

**FRIENDS OF PONTESBURY LIBRARY
REPORT
for the ANNUAL PONTESBURY PARISH MEETING
2023/24**

Friends of Pontesbury Library is a registered charity with the following aims:

- to raise funds to secure and maintain a Library building
- to support and help develop Library services in Pontesbury to serve the surrounding local area
- to develop and promote the use of the library and the value of literacy for the benefit of everyone without discrimination

We have approximately 450 FOPL members and there are over 130 members in the 100 Club Library Lottery. This brings in a regular revenue. Our events, organised across the year, are not only fundraisers but increasingly provide free activities aimed at a wide demographic of young families, schools and the elderly. During this year 2022/23 we have been particularly aware of the need to extend support to refugee families and those falling into poverty as a result of the sudden rise in the cost of living.

NB FOPL has now signed up to the PC agreement to pay for space used for FOPL activities at a reduced rate.

Looking forward

A year's extension to the current contract between FOPL, Shropshire Libraries and the PC to pay £3,500 pa towards the library's back office was agreed before Christmas. This runs out at the end of 2024. With the cost of living still rising and Shropshire Council budget cuts on the horizon it will be a challenging year ahead. It would be appreciated if the PC can keep us in touch with any developments. Councillor Nick Hignett is a FOPL Trustee and has been very supportive to date, along with PC Chair Duncan Fletecher and councillor Roger Evans.

We would ask that all Parish Councillors support FOPL to help keep our library open by encouraging the community to become library members, 100 Club Lottery Members and, where possible, canvass for more volunteers in their dealings with the community. I am sure you appreciate that many of our volunteers do an amazing job to make FOPL a success. However some need to retire from their roles as the years roll by, and a new generation of volunteers will need to take over. (We appreciate that some people do not necessarily want to join a committee, but are happy to help with individual events or ongoing activities e.g. caretaking the Pavilion Garden.)

The FOPL Committee are actively pursuing this and have 3 new committee members already who bring a wealth of expertise with them, but we need more. There isn't absolute clarity about whether it is a legal requirement to provide a library for Pontesbury and the surrounding Rea Valley area, so we have to make the case again as we did successfully in 2015/16.

FOPL asks that the Parish Council will work with us to do just this.

Our first step is to make the case for keeping the library open to Council Leader Lezley Picton & Robert Macey, postholder for Culture & Digital. Following our committee meeting

last Thursday I have invited comments from Members and active supporters in the first instance, and have been pleasantly overwhelmed with responses based on the following questions:

1. What's the value of a library in general and in particular Pontesbury Community Library which serves a hinterland of other villages and hamlets in the Rea Valley?
2. Why do you use the library? Do you know of other people prepared to make positive comments about the library and its resources?

The intention is to include a comments from a wide range of community members in a draft of the letter to the Council leader to reflect the wide support our library has.

BRIEF SUMMARY: EVENTS & ACTIVITIES 2023

Chip It for Charity

This invites the community to bring along their Christmas Trees for recycling by the Wood Matters' Team. This year it was held for the first time at the Ark Nursery carpark and coincided with both Twelfth Night and the FOPL coffee morning. We hope to use this venue in future years

12 Coffee mornings

Held on the first Saturday of each month and always well-attended. During the year we had a selection of speakers including Caroline Wright's presentation about Lily Chitty which scored top attendance for the year. We were also entertained by committee member readings for Valentine's Day, Michael Carding with his Loopy Lines Poetry, Lynn Evans talking about her art & craft pictures

'Songs & Stories for Spring' presented by Mary Keith & Sal Tonge

The library area was full as Mary taught Spring-themed acapella songs and Sal related stories to make us laugh and cry. Singing together made us all feel uplifted: a memorable occasion.

Spring Plant Sale

The weather this year didn't favour seedlings as much as in previous years. Tomato plants were a scarcity! However the event overall was again a great success.

Summer Reading Challenge

Dave Edwards, the renowned ex-Shrewsbury and Wales footballer, generously gave up his time to give out the awards for this in event which had a sports theme this year. His presence gave a high profile to encourage children's reading. He has indicated he'd be happy to work with us in the future.

Art & Craft activities

Six of these were held across the year in addition to those provided by Library Manager Beverley Link. Children were accompanied by adults, some of whom had not been library users. The Christmas Decorations workshops were held on two Saturdays in December. FOPL funded the materials. Two young people with Adult Social Care Provision also attended in their wheel chairs accompanied by their carers.

Primary School visits

Throughout the year there have been 10 visits by Pontesbury CE primary School, 2 by Minsterley School and a prospective visit by St Thomas & St Anne's Primary in Hanwood. Pontesbury children can walk to the Library, but FOPL provided £100 towards a coach for Minsterley's visits and will offer the same for Hanwood if needed. The Ark Nursery has also visited and intends to do so on Tuesdays with their oldest children in the future.

Pre-loved Clothes Event, held at the Congregational Church

We were overwhelmed with good quality children's clothes, including some school uniform items, toys and equipment. The items were free to take away. Those left over were gratefully received by Hope House charity shop in Shrewsbury.

Elvis comes to Pontesbury!

We ended 2023 with a fundraising evening featuring Andy King's tribute to Elvis Presley at the Public Hall. It was a huge hit! And it drew in an audience of younger people and older fans who enjoyed singing along, while giving a boost to FOPL funds.

Yvonne A. Davies, Acting Chair

Friends of Pontesbury Community Library March 2024