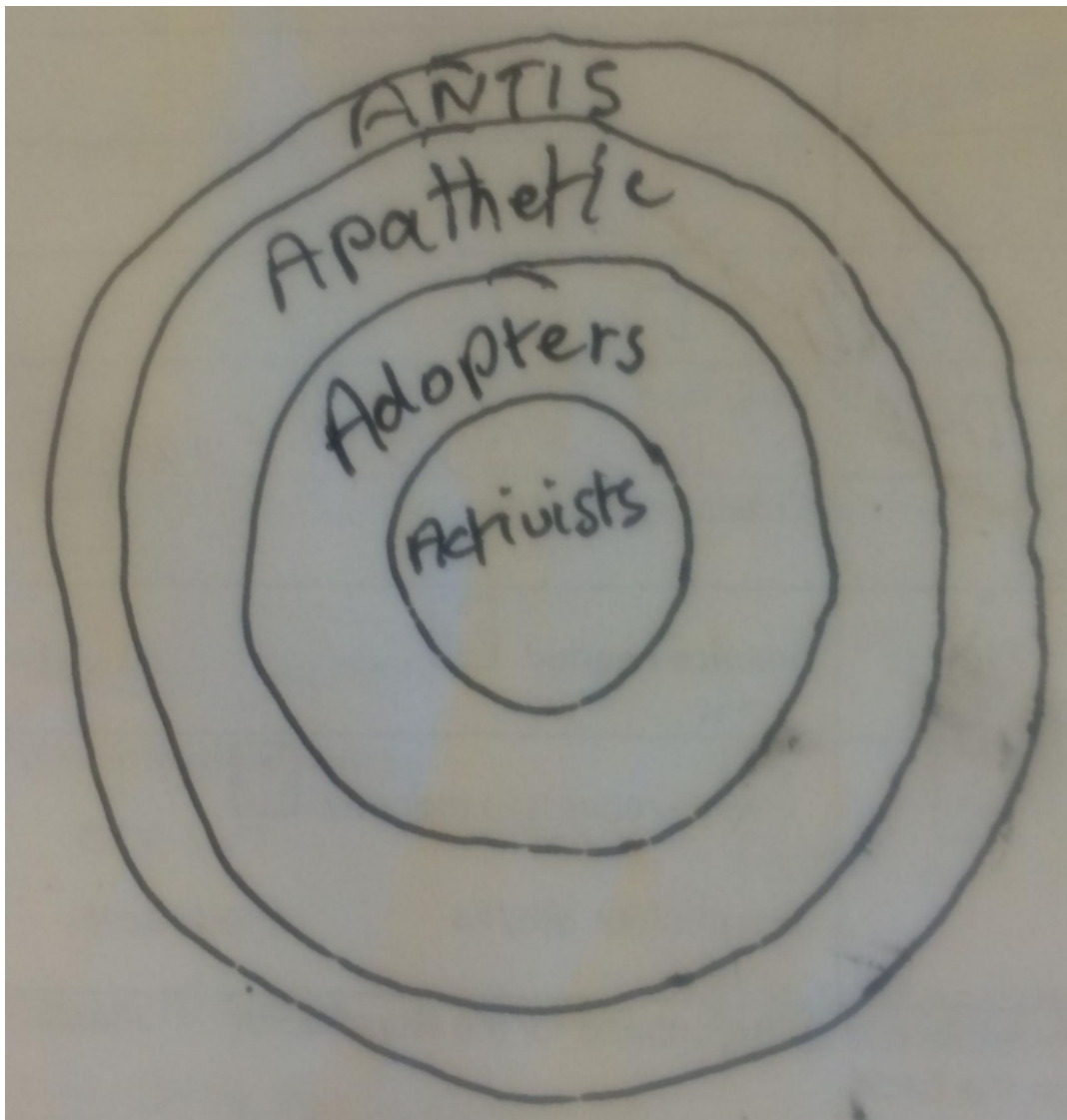


Chapter 11

Showtell days

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The gigabus with a very apt numberplate.



The gigabus.



The gigabus trip.



James at Borwick showing the group how he levels a trench.

