



**GUILLE-ALLES PUBLIC LIBRARY
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR 2020**

1 Introduction

2020 was something of an eventful year – for the world as a whole and for our corner of it.

The **Covid-19 pandemic** threw most of our plans for the Library this year into disarray. Of course, in Guernsey we quickly found ourselves in an astonishingly fortunate position by comparison with the mainland UK and most of the rest of the world. The efforts of Dr Brink and her Public Health team meant we were able to operate a normal library service from late June onwards, putting us in an all-but unique position in the British Isles, and perhaps in Europe.

But it was nonetheless a challenging year. The speed of events in February and March was somewhat overwhelming, and as cases began to rise on the Island, we took the decision to close the Library from Monday 23 March, just before lockdown began. We remained closed for 73 days until Thursday 4 June, by far the longest closure in our 138-year history.

What made shutting the doors particularly painful was that with people stuck at home and many feeling isolated, the library service was arguably needed as much as it had ever been. So, we did our best to adapt, moving events like rhyme times and reading groups online, and launching a contactless **Home Delivery Service** for the over-70s and those in most need. Our staff delivered books, audiobooks, DVDs and jigsaw puzzles to many hundreds of households in April, May and June, and feedback suggests this made a real difference to the lockdown experience for many people. As one example, one person wrote a note of thanks after receiving their delivery, saying: *“Thank you so much for the delivery of my library books this afternoon, you have made my day. I live alone and have run out of books to read, so this is very welcome.”*

Knowing that many people were in dire need of reading material and other entertainment, during lockdown we also made a big push to expand and promote our **digital collections**, seeing big increases in usage. In 2020 eBook loans rose 52% to more than 21,000, with checkouts of digital newspapers up 48% and digital magazines up 53%.

On Saturday 20 June, all restrictions were lifted, and the Library opened as normal again.

Away from the pandemic, 2020 ended in very difficult fashion for our staff as Jodie Knight, formerly our Deputy Chief Librarian and recently appointed Chief Librarian Designate, passed away from cancer just before Christmas at the age of 44. Jodie played an integral role in the development of the library service over the last few years and was poised to drive more changes and new initiatives as she prepared to take over the top job next autumn. As well as being deeply upsetting for the staff on a personal level, her loss leaves a big hole in the management team and one of the key priorities for 2021 will be to readjust and plan for the future without Jodie.

2020 was also the final year of our three-year **Strategic Plan**. There are four key areas that we wanted to develop during this period:

- Grow and sustain readers
- Expand the library experience
- Promote digital inclusion
- Make it easy to use the library

Continuing our efforts on the fourth of these areas, in February we joined many other libraries around the world in **abolishing fines** for overdue books. Worrying about fines was enough to put some people off using the service, and this was something that needed to change. The news was met very positively, and indeed many people returned books they had had at home for a long time – some as long as six years!

As well as removing punitive barriers and encouraging people back to the Library, dropping fines was an important step as the amount of administration involved in the process was clearly out of proportion to the amount of money it generated. Instead that valuable staff time can now be redirected to developing library services.

September saw the unveiling of our new-look **Story Tower**. A generous donation from the Sarah Groves Foundation went a long way towards funding a full refurbishment, making the

room at the very top of the library building much more accessible and transforming it into an atmospheric storytelling space.



These developments, along with our efforts during lockdown and the wide range of events outlined below, ensured considerable coverage for the Library in the local media, continuing to raise our profile in the community. The impact of lockdown means that usage statistics are, of course, down on 2019, but on a month-by-month basis they continue to show growth, including higher footfall in December 2020 (12,466) than December 2019 (12,170). There is little doubt that usage of the service is increasing compared to a few years ago.

As always, I must thank all the staff who, through their dedication and enthusiasm, helped the library service continue to flourish in this most unusual of years.

Guille-Allès

2020 statistics



123,000
visits

235,000
loans



2,100
new members

75,000
website visits



328
children's
activity sessions

1,700
Summer Reading
Challenge participants



2 Adult Services

2.1 EVENTS

2020 Highlights

Double Window

In January we hosted Double Window, an **Art for Guernsey exhibition** of artworks produced by inmates of Guernsey's Les Nicolles Prison. The exhibition ran for two weeks from 15 January, including a Private View event attended by around 150 people. It attracted substantial coverage in the local media, and both verbal and written feedback was extremely positive, including: *"I love this, sharing this artwork in the community is such a neat idea. I went to see the exhibition this morning with a friend, we enjoyed it immensely and thought it was really well thought out and displayed."*

Orwell Season

In January we commemorated the **70th anniversary of the death of George Orwell** with two special events, organised in partnership with local arts collective Thinking On Your Feet. On Tuesday 21st (the exact anniversary) we welcomed more than 40 people for an evening dedicated to Orwell's life and work, with poetry, animation, live music from the band Clameur de Haro, and a talk from Deputy Chris Green entitled 'George Orwell and I'. To round off the 'season', on Friday 24th we staged a free screening of the classic film Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Get Loud in the Library

In January we partnered with local organisations Guernsey Mind and Man Club to host an event supporting **men's mental health**. Four speakers shared their mental health journeys and discussed the role Man Club has played in their recovery. More than 20 people attended, with some also sharing their own experiences in a Q&A at the end. We hope to repeat what was clearly a very worthwhile event in 2021.

