

FRIERN-BARNET-LIBRARY

A Brief History!

Friern Barnet Community Library Note;

FBCL Would Like To Thank

'Dorrell Dressekie'

for providing us with this copy of his work. More details at the end of this document.

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[Friern Barnet & District Local History Society](#)

Please Note;

There are some (typo) errors as this an old document now converted in a digital format, technology is not perfect! Below you may see some inappropriate '8' so; consider it 'g' (!!).

We hope you also find this history fascinating!...

FBCL (f.l. - March.2019.)



Friern Barnet district Local History Society

This history was compiled and written by Dorrell Dressekie in 2010
and updated in June 2012

Background

Friern Barnet Library, housed in a Tudor style building in Friern Barnet Road, was opened in 1934 by the Middlesex County Council Library Service. A purpose-built library, it was among the first to be built and filled out under the County Scheme for whole-time lending libraries. Other whole-time lending libraries of the period under the Scheme were Uxbridge (1930), Yiewsley (1931) and Hayts (1933).

Before the opening of the library, Friern Banner Urban District Council had quite a different procedure for the lending of books. Books were bought and stored in school rooms and in church hall cupboards and the lending was done by volunteers, mainly teachers. They managed the service from the quite cramped confines of their school rooms, with opening times varying from one to two hours once or twice a week.

The Public Libraries Act 1919 signalled significant changes for library services. Middlesex County Council, as the Authority under the Act with responsibility for library services in its education area, inaugurated the County Library Service and with the Education Authority, set up a sub-committee to consult on the provision of libraries. The outcome of the consultation was the scheme to provide libraries in districts too small to maintain their own library service, and where those districts, in further consultation, showed interest in such a scheme.

Development of Friern Barnet Libraries

The population estimate for Friern Barnet then was 15,818 and in 1923 the County Council Scheme led to a meeting with representatives from the Middlesex County Council Library Service to discuss the formation of a local branch. Friern Barnet Library Committee was inaugurated and talks began on how to adopt the scheme in the district.

The Local Library Committee acted promptly with a request to Friern Barnet Urban District Council to allow space at the Council Offices, The Priory, for use as a library. A room was allocated, furniture and equipment put in place and contact made with the Middlesex County Librarian for the supply of books.

An honorary librarian was appointed from the County Library and, according to records, a library of 1,200 volumes opened on 10 December 1923 in The Priory,

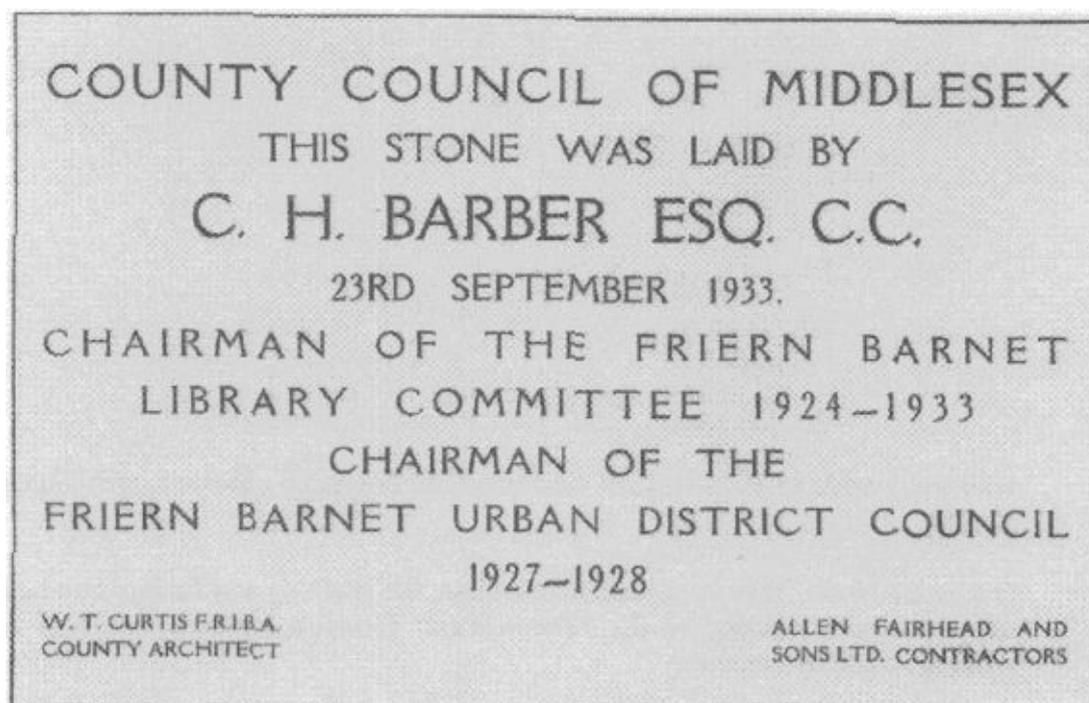
which was si* •*

at the corner of Friern Barnet Lane and Friern Barnet Road. Opening sessions in the public were for two hours, 7pm to 9pm, every Monday evening. The service proved to be in great demand. The number of borrowers increased rapidly as did the number of books borrowed. This led the Library Committee to request permission from the Urban District Council to allow more opening sessions. Tuesday evening sessions were introduced and were soon followed by Wednesday and Friday afternoons, 2.30 to 4pm. The librarian was assisted by volunteers from the local community.

