have also embarked on a second music-focussed twinning with The Icknield School in Sawston. A particularly important aspect of this new twinning is to ensure that we leave a legacy, supporting and empowering teachers who currently lack confidence in teaching music.

**'The Small Grains project is exemplary, building a deep and embedded link, bringing together children, artists and musicians for authentic and inspiring arts experiences. The impact of this has been wide, increasing children's engagement in art and music opportunities, building an understanding of creative careers and empowering and inviting children to demonstrate and develop their own creativity. It is wonderful that you have captured this development through research that you have shared widely within and beyond your trust, and which is attracting interest nationally. The Small Grains twinning sets an example that must be shared as widely as possible'**

**- Arts Council England, Platinum Arts Award report (February 2025)**

# FURTHER INFORMATION

**Visit us**
Stapleford Granary, Bury Road, Cambirdge, CB22 5BP
www.staplefordgranary.org.uk

For information about events, exhibition, access, cafe, blogs, the Stapleford Granary team and our education work, please visit the website.

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# BECOME CURIOUS.
# STAY CURIOUS.

**'Philip Barnes' vision to help people become and remain curious about culture throughout life underpins all we do here at Stapleford Granary. It has shaped the way that the Granary has evolved over the past five years; it has helped us galvanise and attract wider audiences, open up the site in new ways, and punch above our weight with distinctive, creative programming. We want to give people lots of choice, to engage with the arts in the ways that suit them best, and to reach out beyond the walls of the building into schools and commnuities to ensure that a life-long cultural education is established from the earliest years'.**

**- Kate Romano, CEO Stapleford Granary**

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