Book Bingo

Our Book Bingo **reading challenge for adults** is now firmly established as an annual event. The aim of the challenge is to read nine books in nine different categories, which this year included 'Debut Novel' and 'Banned Book'. Sponsors including the Fermain Valley Hotel and the Old Quarter restaurant provided us with prizes for the winners. This year the challenge proved popular once again, with more than 100 finishers and three lucky winners. One winner told us: *"I've loved it. It's been a real challenge to get myself back into reading after having a baby - I attempted Book Bingo last year and failed, as I just kept running out of time to read! So I was really proud of myself that I finished this time."*

Guernsey Literary Festival

This year's Literary Festival was cancelled due to the pandemic, but over the summer we hosted several rescheduled events including a prizegiving ceremony for the **WriteStuff**, the Festival's creative writing competition for local schoolchildren (for which two of our staff serve as filter judges), and a talk from local author **James Partridge**, best known as founder of the charity Changing Faces.



In Living Memory

In November we hosted a launch event for *In Living Memory*, a new book about the Occupation curated by local artist Olympia McEwan and published by Blue Ormer. The book features first-hand accounts from **Occupation survivors**, original essays and poetry, and

Occupation-inspired artworks from Olympia and other local artists. At the event, Occupation survivor Molly Bihet and evacuee Diana Nicole shared memories of their experience during the war years and reflected on how it had shaped the rest of their lives.

A full house of 60 people attended, and feedback was excellent. One person who attended with her children wrote to us afterwards, saying: *“Thank you so much for organising this event. It’s just such a lovely memory for my girls, to have heard from people who lived through it themselves.”*

2.2 COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

Community Libraries

The community libraries continue to show slow growth but are much appreciated by their users. Popular **rhyme time sessions** are held each week at the community libraries at La Nouvelle Maritainne and St Saviour’s Community Centre, while weekly **IT Help sessions** take place at La Nouvelle Maritainne and Rosaire Court.

Special craft events for children took place at the community libraries in October half-term and the Christmas holidays and proved highly popular, with between 50 and 60 children attending each. One parent commented afterwards: *“When I was growing up in the west there weren’t really things like this for us youngsters to get involved with, it was more centred around town, so this is a fantastic way to engage more people”.*

Rhyme Times

The Outreach Team continue to run story and rhyme time sessions in numerous settings every week during term-time, including Bright Beginnings, the Kindred Centre and Homestart. In total 77 such sessions were delivered in 2020, reaching more than 1,000 children.

Rhyme Together

At the beginning of the year the Outreach Team worked closely with the Guernsey Voluntary Service to launch Rhyme Together, a new **intergenerational story and rhyme session** at the Jubilee Day Centre. The older adults at the centre joined families with

children under 4 for stories and rhymes. The first session took place on 26 February and was a huge success, selling out and drawing very positive feedback from the families and older adults who attended. Unfortunately, subsequent sessions were cancelled due to lockdown, but resumed with further success later in the year.

Tea & Tales

Throughout the year the Outreach Team worked to develop a programme of events in **care homes** and other settings like the Guernsey Alzheimer's Association Centre. At Tea & Tales sessions people make friends, talk about books and listen to readings of poetry and short stories. It has been very rewarding to see people be stimulated by these readings, including some who don't engage in many other activities – after one visit, a care home staff member wrote to us to say, *"I was really encouraged by your visit and I can see how storytelling unlocks doors that are usually closed."*

Prison Library

This year our Fiction Librarian Tracey Woosley began visiting the Prison once a fortnight to run one-to-one sessions with **prisoners struggling with literacy**. There are generally four or five people each morning and Tracey offers 30-minute appointments with each.

Tracey and Outreach Librarian Emily Pailing have worked with the education department at the Prison to restart the Shannon Trust scheme, which encourages **peer to peer training** for prisoners who need to improve their reading skills. They have also worked to encourage prisoners, on release, to visit the Library and make use of our resources, and so far, this seems to be producing some success.

3 Children & Young People's Services

Though usage statistics are of course down on 2019 due to lockdown, in the months we were open the Children's Library has once again been extremely busy, further demonstrating the impact of the refurbishment that was completed in late 2018.

Lockdown

During lockdown, the Children's Team compiled a collection of '**Stay At Home**' resources on our website. A vast amount of educational and entertainment content was being released online, to the point that some parents might have felt overwhelmed or unsure how to determine the best or most appropriate content for their children. We hoped that by gathering resources on our website we could help signpost these parents towards the things they might find most useful, including story times, drawing clubs, and homework resources. The page was viewed more than 600 times, and several parents commented that they knew they could be confident using the resources if the Library had recommended them.

