Carnforth Library
1936-2026

Ninety Years at the Heart of the Community

Carnforth Library marks its 90th anniversary in 2026, having opened on 17 September 1936. Fittingly, the anniversary falls during the National Year of Reading, providing an opportunity to celebrate both the history of the library and the continuing importance of books and reading in community life.

This booklet has been produced by volunteers from the community heritage project, *Carnforth Library: 1936-2026 and Beyond*. Through archive research and conversations with librarians and library users, past and present, the volunteers have traced the library's origins, its development over time and the stories of some of the remarkable people connected with it.

Carnforth Library stands as a lasting legacy to those who established, supported and used the service over the past 90 years. We are grateful to everyone who contributed their time, knowledge and enthusiasm to the project and especially the volunteers who undertook the research and writing of this booklet.

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Preface

Celebrating Carnforth Library, 1936-2026

I was first taught the wonderful word 'serendipity' – the art of coming across unexpected and pleasant surprises – in the context of meandering the bookshelves of a library. Nothing compares with the thrill of the potential within those dust jackets, the invitation to explore new worlds or revisit familiar favourites. The library is one of the most democratic of spaces, open to all. It is the cornerstone of community, and its value extends far beyond its shelves.

Global Link's heritage projects explore the relationship between the past and the present, helping people connect with the lives and experiences of those who came before them. The group of volunteers who gathered for this project were inspired by a variety of motivations including local pride and historical curiosity, a love of books and of reading, and an awareness of what can be lost when the value of local libraries and the host of services they offer goes unrecognised. This publication introduces you to their findings.

Over the past 90 years, Carnforth Library has successfully negotiated all the changes in the town, a world war and a global pandemic, serving its members from the analogue to the digital age. Although you will encounter a rapidly changing world in these pages, the role of the library has nonetheless remained essentially the same since its inception: to open doors, broaden horizons, and bring people together. In celebrating its heritage, we acknowledge the continuing significance of Carnforth Library today, and look forward to its future.

Corinna Peniston-Bird, Professor of History, Lancaster University
June 2026

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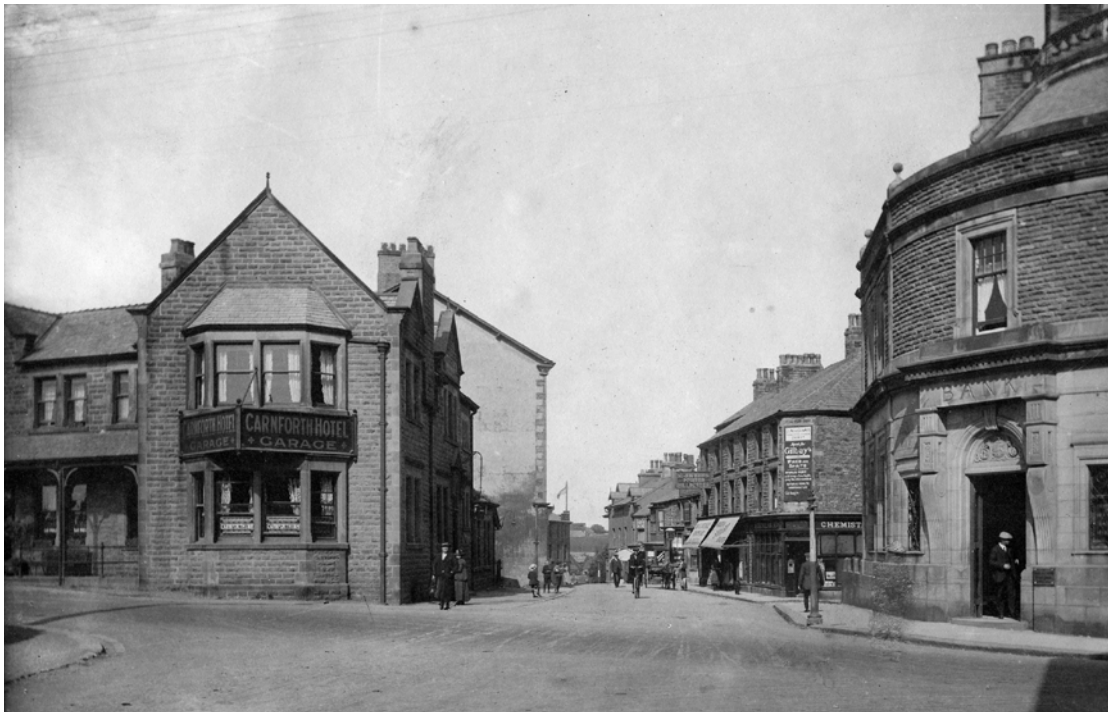
Market Street in Carnforth in the 1890s.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

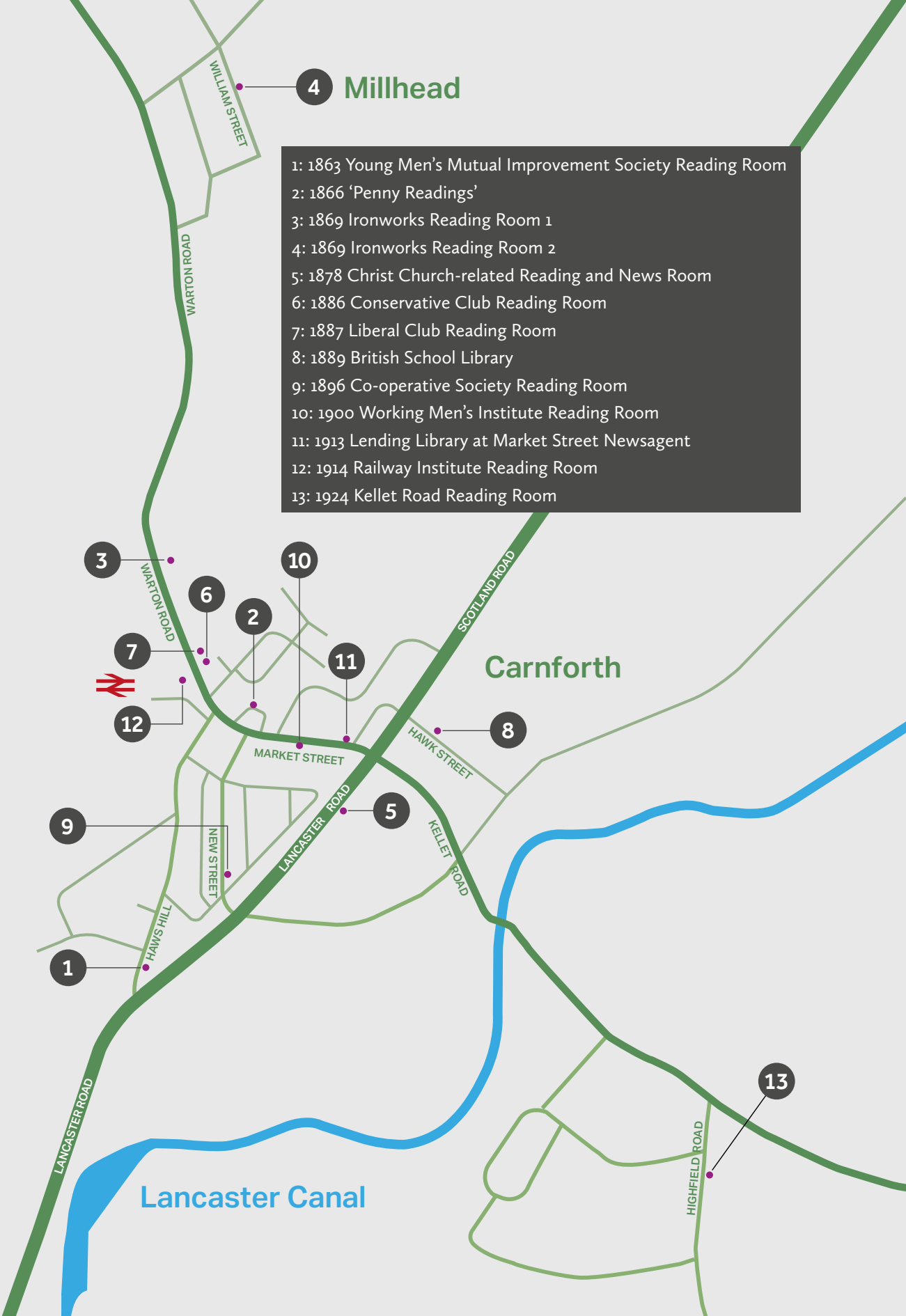
1. Carnforth's First Reading Rooms and Lending Libraries

Carnforth grew rapidly from a small village into a bustling town in the second half of the 19th century, as the expansion of the railway and related industries drew workers and their families to the area. Rising literacy, together with a growing interest in education and self-improvement among Britain's working population, increased demand for books, newspapers and other reading material.

In 1863, the *Lancaster Observer and Morecambe Chronicle* reported that at a Carnforth workmen's supper it was 'regretted that there was no library or newsroom… where working men could retire to during long winter evenings'. Reading rooms and lending libraries appeared in Carnforth soon after, as they did in towns and villages across the country, although access was often limited to men and those able to pay a subscription. These spaces were also promoted as respectable alternatives to public houses, reflecting the influence of the temperance movement and its support for sober, improving forms of leisure.



Market Street in Carnforth in the 1920s.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.



