



The Friends of Highgate Library

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2022

Friends' News

Despite all our efforts over the last two years to resolve the issue of our licence for the Civic and Cultural Centre Hall, the matter remains unsettled. Since 2013 we have hired out the hall to our local community and Camden Council have been responsible for its maintenance and cleaning. In fact the terms of the licence forbid us doing any repairs or redecoration. We have been happy with this arrangement. However the Council's legal department will not put this arrangement into the conditions of our new licence. They argue that it commits the Council to costs. It is hard to understand why a licence cannot reflect the existing situation. Highgate Councillor Anna Wright and senior library staff have intervened on our behalf but the issue is still not settled.

Until it is settled, continuing to use the hall is difficult. We have been unable to negotiate a rent agreement, which we expect to take account of our major loss of regular users due to the pandemic and which will allow us to rebuild gradually. We may need to stop hiring out the hall completely. It seems to be impossible for Camden's legal and property departments to work together to resolve this. We will battle on. Please read the background and detail of our fight to keep the hall as a cultural and civic venue for our community, enclosed with this newsletter..

Meanwhile the library service are using the hall for three children's activities each week until they can return to a smaller space inside the main building.

None of this will affect our organising of our events or the production of our newsletter. Our exciting programme of talks continues both in (for now) in the hall and on Zoom.

We continue to send our monthly emails, including an extended newsletter, and advertise events on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Eventbrite. Remember there is more information on our website, www.FOHL.org.uk. Please contact us by email FOHL@dartmouthpark.org.uk. We welcome your suggestions for future events.

*You can make donations and pay subscriptions (normally £6) by bank transfer to FOHL at RBS **Sort Code: 16 00 23 Account number: 10008322**. If you haven't previously done so or your details have changed you should complete our online membership form at <https://goo.gl/7e6VrW>.*

Linda Lefevre, Chair

News from the Library

Libraries are returning to their pre-Covid state or almost! Physically the Library is beginning to look like its old self. The number of PCs for adults and the time allowed on them will be back to normal in the near future and the 4 PCs for the children are already back in use. Tables for adults at which to sit and read or study are back while the children's library will again soon have toys and space to play. The children's activities, although still taking place in the hall, are once again attracting many children. Outside, the care of the Friends Memorial Garden, carried out for many years by Margaret and Bridget, is now in the hands of two other volunteers who will ensure it remains a beautiful place for all to enjoy.

But it's not just a period of "return to the past". The new Meeting Room in the library is now ready for use. A pleasant space with a table and seating for up to eight, it will provide something that has previously been lacking at Highgate Library, a space for people to meet to talk or work, in groups or on a one to one basis, for training and for studying. It has a virus killer installed to provide Covid safety. Please do contact the library if you feel that this would be a suitable space for your activity.

The Meeting Room will also provide additional much needed shelving for books. We are going to use this to house a collection of "The Classics", a gap in the library collection on which many of the library users have commented. If you are looking for homes for any of your classics we would be glad to receive any that are in good condition and preferably hard back editions.

The other key news is Camden's plan to re-structure the staffing of its libraries, long delayed by both Covid and internal negotiations, is now nearly complete. We should be able to give full details of the new structure and of the names of the staff appointed to work at Highgate Library in the next Newsletter.

Meanwhile Camden Libraries have been reassessing the most useful way to serve its users. In future all the DVDs available will be kept at Swiss Cottage Library, while the system for rotating its stock has re-started. Highgate Library has just received a large number of new Large Print and audio books. If these are of interest do come in and have a look. Reservation charges have been abolished for all Camden materials, so you can now request books and other items from all Camden libraries at no cost.

Sarah Harrison, Chair of Highgate Library Management Group

**Friends of Highgate Library
Annual General Meeting
Thursday April 14th at 7 pm
Before the Hunter Davis talk**

Friends of Highgate Library Civic and Cultural Centre

How we got where we are

It is a nonsense to suggest the Hall can be run as a self-contained operation. It is part of the Library. Before that could happen the Council would have to create new fire exits in the Kitchen and from the Children's library and Office, enable staff to enter and exit from the front, move the IT server, provide independent heating and upgrade the ratty inaccessible toilet. They would still have to address the roof leaks and deal with the damp.

In the early days, confident that we had the support of the Library Service, we rode with the failures of the heating system, the damp in the walls, roof leaks and the ratty toilet even when this forced us to refund payments from users. We did some decoration and brought in our own heaters. We were considering fund-raising for a toilet upgrade.

We have yet to be convinced, but if our relationship were to become more of a simple commercial one, we would need a formal commitment which ensured that disrepair wouldn't impede our earnings. We also couldn't accept the Library Service using the hall for free.

The Friend's Committee and the Chair at the time of the launch in 2013 entered legal relations in the form of a licence which made them 'individually and severally liable'. The Council undertook to transfer the licence to a charitable company as soon as that had been set up. The Council has yet to honour that undertaking.

