



# The Friends of Highgate Library

## NEWSLETTER Spring 2025

### Friends' News

2024 was an eventful year in our library's history with the major refurbishment works while the library and hall were closed. We can now celebrate the brilliant result and I hope many of you can accept our invitation to join a special guided tour of the whole transformed building on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January at 12.00 noon. Just come and meet outside.

During 2024 we have held events in many local venues and we thank our friends in the Highgate Network for their help with this and to you for following us around. Now we look forward to being back in our own warmer, brighter and much improved hall in January with its own kitchenette and accessible toilet.

The hall is no longer under licence to the Friends (ending a long struggle to get a new licence) but is now part of Camden's Library Service and will be used for extended library services as well as hired out for community activities. We reopen in January with some of our favourite users returning and we are open to hire for meetings, exercise classes, drama rehearsals, choirs and children's activities. Contact us through our usual email [FOHL@dartmouthpark.org](mailto:FOHL@dartmouthpark.org) and book on our website at [www.fohl.org.uk](http://www.fohl.org.uk)

We paid tribute to one of our library founders in December with our play about Angela Burdett Coutts. You will see in our programme that we continue to celebrate our library with our February event, focussed on the history of books. Adam Smyth will be telling us about The Book-Makers which is a celebration of 550 years of the printed book, told through the lives of eighteen extraordinary men and women. In March we have Susie Barson, one of the English Heritage writers of the architectural history of public libraries from 1850 to 1930, telling us more about how Highgate fits into this history.

We begin in January with a group of guests on a panel telling us about the poet Leonard Clark who lived locally for 30 years having spent a childhood in Gloucestershire. John Howlett, who has edited his latest poetry collection, will introduce family members and others to talk about him and read some of his poems. This is a great start to our new year and we hope to see many of you back in our Highgate Library hall.

Happy New Year!

*Linda Lefevre, Chair*

Everyone responded magnificently to our appeal for early subscriptions and donations to money to pay for venue letting while we were homeless and most deserve a rest now we are back in our Hall. But if you missed out, 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 are a new member or your details have changed, please complete our online membership form at [www.fohl.org.uk/memberform](http://www.fohl.org.uk/memberform) .

## Recent Events

### **October 15th Alexandra Bold Intertextuality or How all stories are linked**

How do you introduce the academic concept of ‘intertextuality’ to the varied audience at an FOHL event? This was the challenge Alex Dold had set herself in October, when she showed us what the concept means using the popular historical novels of Diana Gabaldon, *Outlander*. She first paid due tribute to the theoretical heavies associated with the term – Kristeva, who coined it, and de Saussure and Bakhtin’s theories of language – and swiftly moved on to explain that intertextuality exists in all fiction be it literary or popular. It is about the encounter between characters or stories in one text and cited characters or stories in other texts - Gabaldon’s volumes, Shakespeare’s plays, a 17th century French fairy tale, or the real French Revolution - creating a ‘mosaic of quotations’. Skilfully in charge of her material, Alex succeeded in showing that intertextuality is accessible to us all and can increase the pleasure and depth of reading, and a kind of complicity with authors. *Michele Cohen*

### **November 12th Jessica Hepburn Save Me from the Waves**

Coming to terms with a childless future became the catalyst for a sequence of endurance challenges - swimming the English Channel, running the London Marathon and climbing to the summit of Chomolungma (Everest). She is the first and only woman on the planet to have completed all three. The strength she acquired through training, the power of music through listening to every single episode (3,000 +) of *Desert Island Discs* and the support of friends and family became the foundation for her extraordinary achievements and helped see her through recovery from major injury. Our audience members were transfixed by Jessica’s amazing story and inspired by her mantra to live big and brave when life doesn’t go to plan. *Virginia Kerridge*

### **December 5th Angela Burdett Coutts “pop up” play by Beth Shaw and Martin Bould**

Beth Shaw and Martin Bould’s play enabled us to re-live Angela Burdett Coutts’ eventful life. Having inherited her banker grandfather’s fortune, Angela spent money on a wide range of philanthropic causes one of them was Highgate Library. During her long life she met all the great and the good, we learnt about Angela’s close relationship with her governess Hannah Brown and the many marriage proposals she received. At the age of 67 she did marry a 29 year old American which shocked polite society. The evening was a way to remember her philanthropic activities and to celebrate the centenary of the Holly Lodge estate where Angela Burdett Coutts’ country house and rural retreat with extensive gardens gave a perfect backdrop for galas and festivities. *Agnes Stewart*

## News of our Patrons

We delight in having a number of local gifted authors who have been our patrons and supporters for quite a while, Hunter Davies for the full thirty years of the Friends. They have been our guest speakers on many occasions and stood up for the library when it was threatened. I have been looking into what they have been doing.