Showtell days

Nobody before B4RN had figured out how to build a commercially viable fibre network in the most sparsely populated and difficult countryside. By trial and error we did, and we were enjoying a lot of success.

We had been besieged with letters and emails, phone calls and direct visits from other communities wanting to join our network, and communities wanting to build their own, and even government officials. Other telcos also wanted to know how to do rural fibre.

Barry and the management team decided that, to save time and effort, and as we still did not have any staff that we would hold 'showtell' days, where all the questions could be answered in one hit, and the visitors could be taken on a tour to see everything in real life and real time.

These proved to be a great success and we held one or two a year up to Covid starting.

Emtelle, our duct and fibre supplier sponsored these events. They put up the finance to hire a venue and provide refreshments. Then when we got our own large enough premises we held them at Melling. Simon Wade was the organiser and he even had takeaway sample packs of the duct and fibres for all the visitors. Suppliers like Sumitomo, Fujicura, Hellerman Tyton and Mills also came and supported these days with demos and information.

Simon hired a coach from a local company and we were amazed by its apt number plate, GIG 4871. The bus was used for many trips out.

Visitors were shown active digs, and could meet and talk to the volunteers doing them. They also got to see fibre blows, both core blows and house fibre blows.



Simon Wade presents at the showtell day.



James Taylor on the core fibre blowing demonstration.



Tom and Bruce on the reeler on the core fibre blow.



As you can see in this photo it is Walter (in yellow) asking the questions!

Simon usually started the day's proceedings, and was a fantastic help on every showtell day, always good humoured, kind and patient.

Barry, and later Tom, would also give updates and answer questions. As time progressed and we got more staff, they would also do presentations about new developments, training, and health and safety. They also did blowing and fusing demos and let visitors have a go.

All the staff took part in one showtell day or another, and joined in with the action, answering questions and pointing things out. As we took on more staff they also benefitted from meeting the communities we visited on the day.

We knew that nothing could surpass seeing everything done in real life, so we always took people out on the bus to see the different stages of a network build.

Mills became our main blower supplier, and this was about the only time the machines could be seen in their shining glory, because, once out on the field trip you saw the machines in their everyday locations, sometimes covered in hailstones and often mud.

Craig from Hellerman Tyton was also very supportive and brought different bullets and explained the differences between them all.



The Mills blowers.



Walter from Surrey at Craig's Hellerman Tyton workshop.



Nick Hall doing a duct laying workshop.



The group watching Bruce blow fibre to the pub.



Keith Brady (Borwick) explains how to lay duct.

In the workshops the visitors could get their hands on the duct, and then Nick from B4RN would explain how to lay the duct.

On one trip out Keith from Borwick showed them how to lay multiple ducts in a single trench, and explained to them where it is going to.

We also showed them fleeing, and explained how to do it and why we had to do it.

We took them to see a site where blowing and fusing were happening on the same day, so that they could also see house installs and see how the duct got to every property from the chamber. To blow a house connection the blower often uses a 'fibre tail' with an air gap. This blows an extra metre or so of fibre before it stops, and that is enough to do a fuse in the outdoor box of then new outdoor boxes, or enough to feed the fibre through to the indoor box.

Everyone asked many questions, and there are lots of photos with groups like this around Bruce, and he always had the answers for the visitors.

We took them on guided walks to see how the land healed after the duct had been buried and also to see the fusing trailer in action once we had got it. We were very proud of that trailer.

We held a showtell at Aughton at the village hall, and the visitors walked a route looking at how we got



Chris Carr (Aughton) showing visitors how to get through or under.

Showtell blowing demonstrations



A blow at Clapham showtell day.



A long blow to a church, with the Cheshire tribe watching.



Walter taking photos at Borwick blows on the showtell.



Bruce explains how it all works



Bruce answers everyone's questions.



More questions at Clapham for Bruce.



Core fibre blowing to the left, house fibre blowing and fusing to the right.



Aughton hosts a showtell.

over obstacles, watched a blow and watched a house install at the local pub. The gigabus was there to do the road trip. Pat was there to serve tea. It was a great event and many visitors came, including some from the European Union government.