1: 1863 Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society Reading Room
2: 1866 'Penny Readings'
3: 1869 Ironworks Reading Room 1
4: 1869 Ironworks Reading Room 2
5: 1878 Christ Church-related Reading and News Room
6: 1886 Conservative Club Reading Room
7: 1887 Liberal Club Reading Room
8: 1889 British School Library
9: 1896 Co-operative Society Reading Room
10: 1900 Working Men's Institute Reading Room
11: 1913 Lending Library at Market Street Newsagent
12: 1914 Railway Institute Reading Room
13: 1924 Kellet Road Reading Room

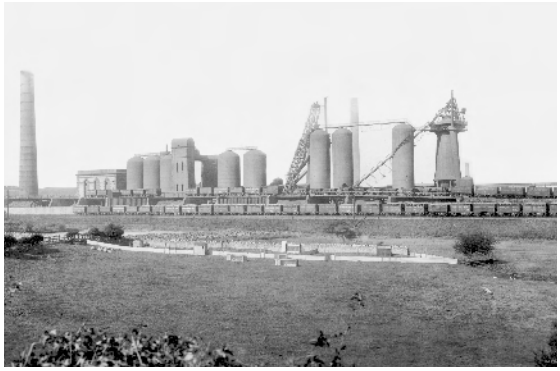
Mapping Carnforth's Early Reading History

1 The Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society opened the first recorded reading room in Carnforth in 1863. It was located at the National School, Carnforth's first school, which opened in 1850. The school also had a lecture room upstairs that was regularly used for public educational events.

The reading room was open every night except Sunday, with a library of 100 volumes open on Wednesday evenings. Subscription was 1s 1d per quarter. By January 1864 there were 18 honorary members, 20 subscribers and 200 volumes, with membership now offered to women at 6d per quarter.

2 'Penny readings' for railway and iron workers were held at what was designated the Carnforth town hall but known as the 'Wooden Hut' on Robin Hill, today the War Memorial Gardens.

3 Carnforth Ironworks opened in 1864 next to the railway station. By 1869 a large reading room for workers had been established.



Carnforth Ironworks.
Copyright The Francis Frith Collection.

4 Another small reading room for Ironworks staff was located at the home of an employee at 23 William Street, Millhead.

5 A committee of 18 local 'well-known gentlemen' formed in 1878 to provide a reading and news room for Carnforth. The first vicar of Christ Church, Rev J A Fidler, was appointed vice chair. Rev Fidler had previously been involved in the establishment of a new Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society Reading Room which had opened in 1871 with a lending library of 150 volumes.

Christ Church services were held at the National School until the church was built in 1873, so it is likely that the 1871 reading room was located there, though we don't know the location of the 1878 room.

Christ Church.
Copyright The Francis Frith Collection.

6 The Conservative Club opened in 1886 with a news room and billiards room.

7 The Liberal Club opened in 1887 and had a reading room. In 1912 a new Liberal Club, including a reading room, was established at Launds House at the corner of Stanley Street and Lancaster Road.

Warton Road, adjacent to Carnforth Railway Station where the Conservative and Liberal Clubs were located. Lancashire Archives and Local History.

8 The Congregational Church opened a school chapel in 1880 with adult and children's Sunday school classes. Within three years the chapel was also used as a day school on weekdays, known as the British School. By 1889 the school had expanded, with more classrooms and a library.

The British School relocated to new premises on North Road in 1914 with headmaster R T Barnard, but a library remained at the Church for some time: 'Quiet Evenings' with readings by the minister were held there during Lent in the early 1920s.

Carnforth Congregational Church.
Copyright The Francis Frith Collection.

9 The Co-operative Society in Britain was committed to educational provision. Carnforth Co-op opened their large new building on New Street in 1888, launching a reading room for men in 1896.

The Society had an educational department which provided regular lectures in Carnforth, Arnside and Silverdale. The Education Chair was Mr A T Berry, who would later become involved in Carnforth Library Committee. The Society's education work continued until the 1960s, with elocution lessons in Carnforth's Co-op Hall.

Carnforth Co-operative Society building.
Copyright The Francis Frith Collection.

10 The Working Men's Institute, a temperance society, had a reading room above a shop at 19 Market Street.

11 There was a lending library at the newsagent at 38 Market Street, today the home of Carnforth Bookshop.

From 1887, two local newspapers were published here – *Carnforth Monthly Reminder* and *Carnforth Weekly News*.

Market Street lending library.
Original source unknown.

12 The new Railway Institute provided facilities for 500 men employed by the three railway companies. Their reading room was at the south side, adjoining the passenger station (now demolished).

Carnforth Railway Station.
Cumbrian Railways Association.

13 A reading room was established somewhere on Kellet Road in 1924.

In 1928 a new Reading and Recreation room was opened at the southwest end of Highfield Terrace, providing a venue for those living further away from the centre of Carnforth.

Kellet Road, Carnforth.
Copyright The Francis Frith Collection.

2. The Beginnings of Carnforth's Public Library Service

Despite a growing appetite for reading, access to books remained uneven in the early 20th century, particularly in rural areas and smaller towns such as Carnforth. This began to change in the 1920s, when new legislation and funding supported the expansion of public library provision.

Lancashire County Library was founded in 1924 with financial support from the Carnegie UK Trust. Under the leadership of its energetic and highly capable first County Librarian, the service was initially organised around a network of local library 'centres', supported by volunteer librarians. One such centre opened at North Road Council School in Carnforth in 1926, marking the first stage in the town's journey towards a permanent public library.

Establishment of Lancashire County Library

The Public Libraries Act of 1919 enabled county councils for the first time to become library authorities and levy extra money from county rates to fund library services in areas previously underserved. The development of county libraries owed much to the Carnegie UK Trust, which not only helped shape the legislation but also provided grants to assist the set-up costs of county library services.

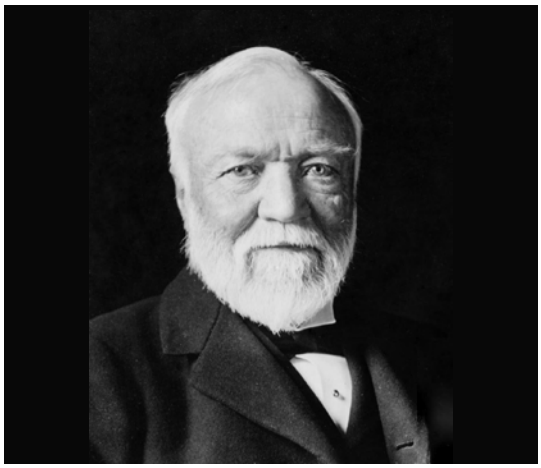
Lancashire County Council adopted the Public Libraries Act on 7 August 1924 and shortly afterwards was awarded a grant of £4,000 by the Trust, of which at least £3,400 was to be spent on books.

Lancashire County Library's first headquarters, established in 1925, were at 1 Fishergate Hill, Preston. Preston Digital Archive.

John Cowley was appointed Lancashire County Librarian from a field of 77 applicants in November 1924 and tasked with setting up the County Library. Following the model favoured by the Carnegie UK Trust, library 'centres' were initially formed, mainly in schools but also in village halls, women's institutes and other community spaces. These centres were supplied with a circulating collection of books from the County Library Headquarters in Preston and staffed locally by volunteers.

The first Lancashire library centre opened in May 1925. By March 1926 there were 116 across the county, including in Carnforth.

Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919), Steel Magnate and Library Philanthropist



Wikimedia Commons (public domain).

Andrew Carnegie emigrated as a boy in 1848 from Scotland to America with his impoverished family. He went on to become one of the richest men of all time, embracing new steel-making processes and coupling intelligence and charm with business acumen, risk-taking and ruthless ambition. Yet he never forgot his roots.

Believing passionately in self-improvement for the working man and the educative value of reading, he funded 2,509 Carnegie libraries worldwide and launched a family of trusts and foundations for the advancement of education, science, culture and international peace. The Carnegie UK Trust was created in 1913 with an endowment of $10 million to 'improve the wellbeing of the masses of the people' of the British Isles. Its initial focus was on expanding access to free public libraries.

John Duncan Cowley (1897-1944), Lancashire's First County Librarian

Courtesy of Cowley family.

Following service in the First World War, John Duncan Cowley studied at the University of Oxford, where his uncle was head of the Bodleian Library. Before coming to Lancashire, he worked for several years as Assistant Librarian at St John's College, Oxford and Middle Temple in London. As Lancashire's first County Librarian, Cowley was the driving force behind the development of the new service, overseeing the establishment of library centres across Lancashire and the first County Library building programmes, including in Carnforth.

Cowley had a particular interest in the training of librarians, leaving Lancashire in 1934 to become Director of the School of Librarianship at University College London. In this role he travelled across Europe and the USA to undertake research and published several books on the topic. At the outbreak of the Second World War he closed the School and joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, working in intelligence and attaining the rank of Squadron Leader. He was killed by a V1 bomb whilst on duty in his London office in August 1944.

Carnforth Library Centre 1926-1936

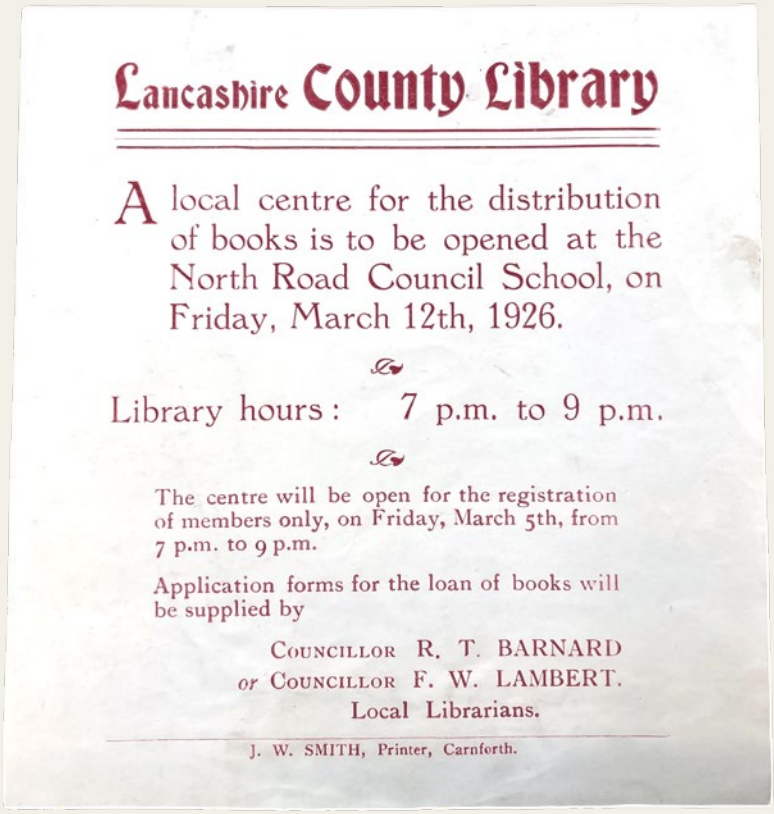
Lancashire County Library Service opened the new library centre at Carnforth on 12 March 1926 at North Road Council School (now Carnforth Community Primary School). It was run on a voluntary basis by two Carnforth councillors: R T Barnard, the school headmaster, assisted by F W Lambert.