At the third Annual General Meeting of the Library **Commence** in December 1926, the **librarian** reported an **increase in membership**, with 368 new members in the year under review. 374 books were in **circulation** and the largest **number of** books exchanged in one session was 675. The representative of the County Library Service present at the meeting **commented favourably** on the work of the library and added **special compliments to the efforts** of the **librarian** and the local volunteers.

"O God, who in Thy Fatherly care for human need, has appointed hours of service as well as hours of work; bless we beseech Thee, this endeavour that provide opportunity for research and recreation to people of this place; and grant that the minds of all who frequent this library may be enlightened by the things that they read and study, to the Glory of Thy Name, to public benefit, and their own eternal good; through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen"

The occasion concluded with guests moving on to a manjuee on the lawn in the grounds of The Priory where tea was served.



The opening

In the following year, on Friday 23 March 1934, the Friern Barnet Branch Library opened to the public. The opening ceremony, held in the presence of a large and distinguished gathering, was chaired by County Alderman H. S. Buttion, JP and Chairman of Middlesex County Council, and the library was declared open by Lord Elgin, Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, Chairman of the United Kingdom Carnegie Trust, an organisation promoting the development of rural libraries.

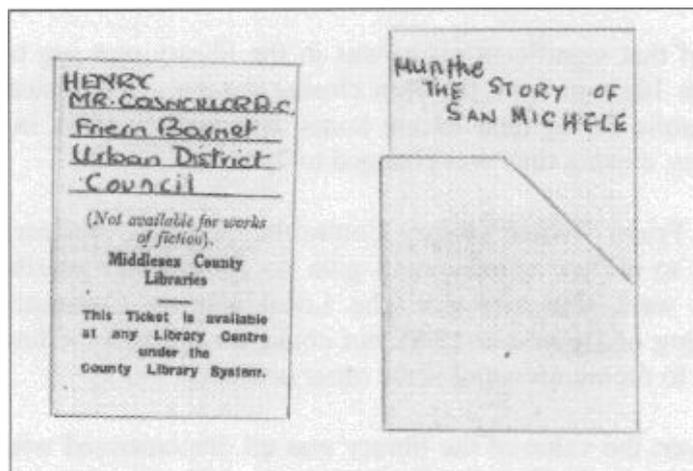


The full descriptive note of the Friern Barnet Branch of the Middlesex County Libraries prepared for the opening ceremony was read by Mr C H Barber:

The library building is planned to accommodate a lending section, a reference section, a reading room and a librarian's room. The lending section is designed on the "open access" system and this portion, in common with the remainder of the building, is capable of complete supervision from the librarian's desk, which is centrally placed.

The building is designed in the Tudor style, the exterior being faced with multi-red facing bricks with stone quoins, mullions, transoms, etc. The roof is covered

The first book issued from the new library was a copy of *I Story of San Michele* by Alec Munthe. The borrower was Mr A C Henry, Chairman of the Priern Barnet Urban District Council and the book was issued to him by Lord Elgin.



The new library marked a significant development in the County Council Library Service and soon became a pivot for the local community. The stock of books on the opening was 8,060 classified under the headings of non-fiction, fiction and children.

Opening hours were 10am to 9pm, so planned in order to allow extra time for people returning home after their day's work. Pupils attending local schools were allocated a special section within the library and for younger children there were afternoon sessions of two hours from 4.20pm to 6.30pm, except on Saturdays. The temporary libraries at The Priory, Holly Part School and St James School were subsequently closed.

By the end of the first year of opening the daily average issue of books was as much as 502 and recorded as frequently rising to 700. Middlesex County Council Annual Report, 1934 to 1935, noted the increase in book stock and growth in the number of registered **borrowers and commut6** or the performance of Fnem Barnet Branch Libras as "providing a service equal to any in the County."

In addition to the main task of lending books, the library service provided a range of other facilities for borrowers. New books were displayed and book exhibitions were organised, one of which were arranged to link in with current events. Musical evenings were held and seasonal holiday programmes put on display. Newspapers, trade journals and some periodicals were placed for the benefit of readers and local organisations were allowed access on notice boards to advertise community activities, particularly if the activities were considered educational. Minutes of meetings of the County Council and the Urban

District Council were also placed for public view.

The local Library Committee held quarterly meetings to receive the librarian's reports and assist in the planning of activities. Lectures, for example, became a

celebrating the library's 21st Birthday. The distinguished gathering included representatives of Middlesex County Council, Friern Barnet Urban District Council, some local organisations and some of the guests who had attended the opening ceremony in 1934. Chief among them was the Earl of Elgin, who had travelled from his home in Scotland for this occasion, saying on acceptance of the invitation: *One always appreciates an honour.*

The Chairman of Friern Barnet Urban District Council in 1934, Councillor A C Barber, who had borrowed the first book, announced to the guests that he still had the book in his possession- Middlesex County Council Library Service had done a special binding of the book and had presented it to him as a memento.