When we got back from our trips we had refreshments back at Melling. Next stop on the Aughton day was the pub, where Bruce blew the fibre in.



Full turn-out at Aughton.



Walter always contributed pies from the local butcher.



Chris Carr leads a walk to see if anyone can spot a trench.



Liza Huddleston (huddspuds) made us cakes.



Pat as usual on her tea duty at Arkholme.



Jacob's join back at Melling for lunch.



Aughton showtell, visitors watched the fibre blow and fusing at the pub.



Fusing the Red Well pub install, filmed by BBC Alba.



Barry explains how a cabinet works at the Arkholme showtell day.



One of the first showtells in the Lancaster House hotel.

Everyone crossed over the road from the chamber where Bruce had blown the fibre from, and it was fused and came live. As you can see from the shirts on the photo gallery page, Hyperoptic and other altnets had sent staff to find out what we were doing. The showtell was open to everyone, sharing our knowledge.

BBC Alba filmed the day at Aughton, and a Radio Wales interview was done in the field on that day.

Beyond the book

[BBC Radio Wales](#)

[BBC Alba](#)



Showtell days were held in many different venues. The first few were held in a hotel, then in our workshop when we moved to Melling in 2015.

Other altnets (alternative networks) have been to our showtell days, and have gone away and built their own networks. They have learnt from our good practice, as well as our mistakes. We hide neither, as knowledge is meant to be shared.

At one event we even got a demonstration of Ann and her quad measuring out the duct for a group of houses when we visited Clapham for a showtell day

Some have asked us why we share our hard-won knowledge. We work on the principle that if I have an apple, and you have an apple and we exchange them, we still only have one apple. Whereas if you



Ann at the Clapham showtell demonstrating duct reeling out.



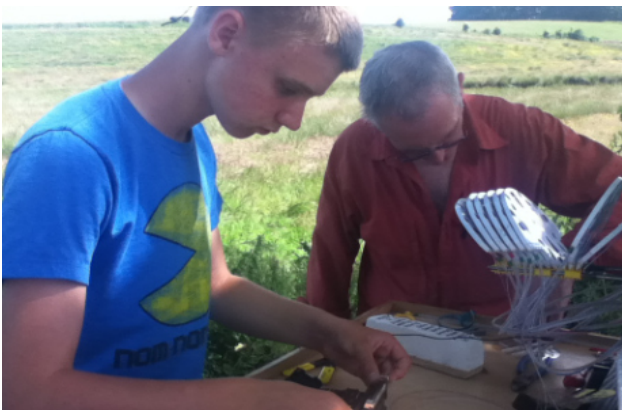
Tom showing BDUK round the storage depot at Melling.



Jamie Potter talking to the volunteers at a showtell day.



Another day, another BDUK visit to Rathmell.



Iain Robertson taught William to fuse at Aughton 2013.

have an idea, and I have an idea and we exchange them, we both have two ideas.

The workshops bring together communities working to the same end, sharing knowledge and building the power of the people to do what the big companies cannot or will not.

Jamie Potter from BDUK came to a showtell in 2016 and described how government vouchers would soon be available. He then went to work for another altnet in the north taking his new knowledge from B4RN with him.

We had many visits from BDUK as their staff changed with amazing regularity, and we had to tell them all about it many times. Sadly, they did not seem to understand about apples.

We also found we had more site visits from BDUK once the voucher scheme started. Before then they had come to the showtell days and wanted to learn more.

William, a visitor from America, was shown how to fuse fibre and was very pleased with himself when he finished fusing an entire bullet.

We have had visits from all over the UK and Europe, and from Canada and Africa. All are impressed by our gigabit symmetrical service, and we also supply 10Gbps on request or more if needed.



William's finished bullet enclosure.

The showtell fibre hokey-kokey

The most popular demonstration at showtell days was the hokey-kokey, where Emtelle put a transparent duct round the room and through it blew a fibre lit by a red light pen.