The library centre was open for one evening a week on Fridays, 7-9pm. In the first week 150 books were issued.

Demand grew rapidly and Councillor Barnard repeatedly appealed for more volunteers to help as the work became almost overwhelming.

The library centre at North Road Council School ran continuously for the next ten years. By June 1935 there were 745 adult and junior members, and the number of books issued in 1935-1936 was 12,914.

The centre had proved a huge success, helping to make the case for the construction of a dedicated library building in the town.



Lancashire County Library

A local centre for the distribution of books is to be opened at the North Road Council School, on Friday, March 12th, 1926.

Library hours: 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

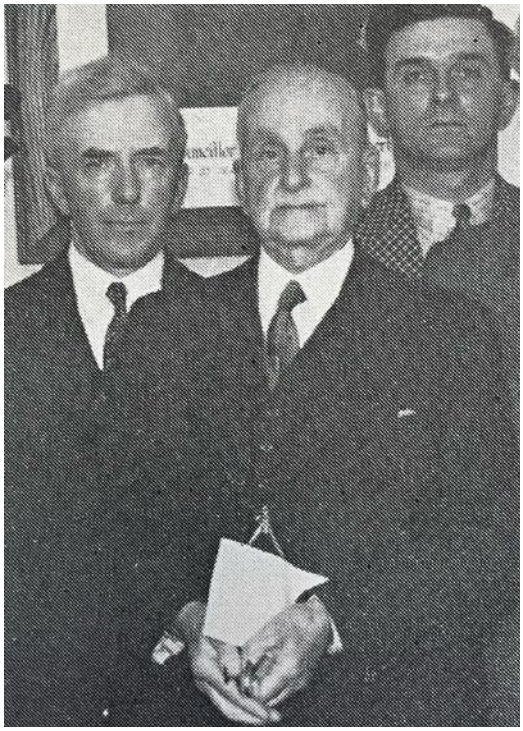
The centre will be open for the registration of members only, on Friday, March 5th, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Application forms for the loan of books will be supplied by

COUNCILLOR R. T. BARNARD
or COUNCILLOR F. W. LAMBERT.
Local Librarians.

J. W. SMITH, Printer, Carnforth.

Notice advertising the opening of Carnforth Library Centre.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.



R T Barnard (centre).
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Robert Thomas Barnard (1871-1961), Carnforth's First Librarian

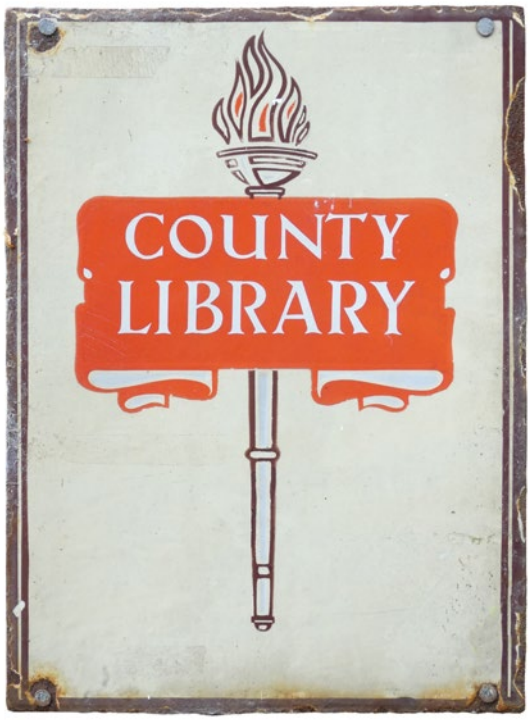
Robert Thomas Barnard was born in Whitby and trained as a teacher. Early in his career, he moved to Carnforth, where he became involved in many aspects of public life.

'R T', as he was respectfully addressed, was appointed headmaster of the newly opened North Road Council School in 1914. There, he encouraged reading, establishing reading groups and a book borrowing facility.

When the library centre opened at the school in 1926, Barnard became head librarian, beginning a lifelong commitment to Carnforth Library.

A long-serving Carnforth councillor, he was appointed in 1935 to the Carnforth Library Committee, which was formed following the decision to construct a purpose-built library for the town. He later served as Vice Chair and then Chair, until the committee was dissolved in 1958.

Barnard played an active role in the Carnforth community, including the Congregational Church and wartime civil defence. In 1956 he was awarded an MBE for public service. His obituary in the *Lancaster Guardian* hailed him as the 'Father' of Carnforth Council.



Private collection.

These County Library signs were provided by the Carnegie UK Trust and displayed on library centres across the British Isles from 1928.

The Carnforth centre at North Road Council School is likely to have had such a sign.

3. Building a Library for Carnforth

The County Library Centre at North Road Council School proved so popular that demand soon outstripped supply. By the start of the 1930s it was recognised that larger communities needed dedicated library buildings, open for more hours a week and staffed by salaried librarians rather than volunteers.

With further financial support from the Carnegie UK Trust, Lancashire County Council embarked on a programme of library building. Carnforth was among the first generation of purpose-built public libraries in Lancashire, opening in September 1936.

The Decision to Build Carnforth Library

From 1930, the Carnegie UK Trust decided to offer grants to erect, adapt or equip buildings in more populous areas where the library centre model was no longer sufficient. In 1932, Lancashire was awarded £4,200 towards the erection of five or six 'branch' libraries across the county. This was the maximum grant possible on a scale of £6 per 1,000 population and came with the condition that it could cover no more than one third of the cost of any individual branch.

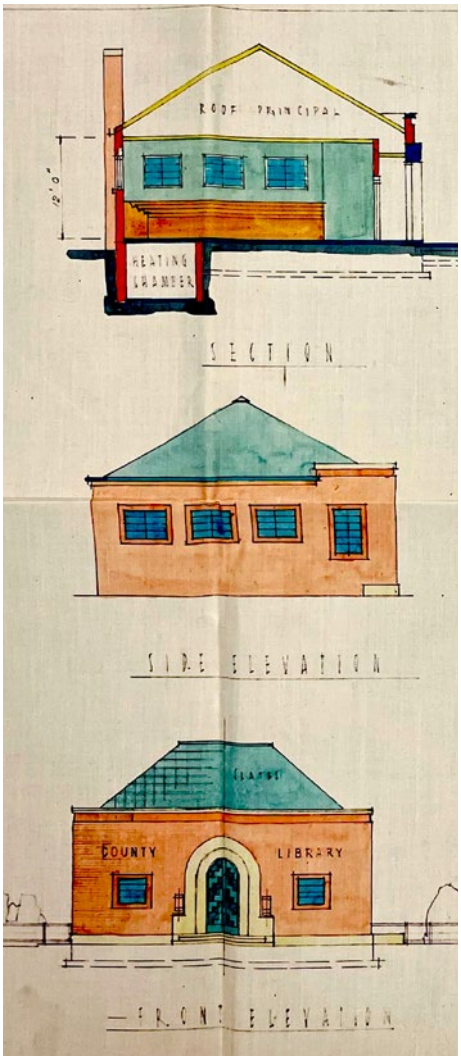
The depressed economic conditions of the early 1930s made it difficult to progress the building of branch libraries on this basis and by 1934, only £235 of the £4,200 had been spent.

Aerial view of Carnforth in 1933, showing the plot later used for the library.
©Historic England.

The enterprising County Librarian, John Cowley, conferred with Carnforth Urban District Council and found considerable enthusiasm for the establishment of a branch library. However, with a population of only 3,200, the town was too small to generate sufficient income from local rates to contribute to the building costs. Cowley therefore requested a relaxation of the condition limiting grant funding to one-third of the cost of a branch library.

In February 1934 the County Council Libraries Sub-Committee proposed 'that a one-room building should be erected at a cost of no more than £1,500' (equivalent to around £139,300 in 2026). The project to build Carnforth Library had begun!

Carnforth Library Building Project Timeline	
February 1934	Proposal to build.
April 1934	Use of Carnegie grant approved to fund the library building. Lancashire County Council agreed to pay for the fittings and books. Carnforth Council agreed to levy a special rate to pay for the site, staff salaries and building maintenance.
	Library plot identified for purchase on Lancaster Road.
December 1934	Plot purchased for £212 from the estate of John George Mitchell, a former Carnforth bank manager.
February 1935	Carnforth Library Committee formed with representatives from Lancashire County Council and Carnforth Council with Captain Alfred Bates MC as Chair. The Committee had oversight of the day-to-day running of the library and recommended staff appointments.
May 1935	Carnforth Library Committee met for the first time. Contract for building given to Edmondson Bros Ltd of Morecambe for £1,550.
July 1935	Carnforth Council signed off the building plans, designed by County Architect, Stephen Wilkinson.
April 1936	Contract for layout of the garden (£27 10s) given to Edmondson Bros.
July 1936	Contract for internal fittings (£287 9s) given to William Higgin Ltd of Bury.
17 September 1936	Library opening ceremony.
18 September 1936	Library opened for business!