The Children's Team were also very busy on social media. A virtual **Lego club** gave children themed Lego challenges, including 'Fantastic Beasts' and 'Spectacular Spacecraft'.

The team also broadcast numerous **live rhyme times** on Facebook. The first took place on Friday 20 March, just before lockdown; there then followed a 6-week break during the strictest phase of lockdown, before resuming at the end of April and continuing once a week throughout May. The first broadcast was viewed more than 8,000 times and attracted 247 comments, including:

'Thank you so much for keeping the smiles and laughter going.'

'Thank you for making our day!'

3.1 EVENTS

Regular Activities

The Children's Team continue to run weekly **story and rhyme times** for babies and toddlers, with more than 1,000 children attending sessions in 2020. Demand for our Baby Bounce sessions has grown to the point that we have recently started running them all year round, not just in term-time, with sessions in the holidays branded **The Baby Social**.

Our holiday book clubs continue to prove popular, with a record 19 children attending the **Chatterbooks** session for 8-12 year-olds in February half term.

Dr Brink

In July we welcomed Guernsey's Director of Public Health for a special children's event called **Story Time with Dr Brink**. Having become something of a local celebrity thanks to her handling of the pandemic, unsurprisingly there was high demand for tickets. Dr Brink reprised her famous reading of 'A Squash and a Squeeze', before answering questions about the pandemic from the children in the audience. The event went extremely well – we had excellent feedback from parents, and Dr Brink seemed to thoroughly enjoy herself.



Summer Reading Challenge

Guernsey's fortunate situation meant we were one of a very small number of libraries able to offer a 'normal' Summer Reading Challenge in 2020. This year's Challenge had the theme of '**Silly Squad**' and 1,640 Bailiwick children signed up to read six books over the summer holidays, with 970 finishers.

Drag Queen Story Hour

Following the success of the inaugural event in 2019, we hosted two Drag Queen Story Hour sessions in 2020: one in January and one to coincide with Channel Islands Pride in September. More than 50 children attended each event along with parents and grandparents. We had good coverage in the local media, and feedback from attendees was

extremely positive – one parent wrote a blog post about the event, which we republished on our own blog: *“What an amazing morning, I can’t rate it highly enough and if you haven’t had the chance to attend the Drag Queen Story Hour then I highly recommend it next time Aida’s in Guernsey.”*



Fairtrade Guernsey

In March we partnered with Fairtrade Guernsey for a special event in the Children’s Library giving children the chance to learn all about Fairtrade. Through different activities, crafts and films, the Fairtrade Guernsey staff shared the stories of the people around the world who grow our food and drink, looking particularly at chocolate (always a popular subject!)

Summer Activities

The Children’s Team ran a packed programme of events over the summer, with story times and other activities based either at the Library or out in the community. A **Story Walk** at Delancey Park was attended by more than 70 children, while a **Codebreaking** activity in the Children’s Library, run in partnership with Guernsey Museums, was attended by more than 40.

Half Term Activities

Highlights of October half term included a **Superhero Story Time**, attended by 45 children, and a **Halloween Story Walk**, which led 56 children plus carers on a spooky night-time walk through town, stopping for stories along the way and finishing with crafts in the Children's Library.



Christmas Activities

We ran a packed programme of activities during the Christmas holidays, including a **Christmas Story Walk**, festive stories in the Story Tower, Elf Stories in the Children's Library on Christmas Eve, and a Board Games Day between Christmas and New Year.

4 Future Plans

One of the key objectives for 2021 will be to implement the transition to a **new library management system**. As our contract with current provider Capita ends, we are taking the opportunity to switch to an alternative provider in Axiell, as their offering is now a demonstrable improvement in terms of both cost and functionality. This presents exciting new possibilities for the service, though since we have been using the same LMS provider, in

various iterations, since the 1980s, it is undoubtedly a big change! The priority for our staff will be to execute the transition 'behind the scenes' as seamlessly as possible, without impacting the public.

A new addition to the service in 2021 will be the **Fab Lab**, due to open on the third floor of the Library in the spring. The Fab Lab is a workshop offering public access to new technologies like 3D printing and other computer-controlled tools that give people the opportunity to make almost anything. A key aim for the staff this year will be to launch the Fab Lab and develop a programme of events.

Other plans for 2021 include a reorganisation of the **layout in the Hayward Room** on the second floor to improve the study areas and make some of our more popular stock areas like travel guides more accessible; an expansion of our '**Library of Things**', currently comprising litter pickers and bat detectors, to include other loanable objects like cake tins; and to explore more opportunities for sponsorship and third-party events in the Library.

All these plans, of course, are dependent on the island's **public health** situation remaining in the relatively happy place it was in at the end of 2020. We have contingency plans in place to keep the service running should social distancing or further lockdown restrictions be reinstated, though of course we hope they won't be needed. But if 2020 has shown us anything, it is that you never know what is around the corner.

Whatever happens in 2021, we will continue to work hard to grow the library service and serve our community and keep looking ahead to make plans for how the service can evolve in the future.