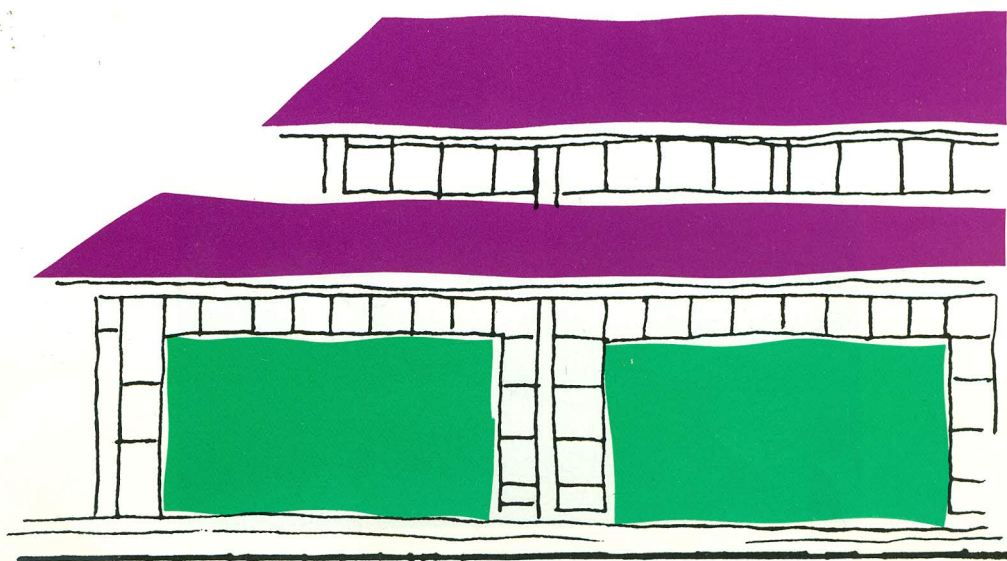


The New South Benfleet Library



THE OLD LIBRARY

The County Council's Library service in Benfleet originally started in the 1930s, located in the Council Mixed School (now South Benfleet County Primary School) opposite the present building.

The Headmaster agreed to the use of the school hall for two evenings a week provided "the usual Library custom of silence was observed". In 1938 opening hours were extended to include Saturdays from 6 to 8.30 p.m.

A service was maintained throughout the war years, (though the blackout made things difficult and opening hours were constantly changed) and in 1940 the Chairman of the Benfleet Library sub-committee cancelled the Librarian's holiday because he felt the Library was fulfilling an important function in raising the morale of the people.

The Library service was always free for the residents of Benfleet, but a charge of 2s. 6d. (12½p) a year was made to those outside the district, and 5s. (25p) to those not resident in the County. The Librarian was paid £35 per annum.

In 1943, the Library was transferred from the School Hall to its present site, which was rented by the Education Committee as an annex to the school from the Elim Mission Trust. The rent was £52 per annum. A preaching desk was considered to be "rather cumbersome" and was removed.

Later the Hall was purchased outright by the County Council, and a service from the Mission Hall continued until the 1990s, when the old building had become unsuited in size, accommodation and character for the requirements of a library service and its clients. A replacement became a priority.



THE TRANSITION

The location of the new Library was of major importance, and a site with High Street frontage was considered extremely desirable. Various options were considered but the building on the existing site was thought to be the most cost effective and realistic proposal.

On behalf of the County Librarian, the Director of Property Services for Essex County Council commissioned W.S. Atkins Property Services to undertake the South Benfleet Project; the main contractor was A.W. Hardy Southend.

Work on the new Library began on July 18 1994 and a temporary service was provided in the old Barclays Bank further down the High Street.



Meeting the brief on this site with a single storey building has resulted in a very tight fit, but architect Mark Harris has successfully designed a building which although demonstrably a public building, has a human friendly scale and avoids dominating adjacent buildings.

Great care has been taken to make the building environmentally sensitive, and natural light and ventilation, as well as energy efficient heating, are used effectively in its design. Roof glazing provides ventilation and maximises the use of natural light, which saves energy and reduces heat build up associated with artificial light. Solar gain is minimised by overhanging eaves and ceiling blinds.

The external colour scheme was chosen to complement the elements, the dark grey of the structural plinth and supporting roof, the light buff of the brickwork and the green of the windows, are carried through into the interior, with the addition of purple to complement the green.

Customers will now enjoy a greatly enhanced service from a building that is almost four times the size of the old, and with extended opening hours.

THE NEW LIBRARY

It is anticipated that the use made of the Library will double, and generous funding has been allocated for new materials to support this; a shelf stock of some 15,000 items is displayed (twice the number in the old library) and now includes videos and compact discs.

The new Library also offers study seating, an induction loop for those with hearing impairment and facilities for disabled people, as well as a small exhibition area and full access to Essex Library's Automated Network - ELAN.

The people of Benfleet have always appreciated and made use of the service that Essex Libraries has offered, and they can now expect the standard of facilities and range of material they deserve.



The South Benfleet Library
opened officially on
Wednesday June 21 1995
by
HRH The Duchess of Gloucester



Essex County Council
Libraries