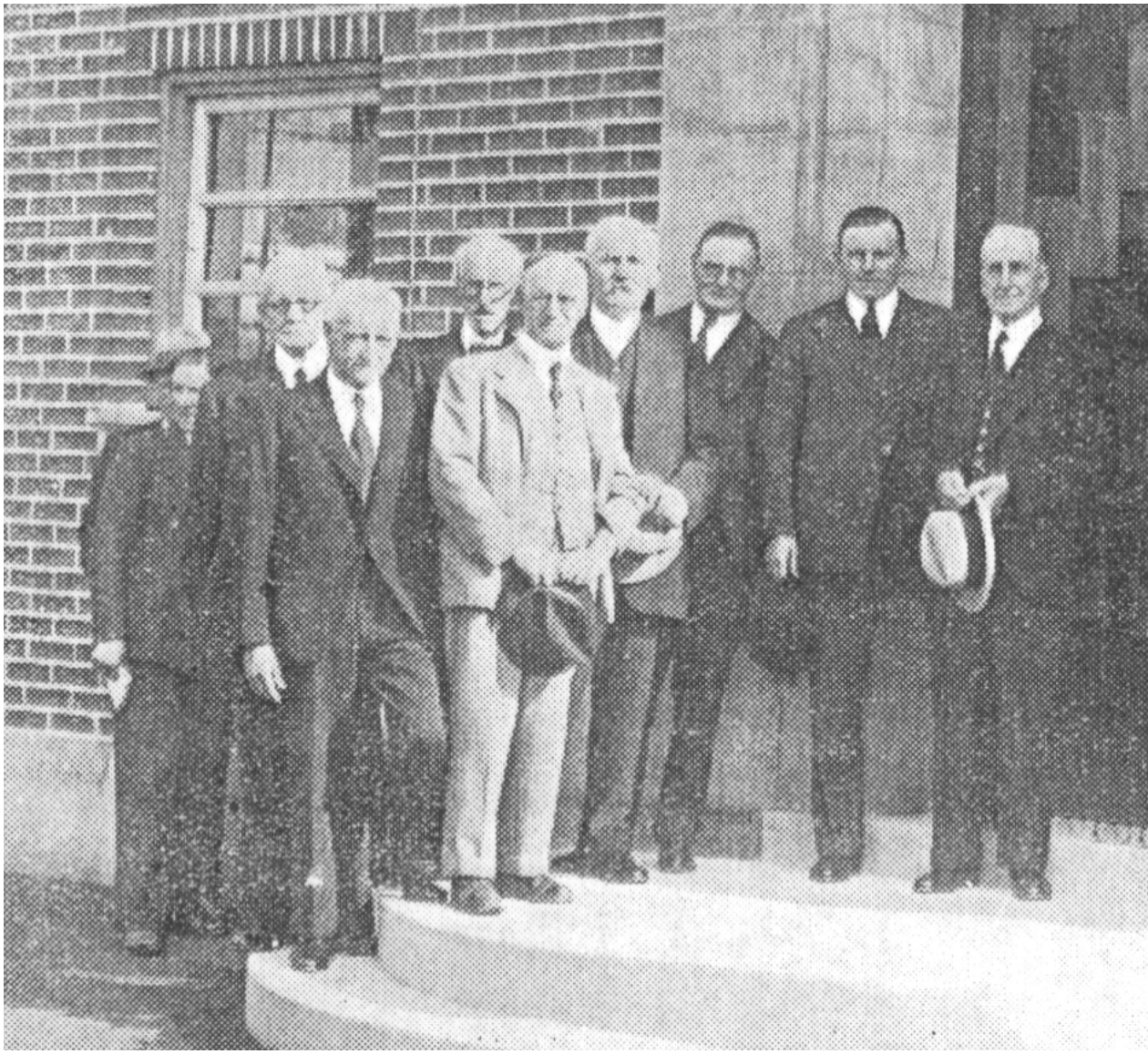


Carnforth Library architect plans, 1935. Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Carnforth Library Opening Ceremony

The library opening ceremony took place on a sunny day in September 1936 and was a noteworthy event, reported in several local newspapers. Carnforth became only the 24th fully equipped branch library operated by the County Council.

Members of Carnforth Library Committee and representatives from the County and Carnforth Councils were in attendance at the ceremony. The Chair of Carnforth Library Committee, Captain Alfred Bates, presided over events. He thanked the Committee and County Council for their efforts, singling out Councillor R T Barnard for 'all the credit', having run the Carnforth Library Centre at North Road Council School for the previous ten years.

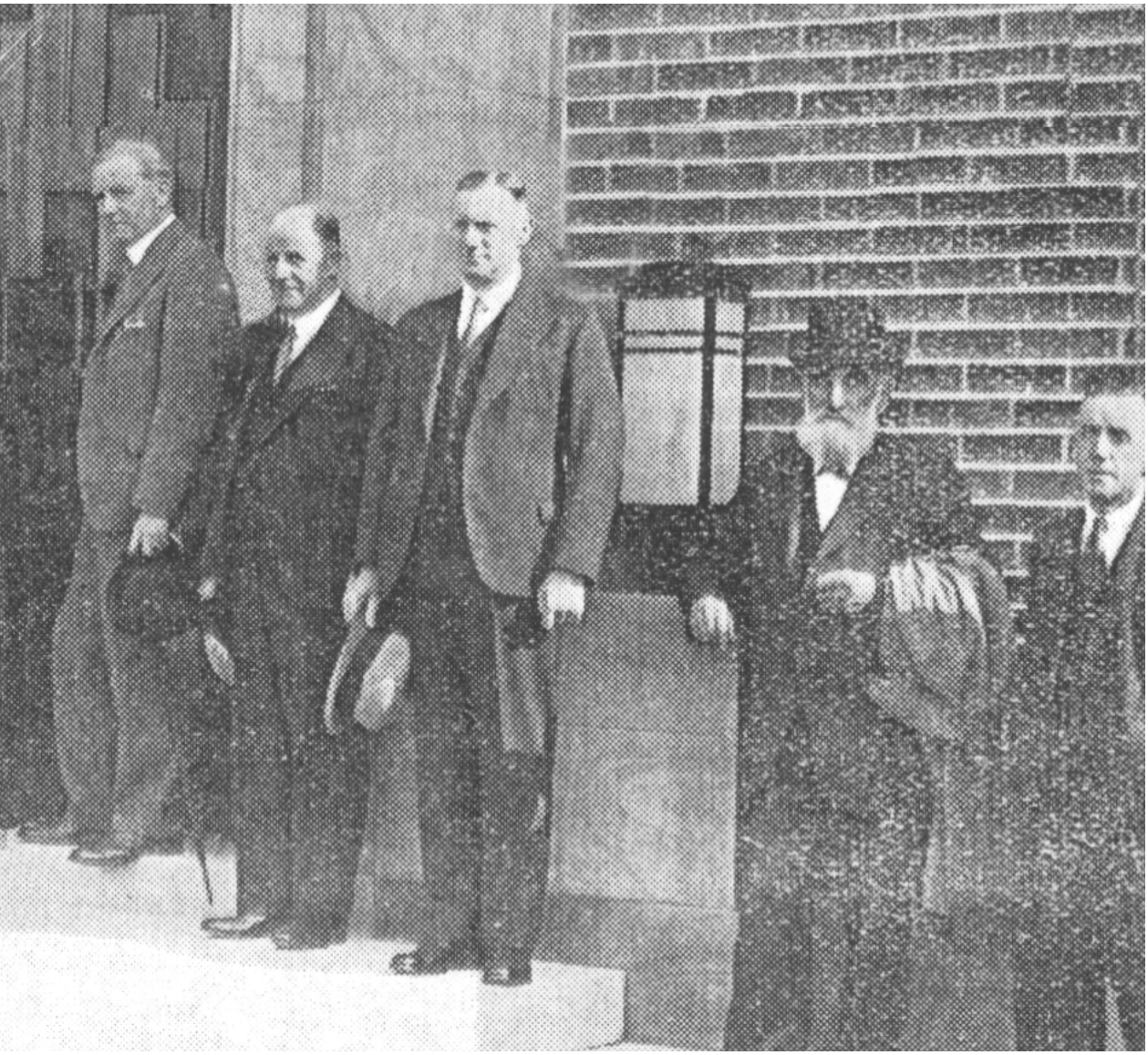


Opening of Carnforth Library, 17 September 1936.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

