

Friends of Highgate Library

Chair's report to the AGM April 2024 to April 2026



Our events

During 2024 the building was closed for the major building work to improve its energy efficiency, to improve facilities and to redecorate throughout. From February our talks were held in various local venues, some gifted by generous supporters. We met in Brookfield School, Highgate Road Chapel, Highgate Cemetery Chapel, the Highgate Society hall and the Holly Lodge Community Centre. Members followed us and all the talks were well attended and enjoyed. One highlight was the “Women in Revolt, Art and Activism” event in Brookfield School hall with four notable speakers, a poster display and a huge audience. The other was the play about the life of Angela Burdett Coutts with audience members taking the roles, held in conjunction with the Holly Lodge Community Centre as part of their centenary celebration.

In January 2025, we returned to our hall, now with new radiators, wall insulation and secondary windows, built-in storage, a self-contained kitchenette and a disabled access toilet. This event celebrated local poet Leonard Clark with a panel of speakers including his son. There followed two events celebrating books and libraries, including a history of public library buildings from 1850. Our April event, as always, picked up a social issue, this time Fahana Yamin, a notable campaigning lawyer and regular attendee at COP meetings, talking about the climate crisis.

In June, we celebrated thirty years of The Friends of Highgate Library with a history exhibition about campaigns and celebrations, and were delighted to see one of the original committee members and one of the library staff from 1995.

In September, we welcomed Dr Wendy Savage, one of the campaigners for the 1967 Abortion Act, with current campaigners and their film about the Act, “Kind to Women”. In November, Sally Gimson, former Highgate Councillor, presented her book with the inside story of the HS2 railway to a large and very engaged audience. In December, we had fun with an evening of young poets and musicians and enjoyed food and wine to celebrate the season. January brought renowned author A N Wilson to talk about his latest biography of Goethe and attracted a capacity audience. February's talk about local railway history continued a series of local history talks which are always popular. In March, Lesley Downer attracted another capacity audience for her talk on women who shaped Japan's history. April again returned to social issues with a talk by Julie Billett, who is part of the team advising the Mayor on London's health and the impact of inequality.

We have exciting plans for events for the rest of this year and hope to see you at them.

Our Newsletters

Our quarterly newsletters are still printed and posted to many, but many more enjoy them by email and on our website. They have brief reviews of past events, and current

news and ideas about the library and its activities and developments. Since 2018 we have been producing a separate full colour programme of events quarterly.

Highgate Library Hall

This is the new name for the Civic and Cultural Centre and recognises the extended community work of Camden's Library Service. The hall is shared with the library for those activities that need more space when the library is open. This shared arrangement was suggested by Councillor Anna Wright when a more formal arrangement seemed impossible after many years of trying to agree one (noted in my report in 2022!). Currently, the library is running Lego robotics for children, Hopscotch Women's Centre language classes and Meet the Author talks as part of the National Year of Reading.

On days when the library is closed and in the evenings, the hall is hired for meetings, exercise classes, dance, rehearsals, and workshops and seminars. Money raised is used by our charity to add books and other things that benefit library users and to run activities. This is possible thanks to our hardworking group of caretakers Agnes Stewart, Jane Steedman, Jayne Rowe and Caroline Anstiss. After the recent very successful FOHL events, we have added more chairs!

Friends of Highgate Library Association Committee

Our events and activities rely on the work of our committee. Currently Sarah Carrier, Sarah Harrison, Margot Kafno, Agnes Stewart, Nancy Pistrang, Patrick Lefevre and me. My sincere thanks to all of them for their continuing support.

Most of us have been working for FOHL for many years and are looking to reduce our work as we age. We want 2026 to be a year of renewal and development. More activities, a wider range of events – maybe comedy, music, more poetry. We really need new members with new ideas and new enthusiasm to continue our successful activities in this community. Please step up and get more involved!

Linda Lefevre, Chair, Friends of Highgate Library