**Julian Barnes** His latest book *Elizabeth Finch* is available through Camden Libraries as are many of his previous books. As a distinguished novelist, he has been nominated for the Booker Prize three times and won it with *A Sense of an Ending*.

**Joanna Briscoe** Her last book *The Seduction* was set near Camden Lock. She is the author of five previous novels, including the bestselling *Sleep With Me*, which was adapted for ITV by Andrew Davies. She is a literary critic for the *Guardian* and broadcasts regularly on Radio 4.

**Tracy Chevalier** Tracy's latest novel, set in Venice on the island of Murano, *The Glassmaker* is an ingenious story of a girl who learns to make beads to support her family. "This charming fable is at once a love story that skips through six centuries, and also a love song to the timeless craft of glassmaking." *Geraldine Brooks*. This and many of her other books are in Camden Libraries.

**Hunter Davies** Hunter continues to produce almost a book a year, adding to the many he has written. His latest is *Letters to Margaret*, which he is talking about at the Highgate Society on January 15<sup>th</sup> at 7.30pm. He also writes articles on football in the *New Statesman* and other articles elsewhere.

**Caitlin Davies** She presented her last book *Private Inquiries* to us. She has also talked to us about her previous book *Queens of the Underworld*. Caitlin was at the Agatha Christie festival, when it was suggested that Bess Sedgwick, the famous adventuress in Christie's novel *At Bertram's Hotel* (published in 1965), was based on none other than Noreen Harbord, a 1950s smuggler featured in her book. Caitlin is currently working on a novel, *The Seaside Detective*, in which a young servant girl is sent undercover into Charles Dickens' household in Broadstairs, to solve a crime.

**John Harvey** John has a new short story, *Criss-Cross*, featuring Alex Hadley, senior officer in the Met – and a leading character in *Body & Soul* (2018) - to be published in a collection of new stories by members of the Detection Club, due out in the Spring of 2025. Later in 2025, *Fedora*, which won the CWA Short Story Dagger in 2014, will be included in another collection bringing together the best of short fiction written by CWA members. He will be back at CrimeFest in Bristol in May 2025. John has also been working towards having enough poems for a new collection, tentatively titled *Blue in Green*, some of which he read recently at the Torriano Meeting House in Kentish Town.

## News from Highgate Library

Highgate Library opened its doors to the public on November 19<sup>th</sup> in what was called a “soft” opening as not all the work was finished, but it did allow people to use the Library again. The first day saw over 200 people come in and the numbers have remained high since then, and the reaction to the changes in the building has been almost unanimously positive. December 4<sup>th</sup> saw the formal opening of the library with the ceremonial ribbon cut together by Samata Khatoon, the Mayor of Camden and Toby Faber, the President of the FoHL, symbolising the partnership which is responsible for running the Library.

It now feels safe to say that Highgate Library’s future is secure – both as one of Camden’s nine libraries and as a well-maintained building. I wish at this point to pay tribute to you, the FoHL members, whose support for the Library has played a key part in achieving this assured future for the Library in its current premises. In the thirty years since FoHL was founded, it has protected the building by obtaining a Grade II listing, and on more than one occasion its members and supporters have opposed Council proposals to close it. Without the work and support of FoHL members, it is likely that there would not be a Council Library in this beautiful building, and the building itself might not have survived.

The practical focus of the work is now the Children’s Library to upgrade the furnishings, with a new carpet, sofa and other seating and in the Adult Library to explore options to improve the shelving. Organisationally, we are working to strengthen relations with people and institutions in the neighbourhood. Regular visits from Brookfield School children are planned; a screen sponsored by Highgate Newtown Community Partnership giving information about neighbourhood activities will shortly be installed; and we are currently working to raise the funds to extend the activities available in the library to provide a varied programme for different age groups, including advice and support services, learning and enriching classes, all available free of charge to library users.

As a thank you to FoHL Members there will be a special guided tour of the whole transformed building. This tour, for FoHL members only, will be on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January at 12.00. There is no need to book – just turn up at the front gates **by** 12.00.

*Sarah Harrison, Chair Library Management Group*

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### **FRIENDS OF HIGHGATE LIBRARY**

Chair: Linda Lefevre Vice Chair & Membership: Sarah Carrier

Events: Margot Kafno Hon. Treasurer: Patrick Lefevre

Committee: Michele Cohen, Agnes Stewart, Paul Harris, Nancy Pistrang,  
Sarah Harrison & Virginia Kerridge

President: Toby Faber

Patrons: Julian Barnes, Joanna Briscoe, Tracy Chevalier, Hunter Davies, Caitlin Davies, and John Harvey

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