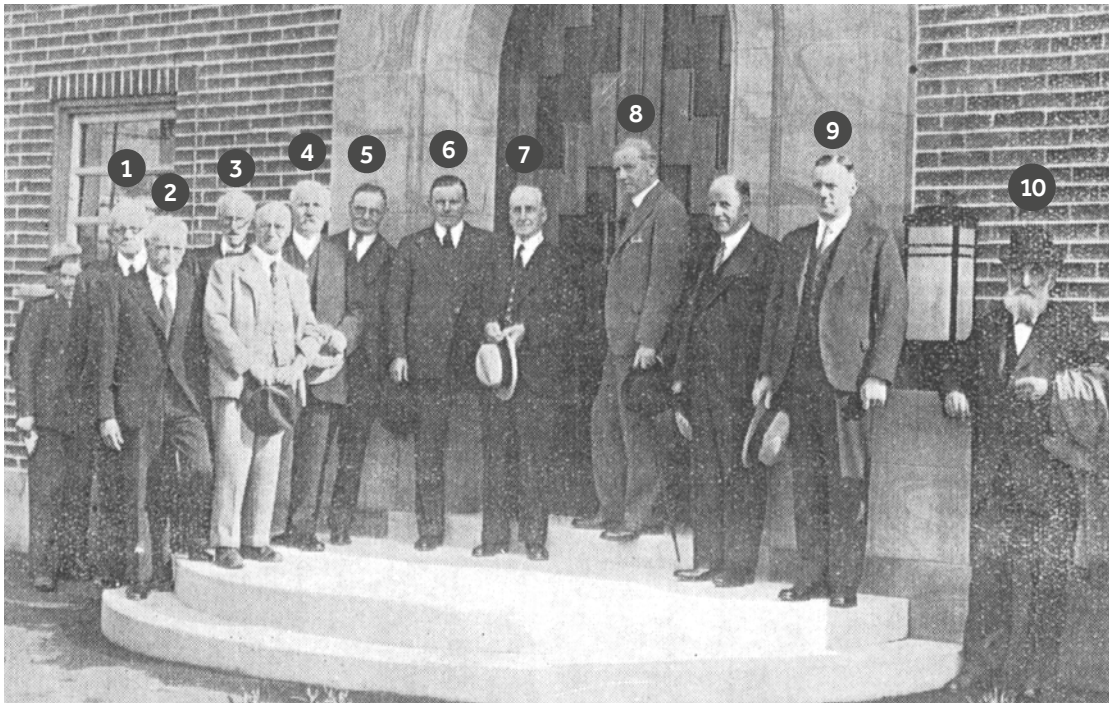
The builder, Alfred Edmondson, handed over a golden 'memento' key (sadly now lost) to Percy Meadon, Lancashire's Director of Education, who formally opened the building and gave a speech about the value of education and the role of public libraries as 'the poor man's university'. To applause he said, 'This library service opens the door to opportunity. Please make full use of it.'

Following the ceremony, the dignitaries adjourned to the County Hotel for tea.

'This library service opens the door to opportunity. Please make full use of it.'
Lancashire's Director of Education in 1936



Who's Who in the Library Opening Ceremony Photograph



Newspaper reports of the opening ceremony don't name the people in the photograph. The project volunteers have tried to identify them from other sources as much as possible:

1. **Cllr R W Postlethwaite**, Carnforth Urban District Council
2. **Mr Frank Loy**, Carnforth Library Committee
3. **Cllr J Kew**, Chair of Carnforth Urban District Council
4. **Cllr F W Lambert**, Carnforth Library Committee and former assistant volunteer librarian at Carnforth Library Centre at North Road Council School
5. **Mr E E Unsworth**, Carnforth Town Clerk
6. **Captain Alfred Bates**, Chair of Carnforth Library Committee and Lancashire County Councillor
7. **Cllr R T Barnard**, Carnforth Library Committee and former head volunteer librarian at Carnforth Library Centre at North Road Council School
   At the ceremony Barnard said that the new library 'fulfilled one of the chief things he desired'.
8. **Mr Percy Meadon**, Director of Education at Lancashire County Council
   The Education Department had oversight of the County Library Service.
9. **Mr Alfred Edmondson**, Building Contractor
10. **Cllr A W Gorton**, Chair of Morecambe and Heysham Library Committee

Sir Alfred Bates MC DL (1897-1973), First Chair of Carnforth Library Committee

Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Alfred Bates was born into a successful family and followed his father into the family law firm, still operating today as Bannister Bates in Morecambe. He served in the First World War as an army captain, receiving the Military Cross. By the early 1930s Bates was still working as a solicitor but was also heavily involved in other forms of public service, including as a Lancashire County Councillor. He remained Chair of Carnforth Library Committee until 1950, when he became Chair of Lancashire County Council.

Bates remained involved in political life until the late 1960s, during which time he championed the establishment of Lancaster University. His awards for service to public life are many, including being nominated Deputy Lieutenant of the County in 1951. In 1935 he became the only Englishman to receive the 'Kentucky Colonel' award from the Governor of Kentucky, USA, for legal services there – a rare honour! In 1952 he received a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II in her first honours list.

Also in attendance at the opening ceremony (but not identified on the photograph):

- Other members of Carnforth Urban District Council and Carnforth Library Committee, including **Mr A T Berry**, Committee representative from Lancashire County Council
- Scholars from the Church of England Senior School in Carnforth

Absent from the opening ceremony:

- **Raymond Irwin**, Lancashire County Librarian, 1935-1945
  Irwin was likely away because of a family bereavement. During his tenure he introduced several innovations, including mobile libraries and the schools and hospital service. He left to succeed John Cowley as Director of the School of Librarianship at University College London.
- **Alderman Rogerson**, Chair of Lancashire County Library Committee
  Rogerson sent a letter that was read out about the benefits of libraries during difficult times.
- **Edith Jessie Carnell**, Carnforth's first head librarian
  Although noticeably absent in the photograph, it is almost certain that Carnell was at the library the next day when it opened to the public.

4. Carnforth Library's First Staff

When Carnforth Library opened in September 1936 it was designated a small, part-time library, open just 12 hours a week. From the outset it was managed by the head of nearby Morecambe Library, a large and busy full-time library, with staff from Morecambe covering the Carnforth opening hours. It soon became clear, however, that Carnforth needed its own library assistant to support the busy evening shifts.

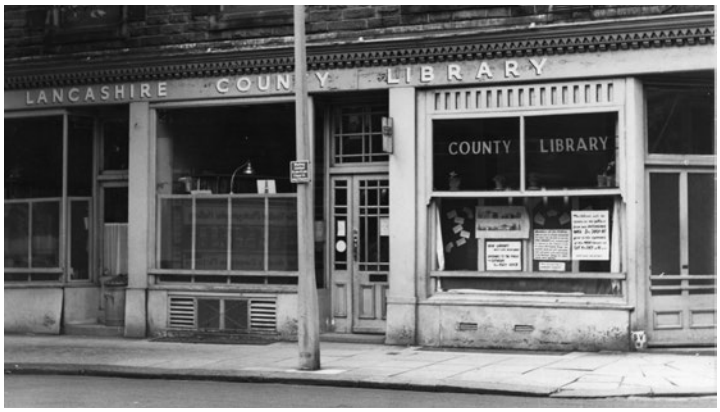
Although small, Carnforth Library quickly proved a success, thanks to strong engagement by the local community and the energy and ambition of the librarians. The staff who oversaw the library's early years were true pioneers whose work had impact around the world as well as here in Carnforth.

Staff at Carnforth Library in 1936:

- Edith Jessie Carnell, Assistant-in-Charge
- Elizabeth Crook, part-time Caretaker
- Mary Jane Tyson, part-time Library Assistant (from December 1936)

Library Opening Hours in 1936:

Monday, Wednesday and Friday: 2-4pm & 5-7pm (Children's Hour: 5-6pm)



Old Morecambe Library on Victoria Street, where Carnforth's first head librarians were based. Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Caretakers at Carnforth Library

For many years, Carnforth Library employed a caretaker to maintain the grounds and building. The first, Elizabeth Crook, was succeeded after she died by her husband, Richard Frederick Crook, who did the job for more than 20 years. His second wife, Muriel, also became Assistant Librarian. The Crooks lived close by on King Street.

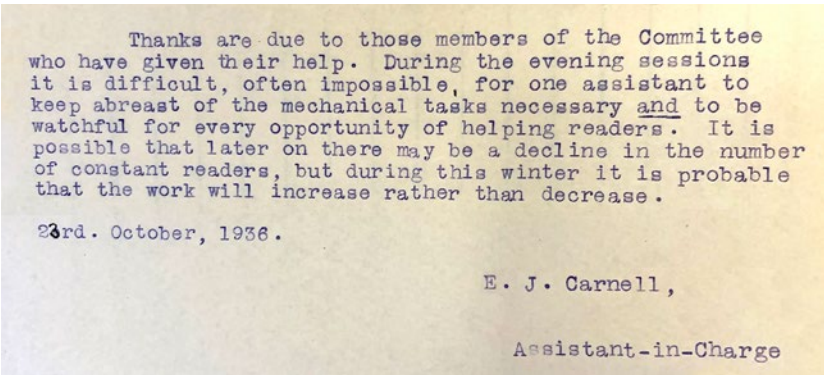
In 1973, another local man, Joseph Stride, took on the role after retiring from the railway.

Joseph Stride.
The Visitor, 26 December 1973.

Edith Jessie Carnell, Carnforth's First Head Librarian, 1936-1939

Edith Jessie Carnell, known as Jessie, became Assistant-in-Charge of Morecambe, Heysham and Carnforth Libraries in 1935, later retitled Morecambe District Librarian. Born in Devon, Carnell's earlier library career included posts in Exeter and Bognor Regis. Morecambe was the busiest of the Lancashire County Libraries at that time and the post was considered especially demanding. It had originally been recommended for a man and at a higher salary than the standard rate. Despite this, Carnell secured the appointment – and at the higher rate – an indication of her reputation and ability.

Carnell oversaw the opening of Carnforth Library in 1936. Her first report, submitted six weeks after opening, noted that the library had 'exceeded expectations' and that local people greatly appreciated the new facilities. Like the District Librarians who followed her, she attended meetings of the Carnforth Library Committee, helping establish close links between the library and the local community.



Thanks are due to those members of the Committee who have given their help. During the evening sessions it is difficult, often impossible, for one assistant to keep abreast of the mechanical tasks necessary and to be watchful for every opportunity of helping readers. It is possible that later on there may be a decline in the number of constant readers, but during this winter it is probable that the work will increase rather than decrease.

23rd. October, 1936.