The Librarian and her staff at Friern Barnet were credited with their professionalism and there was special mention for the project they had pioneered which was to allow borrowers free access to book shelves to select their books. That had proved quite significant nationally and gained so much popularity that it was copied in many places.

Excellence

From the statistics compiled by the Librarian in the ensuing post war years there was much evidence of the excellent service provided, not only to borrowers but to the community in general. Career exhibitions were held for school leavers. Younger children from nearby schools were given instructions on how to use the library. Books were sent on loan to the nearby Friern and Halliwick hospitals and reciprocal lending arrangements with other libraries in Barnet allowed borrowers access to the service elsewhere. members of Friern Barnet Libs could, for example, borrow books from the North Finchley branch in Ravensdale Avenue.

Reorganisation

The County of Middlesex disappeared in 1965 due to boundary changes and Friern Barnet Urban District, along with the local authorities of Finchley, Hendon, Barnet and East Barnet, became the London Borough of Barnet. Borough Council Library Service then came into operation and, working closely with the Education Department and the

Borough Librarian, took on responsibility of all libraries in the Borough,

Friern Barnet Library, under the County Library Service, continued its valuable work catering for the enjoyment of its community and expanding its services to meet the changing needs and demands of its users. Special Children's and Teenage sections were added, class visits by children from Holly Park and St John's Schools were encouraged and for very young children there were Story Time sessions. There was choice of audio books, videos and large print books and a range of leaflets and pamphlets with information on various community activities. Some equipment, such as small chairs and toys for the children's area, were provided by the Friends of Barnet Borough Libraries.

The Friends of Barnet Borough Libraries was founded in 1988 by Councillor Frank Gibson, one time Mayor of the London Borough of Barnet, to create community awareness and support for Barnet Libraries. A non-political group of library users, the Friends worked through a central committee and over the years raised funds to supply extra amenities such as coffee machines and to assist with some library activities. Members of the Friends were present in 1994 to join staff of Barnet Libraries in celebration of what was defined as the "pensionable age" of the library, its 60th year since opening. Children from Barnet schools took part in the celebration with craft

The excellence of the library was without doubt as was evident in an exhaustive inspection of all Barnet libraries by the Audit Commission in 2001, resulting in a three star rating, the highest award for excellence. The Audit Commission Report stated then:

The services have good track record of delivery and responding to users' demands. Staff and users share a strong commitment to improve the

The library offered more than a book lending service. Library stock included CDs, DVDs, large print books and items in some community languages. There was a range of pamphlets, magazines, trade journals and some new publications that were an added attraction. Users had access to computers, internet access and info•link helpline and trained and experienced staff helped everyone to make the best use of the facilities.

Local councillors held surgeries at set times in the library; there were monthly coffee mornings with speakers, always on a topic of interest. The very young and their parents had Rhyme Time sessions and children from nearby St John's School, who themselves used the library, were the carol singers at Christmas time. On a wider front, the library provided the setting for a design project for some forty students from Middlesex University preparing for Level 2 in Interior Design. The students were provided with a set of drawings of the building and allowed access, usually in pairs, for a period of the project.

One of the Libras as recorded for the students on the start of their project stated: This single storey building is located at N 11 3DS and sits north of Friern Barnet

Road on an open green site of just under 2000 square metres. The building has a gross footprint area of 220 square metres and a net area of 192 square metres. The building's principal facade faces south and has distinctive large windows that offer good light to the main spaces and are about 4.74m high. The building is set back from the main road and a slip road enters the site that provides parking. To the west of the building is an open green space that faces south and St John's parish church."

As part of Barnet Libraries' Family Learning Festival in October 2009, Friern Barnet Library participated with a teaming session titled Website for Under Fives. Parents were invited with their children to participate in internet activities and looked at a range of sites for under fives including reading, music and art,



A priest outside the library on 21 May 2011.

The People's Library

Closure of the library was a disappointing outcome for campaigners and for the community in general. But "Save Friern **Barnet Library**" **Group and its** supporters had no intention to walk away at what seemed like the final chapter. The plan to continue the campaign by setting up a pop-up library service, dubbed the People's Library was almost spontaneous.

On Saturday 14 April 2012, start day for the People's Library, local residents of all ages gathered on the green by the locked Friern Barnet Library for the beginning of this new chapter. Many volunteers were on hand to put up marquees and tables and assist generally. The large numbers of books on display were soon to have labels in the front covers: 'Friern Barnet People's Library' and set out in order of fiction, nonfiction, children's books, and specialist subjects.

One local newspaper, The Times Series, **Thursday** April 19th reporting on the event under the heading 'Another day, another chapter', noted the large gathering that turned out to support the People's Library.

The ongoing determination by local residents to continue their campaign through the People's Library has been gaining support from a range of sources. The public service union, Unison, for example, which supported the campaign to protect libraries, had its representative on the green. Visits from Banner Councilors do happen on occasion and, in a way confirmed the clear cross-party support for the residents' views. The Royal British



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