



# The Friends of Highgate Library

## NEWSLETTER

### Spring 2026

### Friends' News

There are challenges in putting together a programme of talks and events. We ask our speakers to come without payment. We mix a variety of fact, fiction, poetry and even plays and films. We include topics we think our members enjoy and we are fortunate that many of our guest speakers are local.

Next month, unusually, we have two events planned. The first on April 9<sup>th</sup> on the health issues facing Londoners with Julie Billett, Deputy Regional Director, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, and on Thursday April 23<sup>rd</sup> our overdue AGM followed by a talk on the Camden New Journal by Dan Carrier.

Patrick and I, with committee help, have kept events going through the Covid lockdown and library building works, adding the necessary technology for Zoom meetings and booking other venues. Patrick became treasurer when I became chair and expected it to be temporary. We are now looking to reduce our roles as we get older. Our committee runs the members' association, organises and manages events, and produces and distributes this newsletter and programme.

This is where you come in. At the AGM, we want to recruit more active committee members, including developing a new secretary and a treasurer. Help with our website, Facebook page and emails would be great too. I hope that by giving this advance notice, you will think about getting more involved. If you want to know more, do contact us on the FOHL email.

Work on the library garden is progressing under Lizzie Smith's expert eye and with help from *Growing Green*. Any gardeners who would like to help, please let us know at [fohl@dartmouthpark.org](mailto:fohl@dartmouthpark.org). Finally, on September 5<sup>th</sup>, the York Rise Street Party has a community focus this year. Any local group or charity is encouraged to have a stall. Contact Dan Carrier. We will be there!

*Linda Lefevre, Chair*

**Website: [www.fohl.org.uk](http://www.fohl.org.uk)**

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## ***Recent Events***

**December 11<sup>th</sup>** A group of lively and talented young people entertained us with poems, songs and carols, accompanied by guitar and piano. Our own Sarah Carrier offered a spirited rendition of *The Owl and The Pussycat* and *The Hippopotamus Song* and the audience joined in enthusiastically. As our pre-Christmas event it was all helped along with mulled wine and delicious snacks.

**January 9<sup>th</sup>** A N Wilson gave us an interesting and amusing talk about Goethe and told us why he became obsessed with the idea of writing a book about him. Goethe, as well as being responsible for the 'psychological novel' was also a leading politician, a scientist and was much involved in the theatre and with literature generally. Wilson admitted to spending his entire life writing this book: **Goethe: His Faustian Life.** *Margot Kafno*

On **12<sup>th</sup> February** Peter Darley, who researched the industrial past of Camden's busy interchange between railway, canal and road, gave a fascinating talk. Camden Goods Depot was established in 1839 as the terminus for goods trains. 12,000 construction workers were employed to build the railways and every mile cost 3 lives or more as tunnels and cuttings were built. We heard about the "seven wonders of Chalk Farm Railway Lands" like the Roundhouse, the vaults for storing wine and beer and the three storey Pickford's stables. The Camden Railway Heritage Trust is now working to develop Stephenson Walk to extend from Oval Road and the Regent's Canal towpath to Regent's Park Road bridge. *Agnes Stewart*

## ***Highgate Library Hall and Community Meetings***

Several months into 2026, with the hall having been closed twice for a year, in 2020 for Covid lockdown and in 2024 for building work, seems like a good time to evaluate the importance of the hall being available affordably for the community and its organisations.

### **The Beginnings**

Our 1995 Constitution states our aim as "Promoting the use of Highgate Library by supporting its endeavours to maintain good relations with local residents and others ... furthering the need for its continuing existence." Inviting residents to use the hall for meetings and other activities seems an excellent way of achieving this.

### **Recent History**

Originally, the Library Service allowed meetings in the library itself, which meant moving bookshelves. Council rules required a council employee to attend each meeting and two enthusiastic staff members obliged in their own

time, but this could not be sustained. The Library Service, supported by Cllr Phil Turner, helped by agreeing that two of the Friends could be classed as trusted users and could act as staff. Fabian Wilkinson, chair of the Friends, and I, as chair of the Conservation Area Committee, were designated.

In 2012, several options for the hall were discussed, including how any arrangements could finance themselves. These options were investigated but found to be impracticable. The Library Service, in connection with a different project, decided to move the store of books elsewhere.

At our AGM in 2012, the Friends decided a working party on community use of the hall was a priority. Representatives of several community organisations and individual activists met frequently over a period of some months and considered numerous possibilities. A licence was obtained by the Friends and community use began, with low hire fees paying rent and any surplus money supporting services in the library. In 2015, our charitable arm was created to manage these finances in conjunction with the Council Library staff.

### **From 2022 to 2025**

The AGM on April 14th, 2022, considered a full report from Linda on the Hall question. Many of the issues remain and make current use unstable. We also discussed the need for better publicity for our events programme. Some people argued that more wine and social chat would bring more people into the Friends. As treasurer, I called for creating greater financial reserves. As a result, the Association was able to carry on its full programme by Zoom during 2020 and again during 2024. The cost of hiring alternative accommodation in 2024 for our talks was £1,125. We had two offers of space for mutual benefit from Highgate Cemetery and Holly Lodge Community Centre.

When the Library Hall was usable again, Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Forum was the first in and called a meeting to start its regeneration process. That meeting was attended by over 100 people, demonstrating the vital importance of the Library Hall. *Patrick Lefevre, Hon. Treasurer*

### ***News from Highgate Library***

Maybe spring is finally arriving after what has been a long, cold wet winter. The bad weather brought many into the library, seeking a warm, dry place to study, to read quietly, or where children could play or read. It was a pleasure to see the library being so well used.

In January, the Department for Education and National Literacy Trust joined forces to launch a National Year of Reading (NYR), to kick-start a reading revolution. The NYR brings together parents, schools, libraries, businesses and literacy experts aiming to reverse the downward trend in children and young people reading for pleasure. Reading for pleasure isn't

just a hobby. Research links a range of benefits including stronger writing skills, improved wellbeing and confidence and even higher earnings to those proficient in reading and writing in primary school.

Central to the service that public libraries have always offered has been making books of all kinds available free of charge and encouraging reading. This remains true, though the form in which “books” are available has widened as technology and disability awareness have increased. We now have substantial collections of books published in large print or as audio books for those who prefer to listen. We have an increasing number of books and audio books available on-line which can be read, or listened to, on phone, e-reader, laptop or tablet. While some mourn the absence of the few newspapers we used to have on paper, Press Reader provides access to the same newspapers plus many more.

There has been a surge in requests for graphic novels. We have responded by increasing our collection. If there are books that you would like the library to stock, then let us know and we will try to acquire them.

We continue to welcome book donations. We can't guarantee that we will keep every book, but we can guarantee that every book donated will support the library. Books not needed in Highgate are given to other libraries or sold, with the money raised buying new stock.

We are organising special events as part of the NYR. The monthly “Meet the Author” events give people the chance to discuss and question authors such as Tim Sullivan, creator of the George Cross detective novels, who recently captivated his audience at a well-attended meeting. Two fortnightly poetry sessions designed to share English poetry have been full. Storytelling sessions for children are planned while the Fun with Books sessions will enable younger children to engage with books. Please support the library and NYR by joining in these activities and encouraging everyone to discover the pleasure of reading. ***Sarah Harrison, Chair, Library Management Group***

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## **FRIENDS OF HIGHGATE LIBRARY**

Chair: Linda Lefevre; Vice Chair 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.

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