E. J. Carnell,

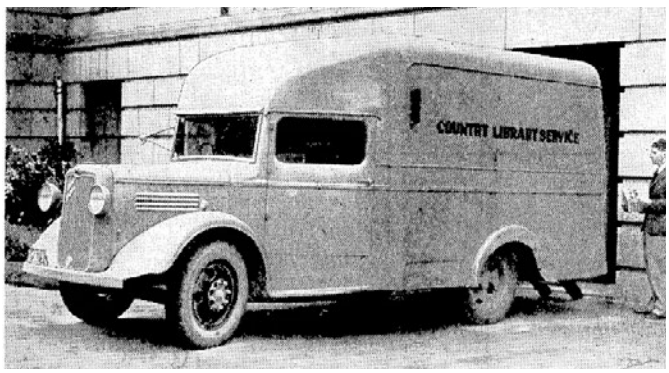
Assistant-in-Charge

Carnell's first report on Carnforth Library in October 1936 stressed how busy it had been. Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Alongside her practical library work, Carnell was a passionate advocate for public libraries. While working in Lancashire she gave regular talks and published her first book, a critique of the county library system, based on research completed for her Honours Diploma of the Library Association. The introduction was written by Lancashire's first County Librarian, John Cowley.

In 1939, Carnell left Lancashire for New Zealand, where she played an important role in developing rural public library services and wartime military libraries. She later worked in Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana and Singapore, becoming part of an international generation of pioneering librarians who helped expand access to books and education across the world.

Carnell's contribution to librarianship was later recognised through the Edith Jessie Carnell travelling scholarship, established in New Zealand after her death and which still exists to this day.



Carnell helped establish the New Zealand Country Library Service. *Evening Post*. National Library of New Zealand.

Rosemary Tilly (later Popplestone), Carnforth's Second Head Librarian, 1939-1948

Rosemary Tilly succeeded Jessie Carnell as Morecambe District Librarian in 1939, officially taking up the role in 1940 after returning from wartime service in the Auxiliary Territorial Service. Born in Lancaster, she had begun her library career in 1930 as a Junior Assistant at Morecambe Library and passed her Library Association examinations in 1933.

Tilly managed a demanding district comprising three branch libraries including Carnforth, 17 village centres, a new mobile library van and a hospital library service. During the war years she also faced shortages of both staff and books. Despite these challenges, she worked regularly at Carnforth and remained closely involved with local activities.

Rosemary Tilly.
Lancaster Guardian, 6 January 1951.

One of Tilly's greatest passions was encouraging children to read for pleasure and she instigated various children's activities at Carnforth. In Morecambe, she established a separate children's library away from the crowded main building, enrolling an astonishing 1,500 young members in its first month. She believed children should associate books with libraries rather than only with school, hoping to inspire a lifelong love of reading.

Tilly also hosted meetings of the Lancashire County Library Staff Guild at Carnforth Library, reinforcing the library's growing importance within the county service.

Following her marriage in 1948, Tilly moved overseas with her husband, later helping to establish and manage English-language libraries in Afghanistan and Iran before eventually returning to library work in Britain. Like Carnell, Tilly dedicated her entire career to promoting the value of reading and libraries around the world.

Tilly and her family in Afghanistan.
Courtesy of Popplestone family.

Women Librarians and Changing Attitudes

All of Carnforth Library's early staff were women, although female librarians of the period often faced restrictions in their careers. Many were expected to leave their posts when they married, reflecting wider attitudes towards women's employment at the time.

These expectations began to change during the Second World War, when women increasingly took on roles previously held by men. Margaret Falshaw, Assistant Librarian at Carnforth, married in 1940 but was permitted to remain in post for the duration of the war.

Pat Rawnsley, Carnforth's Head Librarian, 1949-1973.
The Visitor, 20 June 1973.

Later, Morecambe District Librarian Pat Rawnsley continued working after her marriage in 1964 until her retirement in 1973. She was also one of the first – and youngest – women to qualify as a Fellow of the Library Association.

Another Library Association Fellow was Florence Cook, Lancashire's first female County Librarian, who led the service from 1945 to 1965. Her appointment reflected the growing opportunities available to women in librarianship, particularly as the post had originally been restricted to men when it was created in 1924. Like Carnell and Tilly, she later worked internationally, helping to establish a national library service in Kenya.

Similar changes for women continued into the later twentieth century. Julie Kennedy, who joined the Carnforth Library staff and became manager in 1990, was among the first employees permitted to return to work part-time after having a baby in 1988, allowing her to maintain continuous employment while balancing family life and work.

Miss Florence E. Cook.
Photo: "Lancashire Daily Post."

WOMAN COUNTY LIBRARIAN

MISS FLORENCE E. COOK, at present County Librarian for Cumberland, was, this afternoon, appointed Lancashire County Librarian. She was selected from a short list of three men and three women candidates.

Miss Cook, a native of Sunderland, secured her first library appointment at Leicester, going on to take charge of the Durham City branch of the Durham County Library.

Thirteen years ago she was appointed Deputy Librarian to Kent County Council, and for the last seven and a half years has been at Carlisle, in charge of the Cumberland County Library. She resides at Armathwaite, Carlisle.

Her new post carries a salary of £800 a year, rising to £900.

Florence Cook, Lancashire's first female County Librarian, 1945-1965.
Lancashire Evening Post, 2 October 1945.

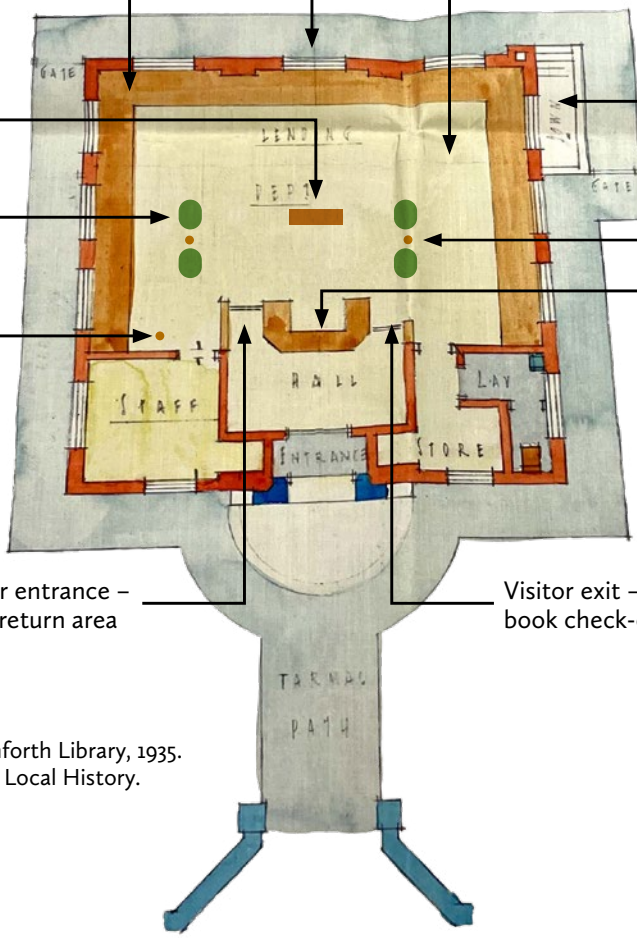
5. Inside and Outside Carnforth Library

Carnforth Library was one of Lancashire County Council's first purpose-built libraries. Designed in the modern style of the 1930s, it reflected the era's ideas about what a public library should be: practical, welcoming and accessible. Since then, the space has adapted as library services – and the needs of library users – have changed.

A Modern Library for the 1930s

Carnforth Library was designed by County Architect Stephen Wilkinson who was responsible for several Lancashire libraries built during the 1930s. A number of these are of a very similar style to Carnforth, including Penwortham and Bamber Bridge. Built of 'rustic' brick with Westmorland green slate roofing, Carnforth Library was small and utilitarian in style, less ornate than the grand Carnegie libraries of earlier decades.

Inside the Library - the Early Years



Architect's plan for Carnforth Library, 1935. Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Adapting the Space

As library services changed, so did the library space. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the layout was altered to improve wheelchair access and make space for public computers.

This meant that some shelving and book stock had to be removed – a decision which was not universally popular with locals!

Carnforth Library's first generation of public computers.
Courtesy of Jill Mason, former Carnforth Librarian.

Fury as library removes hundreds of titles

Book lovers' horror story

by Emily Flanagan

CARNFORTH library-goers are fuming after discovering that hundreds of books have been permanently removed from the centre.

It is believed that as many as 500 books were removed in the stocktake – although library chiefs have refused to

"Carnforth Library is very popular and well used. It is staffed by the most helpful and pleasant staff but they must feel frustrated when so many people are

But District Librarian Steven Eccles defended the move.

He said the removed books had not been loaned by the library for more than two years and it was standard practice to get rid of them.

Lancaster Guardian, 27 November 1998.

2006 Refurbishment

Carnforth Library was a pilot for a major countywide redevelopment programme in late 2006. The redesign aimed to create a brighter, more flexible and modern public space.

The refurbishment introduced white shelving, new flooring, movable furniture and updated computer areas. A distinctive 'glass sail' divider was installed, along with new signage and display areas. Another new feature was a standing desk for staff, though this idea was not replicated in other libraries, meaning that the Carnforth desk is the only one of its kind in the area!

Most of the features of the public library space introduced in 2006 remain in place in 2026, although the building's footprint and internal structure have not altered since 1936. The two office areas, not usually accessible to the public, show clear traces of the original features, including the oak woodwork.

Carnforth Library in 2026.
Private collection.

1936	2026
Single reading room	Flexible community space
Central librarian desk and entrance gate	Left side standing staff desk
Green leather chairs	Modern movable furniture
Light oak shelving	Painted white shelving
Books only, including large reference section	Computers and digital access
A children's hour	A children's area – accessible at all times
Garden frontage	Accessible parking & outdoor seating

Outside the Library: from Garden to Car Park

When the library opened, the building was surrounded by a small garden. After the Second World War, the Library Committee decided the grounds could be 'better utilised' for parking, as more readers were starting to travel by car and the mobile library van also needed access. Previously, staff had to carry books across the main road to the library van, as the police objected to vehicles parking directly outside.

