

Friends of Highgate Library

Chair's report to the AGM April 2019 to April 2021

Our last AGM in the Civic and Cultural Centre heard how our membership was growing and enjoying our many successful events. In the last two years that remains true.

We have continued to have a series of guest speakers on many and varied subjects, often with fascinating illustrations. Our 2019 AGM heard from Martin Wilkinson about how inequality harms our health and our society. In February 2021 we continued that theme with Professor Sir Michael Marmot. We have welcomed novelists Salley Vickers, Joanna Briscoe and Tracy Chevalier, we have had two poetry evenings, we have heard about publishing from Lennie Goodings and favourite children's books from Lucy Mangan. We found out about children's books in the Georgian era. We enjoyed a dramatization of the life of Frances Hodgson Burnett and joined in a play based on Peterloo.

Ever popular events on historical topics have included looking at the innovative architecture in Camden and on the Highgate Newtown Estate and at the development of the area around the library in the 1970s and the pioneering nursery of that time. We have learnt more about Highgate Cemetery. We had our first scientific talk about behaviour and motivation. We have enjoyed a chef talking about sustainable food and a musician talking about Bach. We have travelled with expert guides to China, India and Kazakhstan. We have travelled across Europe exploring a personal family history.

Several of our speakers have had long articles about them and their work in the Camden New Journal, some as a result of speaking at our event. Our May guest Stella Dadzie was featured on January 21st. We put these articles on to our website.

Of course since April 2020 and the arrival of Covid 19 our events have moved online and to Zoom. While we miss meeting in the hall over a glass of wine, these events have attracted an even large audience including members who have moved out of the area and many abroad who have links with our speakers. We have also used our social media sites successfully to promote events. Now instead of sometimes cramming 90 people into our hall we have 200 watching from their homes. The other advantage is that our talks are recorded so we have another large audience who watch later.

In September 2019 with our printed newsletter we introduced a colourful programme of forthcoming events. This last year our newsletters have all been produced at my home as print shops closed. Our regular committee get together to stuff envelopes and then to deliver many by hand had to stop and so we posted them. We were determined that the Friends of Highgate Library should continue to offer entertainment and a chance to meet even if remotely.

In the library, our separate charitable wing raised funds in 2019 for the exciting young people's art project now adding interest in the children's library. Our charity stopped hiring out the Civic and Cultural Centre at the start of the pandemic and we are waiting for the opportunity to reopen. Meanwhile our volunteers have continued to offer whatever service was permitted in the main library.

This has been a difficult year for all of us but it is one of many that our library has endured since 1906. We look forward to better times with our association continuing to support our library and its community.

We hope we will soon be able to run events in the hall. There is much to think about. We are determined our future events will include a continuing online element. At the moment it is unlikely that the internet connection in the hall will support more than live streaming, but if that can be addressed it would be great if we could have fully hybrid Zoom and live meetings. We have unused skills and talents out there and would like volunteers for a working party to progress this.

It would also be great if a wider group could be thinking about how we mark our return to physical meetings. How shall we celebrate?

I thank my fellow committee members for their work and support.

It is two years since we have been able to put out an invitation to anyone who would like to be considered as an additional Committee Member. We need your ideas and enthusiasm. The committee plans events and writes for the newsletter and helps with advertising events including putting up posters. Email us on FOHL@dartmouthpark.org if you are interested or have suggestions for the physical relaunch or would be willing to join the working group.

Linda Lefevre 7/4/2021