

ART & LIT



These ducks are visiting Maker Space from TOG in Dublin, a maker/hacker organisation much like Maker Space. They are watching Duck TV, featuring photographs from Duck365, a project where a plastic duck was photographed every day for two years. The reason why this happened is still a mystery. www.agm.me.uk/duck365/ www.tog.ie

MAKER SPACE

MAKER SPACE IS A HUB FOR THE NORTH EAST'S CREATIVE TYPES AND TECH WIZARDS, NESTLED AWAY IN THE BUSTLING HEART OF NEWCASTLE CITY CENTRE. **PETER CUMISKEY** FINDS OUT MORE

Initiated by Alistair MacDonald and Dr Brian Degger, the 'hackspace' began life in a small room at the rear of Ouseburn's Star & Shadow Cinema. "Maker Space One, as we've come to call it, it was small. At most we could fit sixteen people in," Alistair remembers. "Once we opened the space we attracted a group of interested, enthusiastic people," says Brian. "That was essential in moving the space forward".

IN NEWCASTLE WE HAVE THIS AMAZING INDUSTRIAL HISTORY, WE HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF 'GEEKS'

Hackspace is a global phenomenon; places for communal meet-ups between like-minded people, usually with a common interest in computers or digital art. Brian says he found it curious that such an organisation did not exist already in the North East: "In Newcastle we have this amazing industrial history, we have a long history of 'geeks' basically – Armstrong, Swan, Stephenson – also we have amazing historic institutions devoted to geekery. There's the Mining Institute, the Lit and Phil Society, Discovery Museum, and the Great North Museum. More recently we have Life, Culture Lab and there's the upcoming development Science City." The duo were inspired by Maker Faire, an annual event held at the Centre for Life which celebrates Do-It-Yourself scientific projects, and hackerspaces such as London Hackspace, and San Francisco's Noisebridge. "We'd been to a lot of Hackathons where coders get together to make cool mash ups over 24 hours using sponsoring companies' services," Brian explains. "And we thought that since Newcastle has Maker Faire already we should get an actual community happening." For many attendees, Maker Space is not merely an opportunity to get on with solo projects, but also learn from the experiences of

others. "A lot of these people can just do it at home," Brian says, "but everybody generally comes up against a brick wall when doing technical stuff. Generally there'll always be someone here, or somebody who knows somebody else, who can help out." Amenities include a 3D printer (the Maker Bot), a wall of reclaimed electronics and motors, access to computers and other electronics, not to mention tea making facilities. The new rooms, diagonally across from the City Library, are leased out by the New Bridge Project, whose goal it is to breathe new life into the city's empty office spaces. First and foremost amongst its advantages is that it offers around five times as much space as the former premises.

In a way this provides a creative quandary, as Alistair explains: "Because of our origins in terms of the space we had we haven't got as much variety as we would like. We've had a lot of people working on micro-electronics and things like that and not as many working on larger, more arty things." Brian points out for example that the large work desks would be ideal for cutting fabrics or dress making. Alistair says: "Now we have that space, we are really making it our responsibility to reach out to people less like ourselves in many ways." Maker Space offers a busy programme of nights designed to suit makers across the board (Maker Monday, 3D Thursday etc.). Those interested are encouraged to drop in to Welcome Wednesday, a weekly event for new and existing members held from 6pm. "It's quite hard to explain what we're about," understates Alistair. "The best way sometimes is to just say 'Come along.'" Maker Space then is not an exclusive club for people working on high-tech projects, but a space for anybody looking for inspiration or a good old natter about technology. Newcastle...prepare to get your geek on. Maker Space is located at 18 New Bridge Street West, Newcastle. You can find Maker Space at E-day at Gateshead Library as part of the British Science Festival on Saturday 7th September. www.makerspace.org.uk