

## THE SANDOWN FREE LIBRARY

By Dave Bambrough 2011 (part two)

One of the Lake members thought that if Ferncliff (half way along Beachfield Road) became the library location the Lake members might be more inclined to vote for the scheme. One Sandown member expressed the opinion that the library would be a failure, likening it to be "a dead horse"!

The Chairman stated that he regretted the adverse comments saying that there was more than roads and drains to be catered for within a growing town. The town he thought had stood still long enough and must be lifted out of its rut. He prayed the Council would not be so short sighted as to reject the offer. The motion to procede was again carried.

By late February 1904 the question of the site had become of prime importance. Two had been dismissed, one in Winchester Road and one in Ferncliff was also ruled out due to it being home to the Town Band on occasions. The required silence accorded to a library would be at a premium with a band in the near vicinity. Most importantly Mr Carnegie's offer only applied to a new building, not a patched up old structure.

The June 1904 committee meeting heard three reports. The first and most important was an offer, by way of a gift from Mr Alexander Keller (builder of the Savoy Hotel) of the present site that the Library now stands on. The committee recommended that subject to Mr Carnegie's approval, Mr Keller's kind offer be accepted.

**TO BUILDERS & CONTRACTORS.**

**T**HE SANDOWN URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL are prepared to receive TENDERS for the erection of a Public Library at Sandown.

Drawings and Specification can be seen at the Offices of the Architect, Mr. James Newman, Thornton, Sandown, from whom copies of quantities can be obtained, when ready, on payment of a deposit of 5s.

Tenders to be sent in to the undersigned not later than 4 p.m. on Tuesday, October 10th next, endorsed "Tender for Library."

The Council do not bind themselves to accept the lowest or any tender.

(Signed)  
WILLIAM H. WOOLDRIDGE,  
Clerk to the Council.

September 22nd, 1904.

Discord over the matter continued however, fractiously at times. The Lake contingent continued to voice opinion against the new library, accompanied by one or two Sandown members. Mr Bayliss a Lake member argued that if Mr Keller's offer were accepted the library would be nearer Yaverland and Brading than Lake? A comment from a Mr Dore was that if Lake people did not know what was good for them, they must be taught!!

There had been other site offers nearer to Lake, one from Lord Alverstone in Beachfield Road and the Town Hall. Despite the opposition the the motion was carried, 10-3 in favour, with one abstention. The new library was now to go ahead, at last.

In September the draft lease of the proposed site from Mr Keller to the Council for 999 years was read, with a copy sent to Mr Carnegie. As of yet official plans for

the building had not yet been drawn. Pencil drawn sketches had been forwarded to Mr Keller for approval, whereupon his acceptance would then require proper drawings.

The following month the controversy continued, eventually sanity reigned, but not before the following criticism had been levelled. A letter had been received from Mr Keller asking the Council if they would reconsider their decision as to whom the contract had been awarded. He said it had come to his knowledge that Mr James (who's tender had been accepted) had been informed by a member of the Council that the tender must be under £1800 to be successful. Also a desire of Mr Keller was that the contract should be awarded to Sandown Builders and that Sandown workmen should be employed on the work. (When the time came, many were.)



The fence donated by Alexander Keller.

The Council instructed the Clerk to reply to Mr Keller stating that they could not reconsider Mr James tender as the matter had advanced so far. It was also a matter of common knowledge that £200 of Mr Carnegie's gift of £2000 had to be provided for fixtures, & architect's fees, etc. Therefore the Council felt justified in accepting Mr James tender, not one of £135 above. Despite that, the Architect (Mr James Newman) reported that Mr Keller had kindly agreed to give the Council the wooden fence around the Library site.

Plans were prepared, and in early January 1905 the stones commemorating the generosity of Mr. Andrew Carnegie and Mr. Alexander Keller

were laid. The Carnegie stone was laid by Major J. E. B. Sedy, D.S.O., who then represented the Isle of Wight in Parliament, who said that he hoped this building would be the gateway to knowledge and freedom for all the inhabitants of this fair town for many years to come. The stone recording Alexander Keller's generosity to the town was laid by Mr. V. J. Board, who was Vice-Chairman of the District Council during the year, and was also the proposer of the resolution making an appeal to Mr. Carnegie for financial assistance. By early May 1904 the construction of the building was well underway. A third payment of £400 had been made to the builder.

Lord Alverstone (Lord Chief Justice of England) expressed his pleasure at being invited to perform the opening ceremony, which he would gladly do if the date was fixed for a Saturday prior to August 12<sup>th</sup>. Mr Dore (Councillor) expressed gratitude for Lord Alverstone's gesture and suggested that Mr Carnegie might like to be present. (Not to be).

A further Council meeting in June 1905 recommended the following; that a pathway be paved around the new building, lighting installed throughout the building by electricity (rather than gas), advertisements for a curator and librarian be placed in local papers and that a further £100 be paid to the contractor. By now the Council had received 39 applications for librarian. The library buildings were recommended to be insured for £2000.

As requested by Lord Alverstone the grand opening took place one week prior to August 12<sup>th</sup> on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July 1905. Mr T. A. Wright, Chairman of the District Council, presided at the ceremony which took place in the public reading room with many other Island and local dignitaries in attendance.

By October the total number of books within the library was 2,745. Further alterations and additions during 1906 were; Mr H. Atrill was engaged to cut more deeply the words "Free Library" over the entrance. A ladies room was due to be opened during June, July, August and September, until eight o'clock each day, and until dark during the remaining months of the year. Up until June 21<sup>st</sup> 1906 108 people had used the reference Library, whilst the total number of borrowers were 494 and a total of 6,233 books had been issued. In addition to public reading and writing rooms, the building included a reference library and a most interesting and instructive collection of fossils gathered from around the Island, which commanded the attention of all interested in geology. (Now housed in the new Dinosaur Isle situated at the Eastern end of Culver Parade.)

Within a few weeks donations were flooding in. As well as Mr Carnegie's £2000, there was £25 from a Miss Richardson, (equates to £2370 in 2010) towards the purchase of books. Mr T. A. Wright gave £10 and 140 books. The Rev. Storrs, 24 volumes and a bound volume of "Quiver". A Mr Parsons offered a present of a 2-dial clock and 300 books. Mr Board (Chairman) and Mr Bynner promised £5 each towards the purchase of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The committee welcomed any offer of books or money to assist with the purchase of books or to meet current expenses. It was decided that a box would be placed in the entrance hall for voluntary donations. (This was the beginning, how will it end?)



**An early photograph of the library complete with the Jubilee Fountain.**