Although our main objective as the Friends of the Library was to help make Highgate Library the cultural and civic hub for the area, the Council required an income of over £10k a year from the hall and raising this required regular semi-commercial users and a huge volunteer effort from the Friends. As the surveys done for the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Plan have shown, we were successful beyond our wildest hopes.

New cultural centre a lifeline for library

Volunteers bid to secure long-term future of building

by Amie Keeley

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A Highgate library which was threatened with closure just a year ago has opened a new civic and cultural centre at the site in a bid to secure its long-term future.

The Friends of Highgate Library has secured a licence from Camden Council to manage the Children's Corner annexe, which will be rented out for community meetings, drama and dance rehearsals, educational courses and exhibitions.

Lifeline

Volunteers from the group celebrated with a special launch event on Monday when president, *Only Fools and Horses* actor Roger Lloyd-Pack, officially opened the centre.

The future of the library, in Chester Road, was left hanging in the balance last year after Camden Council announced it



■ Roger Lloyd-Pack opens Highgate Library Civic and Cultural Centre
Picture: Nigel Sutton

was cutting its budget. But it was thrown a lifeline when the council savings were deferred until 2015.

The Friends of Highgate Library have set out to find ways of maximising the space while bringing in additional income, so it can continue to operate as a public library.

The Children's Corner, which was added to the main library in 1936, has been redecorated. It was previously used as a store for the mobile library book collection.

■ Anyone interested in using the space should visit www.dartmouthpark.org/FOHL

When Covid struck after years of successful operation, we were simply locked out of the Hall and were left to manage the consequences with our regular repeat paying users. Most quickly decided to discontinue their activities and we had to return payments made in advance. Last summer we warned the Council that those users who hadn't succumbed to Covid wanted to negotiate lettings for the start of the academic year. We weren't allowed to restart managing the Hall and those users found other venues.

A great sadness of our belated negotiations with Property Services and the Council's lawyers was to be told that neither the Library Service nor any other part of the Council was willing to support our rebuilding of this paying user base until we were again able to earn the 10k per annum for the Council we had for several years earned. (They actually wanted to increase this.) Whilst the civic and cultural users are keen to resume their use as soon as Covid allows, neither we nor the Council can have any idea how soon we could rebuild a sufficient regular user base. It is, however, obvious that the two-month rent free period offered isn't going to begin to cut it.

It is improbable that subsidising the building maintenance costs of the Council could be seen as a charitable activity. Keen though the Council is to ignore the fact that that even before our Charity was established, our relationship has always been based on a requirement that everything we 'earn' from lettings is, directly or indirectly, spent on supporting, protecting and enhancing Highgate Library.

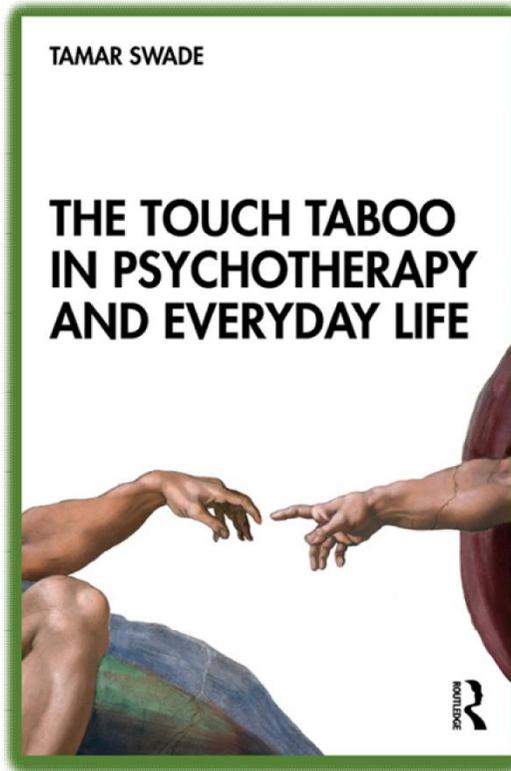
While Covid is still very much with us, we can continue to fudge and mudge, earning small amounts which enable us to pay the insurance and the costs, including software, of running the main volunteer scheme. Without a licence on a realistic basis, it would simply not be possible to enter into medium-term relationships with the sort of regular paying users needed or indeed to launch the sort of substantial promotional effort required.

The time is rapidly approaching when we will simply have to accept the Council isn't willing to enable us to rebuild our hugely successful Civic and Cultural Centre when Covid allows and that the Library Service have abandoned the idea of making Highgate the hub it could be. We are on the cusp of seeing the civic and cultural project disappear.

If nothing changes a decision will be made after the AGM has considered the matter on the 14th April.

The Friends of Highgate Library present
Thursday 10th March 2022 7.00 for 7.30pm

Tamar Swade
The Touch Taboo



Tamar's book examines the effects on us of touch, and of touch deprivation – what we feel when we are touched, what it means to us, and the fact that some individuals and cultures are more tactile than others. Join us to find out more.