Additional land was purchased to create more parking space, while the front gate was widened and part of the garden asphalted so cars could safely turn in off the road.

Alongside this, efforts were made to make the library grounds attractive and welcoming. John Barrow was the first gardener appointed in 1951. The 1950s saw benches, flowers and a library noticeboard added to the front garden, although the flowerbeds were replaced with grass after repeated damage by local children!

Carnforth Library in 2004 before the hedge was added and the garden re-landscaped as part of the 2006 development project. Photograph by Clive Holden, former committee member of Mourholme Local History Society.

During the 2006 refurbishment, the outside space was redesigned again with seating and children's features added, reflecting the library's changing role as both a community and family space.

Carnforth Library garden in 2026.
Private collection.

Carnforth Library Timeline

1919 Public Libraries Act, allowing county councils to become library authorities

1924 Establishment of Lancashire County Library

1926 Opening of Carnforth Library 'centre' at North Road Council School

1934 Decision to build Carnforth Library

1935 Appointment of **Carnforth's first head librarian – Edith Jessie Carnell**

1935 First meeting of **Carnforth Library Committee**

1936 Opening of Carnforth Library

1937 First **adult education evening classes** held at Carnforth Library

1939 Introduction of **Carnforth area mobile library van**

1939 Outbreak of Second World War

Salford Public Library sends 100 children's books to augment Carnforth Library's stock following the arrival of around 1,600 evacuees

1939 Jessie Carnell leaves to take up library fellowship post in New Zealand

Rosemary Tilly becomes head of Carnforth Library until her departure in 1948

1943 Carnforth is involved in the **national paper salvage campaign**

1944 First **Children's Book Week** at Carnforth Library

1947 Purchase of land behind Carnforth Library for **parking**

1951 Carnforth Library appoints a **gardener**

1958 Lancashire County Library starts mailing **'talking books'** to blind and partially sighted users

1958 Formation of Morecambe District Library Committee, leading to **dissolution of Carnforth Library Committee**

1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act creates a statutory duty for local authorities to provide a library service

1974 Nearby Bolton-le-Sands Library is a pilot for **computerisation**

1978 Home Library Service is introduced

1989 Controversy over whether Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* should be stocked in Lancashire libraries

1999 Move from 'brown' card method of book lending to computerised system

2002 Introduction of the **People's Network public computer service**

2006 Major refurbishment at Carnforth Library, inside and out, a pilot for a countywide redesign scheme

2016 Carnforth Library survives a proposed programme of library closures and spending cuts

2020 COVID-19 pandemic
Carnforth Library initially forced to close. On re-opening as a frontline service, books are quarantined and social distancing measures put in place

2024 Formation of **Friends of Carnforth Library**

2026 Carnforth Library reaches its 90th birthday during the **National Year of Reading**

6. The Changing Role of the Librarian

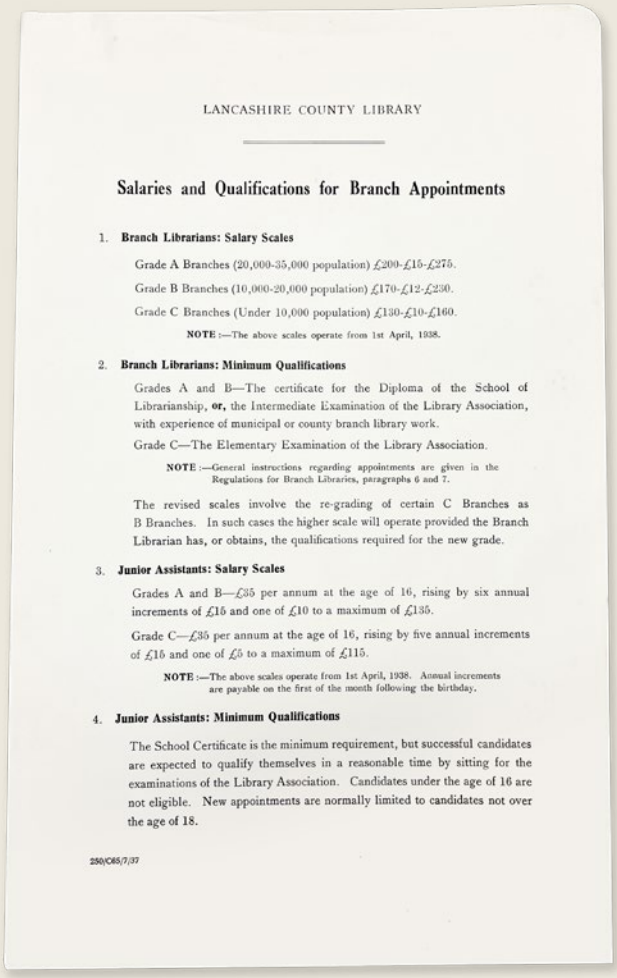
The role of the librarian has evolved significantly since 1936, reflecting wider technological, educational and social changes. Once focused primarily on managing collections of books, Carnforth librarians in 2026 support digital access, community activity and information services for people of all ages. In times of crisis, their role as frontline public service workers – and the importance of free public access to books, reading and information – becomes even more evident.

Training and Qualifications

In the early years of the County Library Service, librarianship was still a developing profession. By the late 1920s, paid library staff were being appointed, and formal training and qualifications increasingly shaped recruitment and career progression.

National standards were established through the Library Association, founded in 1877, alongside the School of Librarianship at University College London, established in 1919. Lancashire staff were expected to undertake training, attend conferences and gain qualifications ranging from certificates to professional diplomas.

Over time, entry routes diversified. In the 1980s and 1990s many library assistants studied part-time for the City and Guilds 'Library and Information Science' qualification. Since 2017, Lancashire has offered apprenticeships in larger libraries. Initially focused on customer service, the scheme has since been developed with CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) and Nelson & Colne College into the 'Library, Information and Archives Services' (LIAS) apprenticeship, continuing a tradition of structured training alongside practical experience.



LANCASHIRE COUNTY LIBRARY

Salaries and Qualifications for Branch Appointments

1. **Branch Librarians: Salary Scales**

   Grade A Branches (20,000-35,000 population) £200-£15-£275.

   Grade B Branches (10,000-20,000 population) £170-£12-£230.

   Grade C Branches (Under 10,000 population) £130-£10-£160.

   NOTE :—The above scales operate from 1st April, 1938.

2. **Branch Librarians: Minimum Qualifications**

   Grades A and B—The certificate for the Diploma of the School of Librarianship, **or,** the Intermediate Examination of the Library Association, with experience of municipal or county branch library work.

   Grade C—The Elementary Examination of the Library Association.

   NOTE :—General instructions regarding appointments are given in the Regulations for Branch Libraries, paragraphs 6 and 7.

   The revised scales involve the re-grading of certain C Branches as B Branches. In such cases the higher scale will operate provided the Branch Librarian has, or obtains, the qualifications required for the new grade.

3. **Junior Assistants: Salary Scales**

   Grades A and B—£35 per annum at the age of 16, rising by six annual increments of £15 and one of £10 to a maximum of £135.

   Grade C—£35 per annum at the age of 16, rising by five annual increments of £15 and one of £5 to a maximum of £115.

   NOTE :—The above scales operate from 1st April, 1938. Annual increments are payable on the first of the month following the birthday.

4. **Junior Assistants: Minimum Qualifications**

   The School Certificate is the minimum requirement, but successful candidates are expected to qualify themselves in a reasonable time by sitting for the examinations of the Library Association. Candidates under the age of 16 are not eligible. New appointments are normally limited to candidates not over the age of 18.

250/C65/7/37

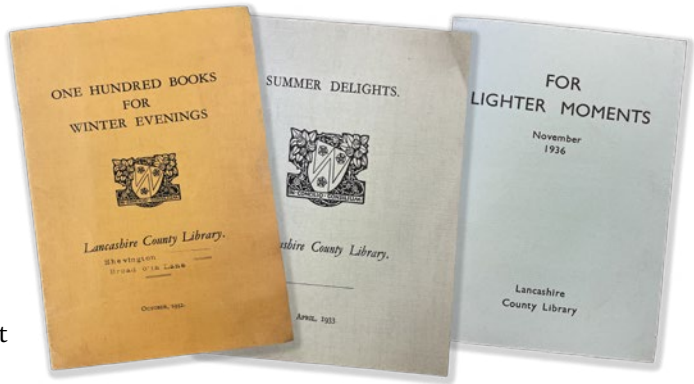
Lancashire County Library salaries and qualifications for librarian appointments in 1937.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Professional Identity

Lancashire Archives and Local History.

In the early years, staff were expected to join the Library Association and attend local meetings, promoting a strong sense of professional identity.

Alongside this, Lancashire was unusual in having a Library Staff Guild which met annually and produced regular bulletins. A staff newsletter was revived under the name of *The Loop* around the end of the century.



Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Guidelines published by Lancashire County Library in 1935 showed the expected role of a professional librarian at the time that Carnforth Library opened. There was an emphasis on publicising the library's offer, using Library Service literature and creating colourful displays to engage borrowers. This is still part of the librarian's role in 2026.

Book display, Accrington Library.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

'A good librarian should know their library stock, be patient and a good listener. You don't have to know everything, but where to find it – and these days, be an IT expert too.'

