

Barnet Museum

Survived a Nazi Bomb, Survived Council Cuts and now...Surviving the Pandemic?



Barnet Museum is the centre of history and heritage in the town of Chipping Barnet. “Chipping” means “market” and Barnet was a prominent market town (with a royal charter in 1189) and the only place in Greater London with a registered battlefield (The Battle of Barnet in the Wars of the Roses 1471). The Museum, itself, has a long and illustrious history.....

In 1927, Bertram Ralph Leftwich, a Civil Servant, wrote to the local newspaper claiming that the town of Barnet was losing its identity and that buildings and traditions were changing for the worse.

He proposed and the setting up of the BARNET RECORDS SOCIETY to collect documents and artefacts to keep alive the history of the town.

As the artefacts collection grew, the Society began keeping an ad hoc museum, housed in local buildings (schools, Council Offices and the like).

In 1938, HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL and BARNET URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL arranged for the Society to use 31/33 Wood Street premises near the High Street in High Barnet to exhibit the artefacts and store the archive of documents and, in March 1938, BARNET MUSEUM was born.



The Barnet Record Society changed its name to the BARNET & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY because “Records” were being confused with gramophone records!



In 1940 the 33 Wood Street part of the building was completely destroyed by a German bomb. The collection was previously moved for safekeeping and later returned to the refurbished 31 Wood Street part of the building.

Over the next period the Museum and History Society continued as a steady part of Barnet life; its area of interest (its “catchment”) included High Barnet, Underhill, Arkley, Hadley, Hadley Wood, East Barnet, New Barnet, Whetstone and Totteridge. Occasionally and exceptionally, items from other parts of Barnet, and sometimes further afield, are accepted into the collection because of their special importance to Barnet.

In 1965, under the London Government Act 1963, the areas covered by Barnet Urban and District Council (BUDC) and East Barnet and Vale District Council (EBVDC) became part of the new LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET. The Museum was day-to-day largely unaffected by the change, but the ownership of the premises and funding slowly became major issues. The voluntary-run History Society had always been funded by a combination of the Herts County Council and the Barnet Urban District Council; funding and premises ownership issues became clouded but were a relatively low priority for the Council.

In the 1970s there was a considerable refurbishment of the interior of the Museum addressing, among other things, woodworm.

The Museum had a relatively stable and quiet existence over the 1980s and 1990s. Under the leadership of Dr Gillian Gear (who sadly died in 2015), the Society developed a reputation for sound research and study of local history and hosting local archives. The Museum became more professional in its dealing with collecting, interpreting and exhibiting objects, attaining Arts Council (formerly MLA) Accreditation as a Registered Museum.

In 2009, Barnet Council began moves to close local museums. It succeeded with the closure of Church Farmhouse Museum (which was Council owned and funded) in Hendon. Barnet Museum’s different governance structure (a registered charity), the lack of clarity about ownership of 31 Wood Street and huge public support saw the Council fail to close the Museum.

In order to articulate the joint nature of the Museum and Society, the Society changed its name to BARNET MUSEUM AND LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY (BMLHS).

In 2018 after much wrangling, BMLHS surrendered its claimed security of tenure in exchange for a 125-year lease at peppercorn rent on 31 Wood Street. The Museum’s home was secured.

THE PHYSIC WELL is a mineral water spring-fed well on (what was called) Barnet Common. The Well was a popular source of medicinal waters for many years before its most famous appearance - in Samuel Pepys Diary in 1664 and 1667. The Well fell out of favour being largely covered up by the 1840s.



In the late 1920s a Council estate was built around the area of the Well. In 1937, a housing in the Tudor style was built over the Well. There was probably an effort to boost tourist/heritage interest in the area – one of the nearby new roads was named “Pepys Crescent”; however, the outbreak of war two years later saw the Wellhouse abandoned. Over the next decades, the Wellhouse gradually deteriorated, although it was remembered in the naming of The Wellhouse Hospital Trust (Barnet Hospital). Barnet Museum unofficially kept the Wellhouse in reasonable condition and opened it occasionally to researchers and interested parties. In 2018, Historic England, The Heritage of London Trust, Barnet Museum and

Barnet Council refurbished the Wellhouse and brought it back to its 1937 condition. In 2019, the Museum opened the Wellhouse to the public every month from February to November. In November 2019, the Museum signed a 50-year Lease with the Council and will continue to manage the facility.

The Museum has a Loan Box of Battle of Barnet replicas and educational materials which is lent out to local schools.

The Museum also runs an outreach programme for care homes and dementia sufferers, offering an opportunity to remember and relive (mainly) the 1950s.

WHAT IS IN THE MUSEUM?

There is a **TIMELINE** of the history of Barnet Town around the Museum.

GROUND FLOOR, BACK ROOM: medieval history and archaeology focussing on the Battle of Barnet 1471.

GROUND FLOOR, FRONT ROOM: household items given to us by Barnet residents; kitchen, laundry, house-cleaning, George Medal of Joseph Carley WW2, Pub Signs (The Wellington and The Salisbury), Shop.

STAIRS: gallery of paintings, prints and photographs, replica Battle of Barnet banners.

BASEMENT: Costumes (including the Pearly King, Queen and Princess of Barnet), Dolls, Toys, Embroidery Samplers, Don Cochrane WW2 tribute.

TOP FLOOR, FRONT ROOM: Barnet in WW2 (including D-Day, Rationing, Fire Brigade, Bomb Maps and Unexploded Bomb Casing), High Street, Cinema in Barnet, Schools, Royal Commemorative China, Hospitals (including Friern Hospital) and Medicine, Churches, Pubs, Milk Cart, Achievements by Local People.

TOP FLOOR, BACK ROOM: Barnet in WW1 (including artefacts from the Cuffley and Potters Bar Airships, Margaret Road School Memorial, The War of C Smith, Death Pennies, Trench Art), Hadley Wood, Barnet Football Club, Recreation and Sports in Barnet, Barnet Commemorative China, Law and Order, Victorian/Edwardian Salon.

STORES AND ARCHIVES: The Museum holds an extensive archive of local history documents, maps and photographs. In addition, the Museum has many objects and items of costume in store.

PHYSIC WELL, In the Wellhouse there is a display of Clay Smoking Pipes.

Barnet Museum has a website (www.barnetmuseum.co.uk), a Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/barnetmuseum) and a Twitter account (@MuseumBarnet).