In person and on Zoom - Advance registration on Eventbrite essential

Links on www.fohl.org.uk/events

Highgate Library Civic & Cultural Centre
Croftdown Road, London NW5 1HB

Admission with donation or free

Things to Come

Events on Zoom and in the Hall with limited Covid aware seating. Advance registration is absolutely essential: <https://fohl.eventbrite.co.uk>

Thursday March 10th Tamar Swade *The Touch Taboo* Touch has been a taboo in mainstream Western talking therapies since their inception. This book examines the effects on us of touch, and of touch deprivation – what we feel when we are touched, what it means to us, and the fact that some individuals and cultures are more tactile than others. The author traces the development and perpetuation of the touch taboo, puts forward counterarguments to it, outlines criteria for the safe and effective use of touch in therapy, and suggests ways of dismantling the touch taboo. This book will be essential reading for therapists and for any general reader interested in the crucial issue of touch in everyday life.

Thursday April 14th Hunter Davies *Hampstead Heath* Hunter has lived close to Hampstead Heath for more than 60 years and has walked on it nearly every day he was in London. In this book he visits all parts from Kenwood to the Vale of Health, from Parliament Hill to Boudicca's mound. As he walks he talks to the diverse array of individuals he meets to create this affectionate portrait of an iconic urban green space.

Hunter's talk will be preceded by our Annual General Meeting and will start slightly later than normal.

Thursday May 12th Andrew Whitehead *Curious Crouch End* Always a popular guest speaker, historian Andrew Whitehead tells the stories hidden amid the Victorian villas and Edwardian terraces of this fashionable corner of the capital: from a pioneering women's football match organised by the wonderfully named Nettie Honeyball, to the high point of the 1968 student rebellion. He brings to life the spectacular Art Deco in the square, the sparkling Art Nouveau in the pub. Join us to find out more.

March 8th celebrating International Women's Day *The Kentucky Packhorse Library*

The Great Depression had plunged the nation into poverty, and Kentucky was among the hardest hit. The Pack Horse Library initiative, which sent librarians deep into Appalachia, was one of the New Deal's most unique plans. In 1930, up to 31 percent of people in eastern Kentucky couldn't read. In 1934 the first WPA-sponsored packhorse library was formed in Leslie County. The packhorse plan required help from locals. "Libraries" were housed any in facility that would step up, from churches to post offices. Librarians manned these outposts, giving books to carriers who climbed aboard their mules or horses, panniers loaded with books, and headed into the hills. They splashed through iced-over creeks, doling out reading material to isolated rural people. Jojo Moyes' novel *The Giver of Stars* tells this story and gives an insight into the lives of women at this time.

Recent Events

Watch events again or catchup <https://vimeo.com/friendsofhighgatelibrary>

Public talks provide part of Caitlin's living so the video of her talk is only available to Friends. If you would like to see it email us for the password.

Thursday December 9th *Caitlin Davies Queens of the Underworld*

This was another fascinating evening. Caitlin Davies was telling us about the neglected subject of female crooks. Her research is not only an important part of women's social history but it makes a good read. Caitlin's book shines a light on the incredible lives of female criminals like a bandit leader, a burglar and a jewel thief. What makes the story even more interesting is that Caitlin also tracked down some of the modern-day descendants. It was an evening to be remembered.

Thursday January 13th *Samuel Taylor Coleridge Local Poet and Sage of Highgate*

This pop-up play had to be done entirely on Zoom which was a huge challenge. However, Beth Shaw and Martin Bould rose to the occasion, so we managed to have a cast of twenty characters in their own homes with their own props and costume flourishes and with scripts sent by email. With our excellent tech supporters watching out for mute and unmute errors we all had an excellent and enjoyable evening and learnt much about Coleridge and his life.

Thursday February 10th *Ann Oakley Forgotten Wives*

Ann Oakley gave us some fascinating insights into the research she did for this book in which she explores the lives of the wives of four men who made a significant contribution to the making of the modern welfare state. Her contention is that the wives not only supported their husbands by managing their households, but that they also contributed massively to the work for which their husbands are remembered. In the 1960s it was rare to see a man pushing a buggy or carrying a baby. Today it is commonplace. In the 1970s a teacher at Brookfield School won a landmark case on maternity leave. These are but two small examples of the way attitudes have changed over the last fifty years. This change is in no small part due to Ann Oakley's scholarly work on gender and the position of women.

FRIENDS OF HIGHGATE LIBRARY

c/o Highgate Library, Chester Road, N19 5DH

Chair: Linda Lefevre

Vice Chair & Membership: Sarah Carrier

Events & Hon. Secretary: Margot Kafno & Ann Cheyne

Hon. Treasurer: Patrick Lefevre

Committee: Michele Cohen, Agnes Stewart, Paul Harris

Sarah Harrison & Virginia Kerridge

President: Toby Faber

Patrons: Julian Barnes, Joanna Briscoe, Tracy Chevalier, Hunter Davies, Caitlin Davies, John Harvey & Charlotte Mendelson
