

Celebrations to mark the opening of the Portico arts and heritage centre

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The Portico arts and heritage centre in Ards

The local community in Portaferry, County Down, have been celebrating the official opening of the town's new arts and heritage centre, the Portico.

The Grade A listed building, formerly known as Portaferry Presbyterian Church, has been part of the community since 1840. But in recent times it had fallen into a state of decay and disrepair and was in danger of being lost.

A group of determined residents came together to save the building and return it to the heart of the local community. Over the last eight years the group has acquired ownership of the building, raised the funds for and carried out its complete £1.5million restoration.

[quote=Paul Mullan, Head of HLF Northern Ireland]"This project is a wonderful example of how determination, commitment and a shared vision can transform a heritage asset and deliver outstanding benefits for the local community."[/quote]

With a full programme of arts and heritage events planned, the building is a beacon of what can be achieved by a community group with a purpose.

Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: “This project is a wonderful example of how determination, commitment and a shared vision can transform a heritage asset and deliver outstanding benefits for the local community. Thanks to National Lottery players, this beautiful building, once at risk, has been brought back to life to be at the centre of community life for years to come. It is an inspiration for others not only in Ards, but right across Northern Ireland; heritage is a driver for wider regeneration that can deliver jobs, attract investment and make our communities better places in which to live, work and visit.”

A special service of dedication was attended by Prince Charles who unveiled a plaque to mark the official opening and met with volunteers, project workers and members of the local community.

Further details can be found by visiting the [Portico website](#).