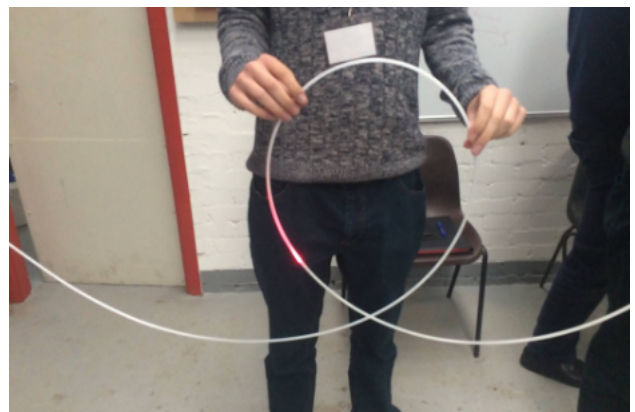
Mark Graham from Emtelle would set up the demo and everyone could see how easy it was to blow fibre down a duct, and how a bend in the duct would stop the fibre going through. The photos show the red light pen on the floor coupled up to the pan of fibre, and the red light showing its path in the man's hand in the loop of duct. The fibre will blow ok through loose loops, but a tighter bend will impede progress or even stop the blow. A practical demonstration explains it far better than words can.



The fibre hokey-kokey.



The red-light pen on the floor and the fibre light reaches the man's hand.



Fibre looping the loop.



Tom doing his presentation at a showtell day.



Rapt attention.

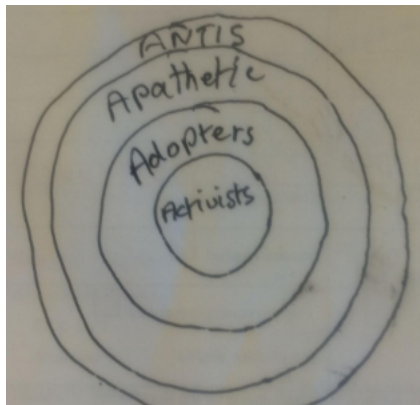


Showtell day Activists discussing duct.

Rural communities have to work together to lay fibre, if they want a future-proof internet connection.

In Summary

1. The capacity of local communities to achieve significant objectives without external financial support is very great, but could be even greater with support, of course
2. Clear, expert, ambitious vision and planning are essential to breaking the mould and leading the tribe.
3. Find public-spirited experts from your community: in our case, telecom engineers, accountants, solicitors and administrators, tea ladies. Train your diggers, blowers, fusers and DIY volunteers.
4. Do not rely on the government - they might help but probably will not. Do not believe what the ministry and civil service tells you; not everything they tell might be true, or it may only be true for a limited time, or it may not be the whole truth. And policies and goals can change overnight.
5. The B4RN project has proved what can be done in the face of very poor odds, and shown the social capital accrued, pride of ownership and social cohesion, which are not necessarily part of Establishment aims and objectives.
6. You need to want something badly enough to do something about it. So to repeat what we talked about at the beginning of this book, here is a call to action. Find your tribe and JFDI.



Story of the 4 As

The Activists

These are very passionate, motivated people, they cannot do it all themselves, but they can inspire and enable others.

The Adopters

These are smart, experienced, and skilled people, who want to help themselves and their communities, and can actually make sure 'stuff happens'. They are often, but not always, retired people.

The Apathetic

This is probably too strong a word, maybe Agnostic would be better? These are the people, who for different reasons are reluctant to commit. It could be that the project is of no interest to them, it could be they do not understand it, or it could be their own lives are so hard they do not have the energy to spare. A large percentage of them can be won over by Adopters, but Activists just drive them away.

The Antis

These are people who have a vested interest in preventing the project, or people in government who don't understand it and will not put any effort into helping it. The majority of them cannot be won over as the incumbent's lobby is far stronger than yours. The main job is to stop them upsetting the Apathetic, and from influencing your Adopters. Though, to be fair, most Adopters can see through them and choose to let them lie.

If you want to build a B4RN in your area, come and visit us, or watch the videos on our website, and join our Facebook group to see the community in action. If you have a question, we will try to answer it. If you have a problem, we'll work with you to find a solution. And perhaps we'll share the solution with others.

It is called Paying it Forward...

It can transform your life, your communities, your feeling of empowerment and your pride in the power of the people.