

expensive to staff separately, and the space is now the base of the Mobile Library and the Home Library Service to the housebound.

Return to **CHESTER ROAD** and turn left to view the main part of the library, which celebrated its centenary in 2006. This was the first public library in St Pancras, and for decades the only one to be purpose-built, other branches being opened in converted houses or shops. The Vestry was a reluctant and belated adopter of the Public Library Act (1850); ratepayers, in successive referendums, were resistant to the cost. Progress was made after the formation of the new borough council in 1900: referendums were no longer a requirement and the Progressive (Liberal) party gained control. Andrew Dale Carnegie, the Scottish-born American steel magnate, donated £4,000 to St Pancras to pay for a central library in Kentish Town (which never materialised) and for four branch libraries. The Council was to raise a penny rate to cover running expenses and to provide the land. The chosen site in Chester Road, scarcely the most central or accessible in the borough, was sold cheaply by Mr Burdett-Coutts (né Bartlett, p 104), the Duke of Bedford meeting its £500 cost. Designed in a Renaissance style by William Nisbet-Blair, the borough engineer, the mostly red-brick building has a pedimented central section with an arched loggia, flanked by lower wings. The foundation

Backtrack past a doorway inscribed “The Children’s Corner”. This was the entrance to the former junior section of **Highgate Library**. Added at the back of the main building, top-lit and with oak fittings scaled down to child size, it opened in 1936. To mark the occasion [26] the children received a special message from the poet Walter de la Mare. The Children’s Corner closed in the 1970s, deemed too

stone was laid on 14 June 1906 by Cllr H T Ashby, and the library was enthusiastically opened just four months later, on 18 October, by George Hickling, the Mayor.

In the early days there was no browsing of the shelves; books were on closed access, readers selecting them from a catalogue ‘indicator’. Despite its awkward location, the Highgate branch served as the headquarters of the St Pancras library

service. Here all books were catalogued, a junior assistant then carrying them to other branches in a suitcase, by tram from Parliament Hill Fields. Between 1947 and 1965 the library organised a wide range of extension activities, including poetry and gramophone circles, and numerous talks and debates. Speakers included Neville Cardus, Huw Weldon, Noel Streatfeild, Stella Gibbons, Enid Blyton, Valentine

Dyall and Eleanor Bron. A regular visitor in the 1960s was the historian A J P Taylor. Under the area’s Stage 2 redevelopment plans, the library was meant to be demolished and replaced, but was saved largely through community action. In 1980, with Camden Lottery funding, the interior was nicely remodelled by John Winter & Associates, with Peter McMunn as project architect, but their thoughtful work had, sadly, been undone by the end of the decade. The building was Grade-II Listed in 1995. Outside, behind original railings, is a garden with a seat, created in 2004 in memory of Edith Morgan, late Secretary of the Friends of Highgate Library (FOHL), a very active user group supported by such celebrities as writer/broadcaster Hunter Davies and actor Roger Lloyd Pack.

Opposite is one end of the local shopping parade (1976–78), another of the two blocks completed under Forrester and Palacio’s pilot Stage 2 plans. The ‘high-tech’ 4-storey block at **Nos.58–86** is in reinforced concrete, with bolted coloured enamelled concrete panels and painted railings. Shops occupy the two lower levels, with maisonettes above. The parade’s construction was a high priority,

26 The Children’s Corner, Highgate Library: opening ceremony, 9 Oct 1936 (*Sunday Pictorial*), with children waiting to be presented with something, perhaps a copy of Walter de la Mare’s message

