



The Friends
of Highgate Library

NEWSLETTER Winter 2025

Friends' News

At the end of another eventful year, we are reflecting on our achievements. This newsletter has news of recognition of the work our volunteers do, and have done, since 1995. Our exhibition in June showed our past campaigns. Recently, two volunteers attended a celebration of community activists with our MP Tulip Siddiq, and Sarah Harrison, a stalwart volunteer for many years, has received a British Citizen award. *Read more inside.*

Our volunteers run the members' association, organise events, produce this newsletter, hire out and care for the Library hall and its users and, crucially, work every week in the library, keeping it open and serving users while also running activities alongside our wonderful staff.

For the future, Sarah's article has more to say about the promotion of 2026 as a national Year of Reading with its impact on our library. Our Friends charity is planning its own website to promote library use and link this with a local promotional campaign. We are working with a graphic designer to update the appearance of our communications.

In 2026, we are also planning to improve and develop the garden spaces on either side of the entrance. Any keen gardeners among you who would like to help, please let us know at fohl@dartmouthpark.org. There will be the work of creating a new garden and then a regular job to maintain it by watering and weeding.

We will start 2026 full of enthusiasm and with an exciting and varied series of events, as you will see in our programme, and we hope to welcome you to them.

Happy New Year

Linda Lefevre, Chair

Hampstead and Highgate Heroes - Parliamentary Reception for Community Champions

Friends of Highgate Library received an invitation from Tulip Siddiq, MP for Hampstead and Highgate, to a special reception she was hosting in the Houses of Parliament on Tuesday October 21st, to celebrate the unsung heroes of Hampstead and Highgate. It was a great opportunity for our two volunteers Agnes Stewart, who has for many years acted as caretaker for the library hall, and Alison Steadman, who has been a regular volunteer in the library for more than ten years, to represent the Friends and to visit the Palace of Westminster. They met representatives from other local organisations active in the community.



The Library Hall

Apart from our monthly events, our Library Hall has some regular users who offer services you might like to try.

Let's Play Trains

North London Trainmaster run a pop-up stay and play for under-fives with hands on track and trains and ride on trains in the library hall monthly on **Sunday** mornings. Tim Lei, who runs it, makes a generous offer of 20% off to Newsletter readers; the code to apply at checkout is 'fohl20'. Find out more at nwllondon.trainmaster.co.uk or email nandwllondon@trainmaster.co.uk

On **Wednesdays** from 4pm to 7pm there are dance classes for children. To find out more, contact Megan Curley at ne1schoolofdance@gmail.com

On **Thursday** afternoons there are Pilates sessions with Alex Mavrocordatos. All enquiries to Alex at alex@orthopilates.com

The hall is also regularly booked for children's birthday parties and is available for drama rehearsals, choirs (plus piano), workshops and seminars. Find out more on our website www.fohl.org.uk and send enquiries to fohl@dartmouthpark.org.

Hire fees are paid into our charity and support the work of the library and the free activities it offers.

Recent Events

October - *Broadway General Manager* - Peter Bogyo

Peter Bogyo gave a fascinating insight into a lifetime working as a General Manager in New York's theatreland. After finishing at Yale, he set out to be an actor but found himself drawn into management. The responsibilities were enormous, covering all the technical and artistic strands that go into making a successful theatre production. From dealing with actors' accommodation demands to the ambitions of producers and designers, he showed how a cool head is needed to do the sums to keep the show in profit. Beyond that, it is a people business where tact, understanding and a degree of guile are what finally put the show on the road. His book, *Broadway General Manager*, is available for all to read on Kindle. *Margot Kafno*

November - *Off the Rails* - Sally Gimson

Sally Gimson, who has served as a Camden councillor, returned to her old domain to talk about her new book on HS2, "*Off the Rails*". No prizes for guessing what she thinks about the whole HS2 project. She told how it was ill-conceived from the beginning or not conceived at all. The problems were not party political – it was designed and carried out under both Tory and Labour governments. The central issue was that its aim and scope were never fully specified or agreed upon. Sally highlighted a key lesson: HS2 should have been a national project, with buy-ins across government departments and from all stakeholders. Fundamental questions have yet to be satisfactorily addressed: who is it for, how will the remaining work be financed, and who is in charge? Sally delivered a clear, concise and illuminating talk to a large and lively audience. It was a pleasure to have her to gain the benefits of her research and perspective. *Nancy Pistrang*

British Citizen Award

Sarah Harrison was recently presented with a British Citizen Award Medal of Honour. These "People's Honours" are "Recognition for individuals doing extraordinary things for the good of the Country". She was nominated in recognition of all she has done over the past decade to ensure that Highgate Library has not only survived but also thrived. Her energy, creativity and dogged focus played a major role in transforming Highgate Library into a key local community resource that enriches the neighbourhood. Typically, in her acceptance speech, Sarah made it plain that she was receiving the award on behalf of all those volunteers, past and present, who had given their time and energy to making Highgate Library the great place it has become.

News from Highgate Library

The Library Campaign is a national charity established in 1984. It aims to advance the lifelong education of the public by promoting and supporting publicly funded libraries through the activity of Friends of Library groups and users. Earlier this year, it launched a competition for Friends of Library Groups, with prizes in ten categories. We (FoHL) have just heard that we have been awarded the first prize in the anti-cuts category. Our £400 prize money will be used to fund an activity in Highgate Library. We are delighted and thank the Library Campaign for this, as well as for the valuable work they do promoting publicly funded libraries.

It has been quite a year for recognising the important role that FOHL plays. Last month, two volunteers, Alison and Agnes, represented FoHL at an event hosted by Tulip Sadiq MP for “the unsung heroes” in her constituency (see their report).

With ever-growing realisation of the importance of reading and the extent to which those who read have better life chances, reading is being promoted at every level in the public sector. The Education Department and the National Literacy Trust have launched 2026 as the National Year of Reading, aiming to kick start a reading revolution. Camden Council recently launched its five-year strategy “Camden Reading Together”, and continued its programme of refurbishing its libraries, putting them at the centre of its neighbourhood hub strategy. In the library, we are working to introduce new reading initiatives. The Read Easy scheme for adults and Fun with Books sessions for children have started, and we are looking to fund poetry and other reading groups. We are collating information on all the archives holding records on this area to make local history more accessible and to facilitate research.

This surge of awareness of the importance of reading and the key role libraries can play makes it an exciting, positive time for libraries despite the devastating cuts that have hit some areas. The long years when FoHL had to campaign against funding cuts which threatened the Library’s existence have given way to a new era where its importance is recognised. Thanks for this are due to all the members of FoHL, past and present, without whom there might not be a Highgate Library. ***Sarah Harrison, chair, Library Management Group***

FRIENDS OF HIGHGATE LIBRARY

Chair: Linda Lefevre, *Vice Chair & Membership:* Sarah Carrier, *Events:* Margot Kafno, *Hon. Treasurer:* Patrick Lefevre, *Committee:* Agnes Stewart, Nancy Pistrang, Sarah Harrison, Virginia Kerridge, *President:* Toby Faber, *Patrons:* Julian Barnes, Joanna Briscoe, Tracy Chevalier, Hunter Davies, Caitlin Davies, and John Harvey

Website: www.fohl.org.uk Email: fohl@dartmouthpark.org