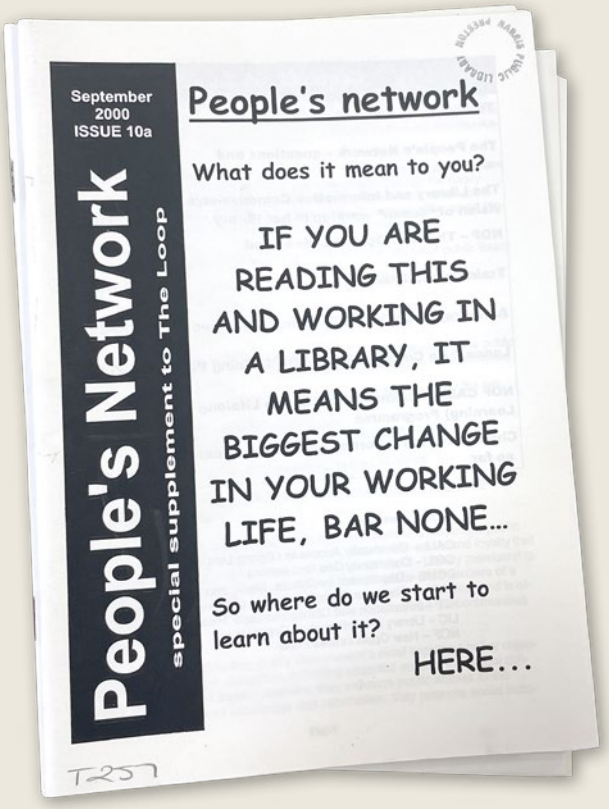
Former Carnforth Librarian

From Card Catalogues to Digital Systems

During the 20th century, library organisation relied on card catalogues and manual borrowing systems. Rows of index cards recorded every book, while borrowers' tickets and stamped due dates were carefully managed by hand. It was a tactile, methodical system that required detailed knowledge of stock and strong administrative skills.

By the later 20th century, growing collections and new technologies made change inevitable. Experiments with computerised systems in Lancashire began in the 1970s, including at Bolton-le-Sands near Carnforth, followed by a major transition in the late 1990s.

In 1999, the Talis library management system was introduced, replacing card catalogues and enabling integrated cataloguing and borrowing across the County Library Service. This shift required significant staff training and large-scale data conversion, as thousands of records were transferred into digital formats.


September 2000
ISSUE 10a

People's Network

special supplement to The Loop

People's network

What does it mean to you?

IF YOU ARE READING THIS AND WORKING IN A LIBRARY, IT MEANS THE BIGGEST CHANGE IN YOUR WORKING LIFE, BAR NONE...

So where do we start to learn about it?

HERE...

Lancashire Library Service staff newsletter reporting the introduction of the People's Network public computer system, 2000. As the newsletter noted, 'The times they are a changing (again)!' Lancashire Archives and Local History.

As public internet access expanded in the early 2000s, librarians increasingly supported users with online services, digital skills and information retrieval. This marked a clear shift from being custodians of books to facilitators of information access.

Librarians in Times of Crisis

Carnforth librarians have played an important frontline public service role during difficult times, balancing practical service delivery with community care and access to information.

Second World War

During the Second World War, libraries remained open wherever possible despite staff shortages, blackout restrictions and disruptions caused by evacuation. Carnforth Library staff had to manage difficult working conditions, including police concerns about lighting during evening opening hours.

In 1939, around 1,600 evacuees from Salford arrived in the Carnforth area. Salford Public Library sent 100 junior fiction books to augment the Carnforth Library stock. Some evacuees returned home but in 1944 more arrived from London, driven to rural safety by the flying bombs. Library membership increased considerably during both periods.

IWM (Art.IWM PST 14664).

At a time when reading was a valued and hugely popular pastime, librarians like Carnforth's Rosemary Tilly had to adapt their work to wartime conditions. In 1943, Lancashire ran a major paper salvage drive, with paper urgently needed for information leaflets, munitions, books for servicemen and to replace stock lost in bombed libraries. Librarians supported this work and households across the county, including in Carnforth, handed in material for sorting and recycling.

At the same time, wartime shortages and printing restrictions reduced the supply and quality of new books. Librarians struggled on, repairing books, requesting as many titles as they could and trying their best to keep libraries functioning as a welcome haven.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic again highlighted the adaptability of library services. Libraries were designated an essential public service, with employees recognised as key workers.

Carnforth faced the challenge of managing social distancing measures in a small library space, as well as the need to quarantine books, support digital access and maintain services for those most in need. A 'Six of the Best' book-bag offer was developed to minimise contact. Health, safety and information access became closely intertwined with day-to-day library work.

7. Carnforth Library at the Heart of the Community

From the outset, Lancashire County Library encouraged librarians to undertake what was called 'extension work' – reaching beyond the lending of books and into the wider life of the community. In 1938, the Lancashire County Library Staff Guild Bulletin described the aim as providing 'not merely an educational, but a social service'. The principle of the public library as a free and inclusive civic service was later placed on a statutory footing by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, which still governs all libraries in 2026.

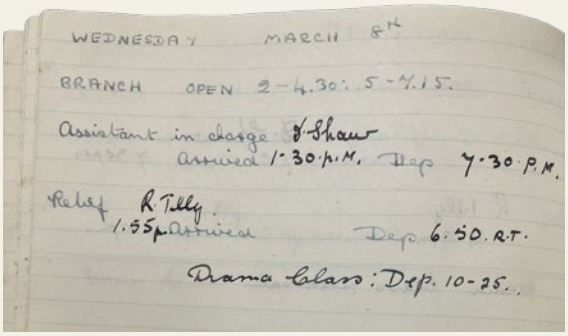
Carnforth Library quickly became more than a room full of books. Librarians worked with local organisations, hosted meetings and classes, organised displays and welcomed community groups into the building. In this way, the library became part of the town's public life as well as a place to access information and learning. The hushed silence once associated with libraries has gradually given way to conversation, activity and community life.

Opening up the Library

Activities for adults and children have been central to the work of Carnforth Library from the beginning. Carnforth's first librarian, Jessie Carnell, invited the local Workers' Education Association to hold classes there, and in the early days a BBC discussion group met in connection with educational radio broadcasts. The first story hour for children was held in 1940, another example of the library's developing role in the community.

Over time, Carnforth librarians organised craft groups, coffee mornings, exhibitions and children's activities, continuing the library's position as a key social and cultural centre for the town. Local people recall visiting with friends, parents and grandparents, then later bringing their own children and grandchildren to the library, borrowing books, attending activities and reading the newspapers. These memories show how the library has long acted as a shared space connecting different generations.

> *'I always felt an honorary "Carnforthian" as I spent so long working there and felt part of the community.'*
>
> *Former Carnforth Librarian*


WEDNESDAY MARCH 8th
BRANCH OPEN 2-4.30: 5-7.15.
Assistant in charge J. Shaw
Arrived 1.30 p.m. Dep 7.30 p.m.
Relief R. Tilly
1.55 p. Arrived Dep. 6.50. R.T.
Drama Class: Dep. 10-25.

Carnforth Library logbook from March 1944, recording a drama class. A drama group met at the library from the 1930s through to at least the 1950s.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

More than Books

The Second World War brought into focus the value of public libraries as a community service. A memo from the Government Board of Education at the start of the war highlighted the importance of keeping libraries open:

'... Nor is the service which the Public Libraries can render confined to the supply of books. The Library is often, and might still more generally become, a centre for the organisation of Study Circles, Listening Groups, Play Reading Circles, and similar activities.'

Expanding the County Library Service

As the County Library service developed, it increasingly reached people beyond the library walls. Services expanded into Lancashire schools, hospitals and prisons. Mobile and home library services helped bring books to people unable to travel.

The Home Library Service was introduced locally in 1978 by Morecambe and Heysham High Schools. It was then managed for many years by the Women's Royal Voluntary Service and in 2026 is staffed by local volunteers, including in Carnforth.

Libraries also adapted to the changing needs of their users, offering services such as:

- Newspapers and magazines
- Books in Braille, large print and 'talking books'
- Record/cassette/CD borrowing
- VHS/DVD borrowing
- Printing and photocopying
- Books in languages other than English
- Books for young people with dyslexia
- Digital books, newspapers and magazines

Carnforth Library display of DVDs, newspapers and periodicals.
Courtesy of Jill Mason, former Carnforth Librarian.

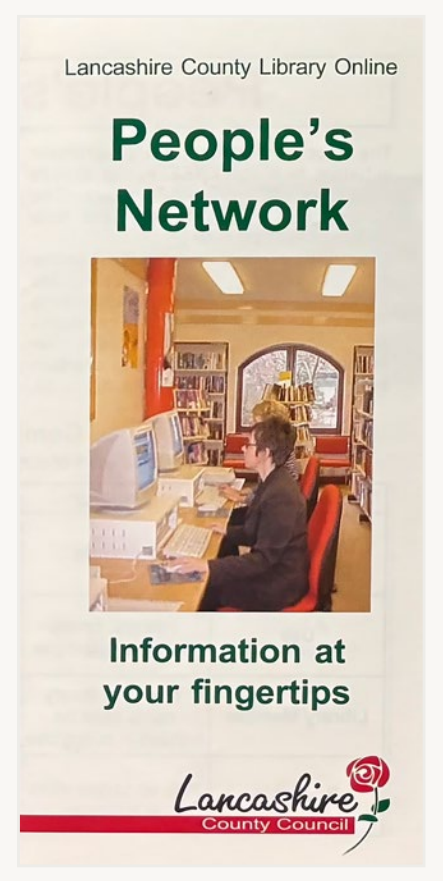
Introduction of Public Computers

In 1995, the Government announced plans for libraries to become the 'communication backbone of the information society'. Through the new People's Network programme, every public library was to offer free internet access by 2002.

Lancashire secured funding to install more than 800 computers across its libraries, and Carnforth Library joined the digital age. This marked a new stage in the library's role as a public service, helping to ensure that access to digital information was available to everyone.

For many people, libraries provided their first opportunity to use the internet or develop computer skills. In 2002, only about half of UK households owned a computer. Free IT workshops helped residents learn everything from basic computing to online job-searching. For some Carnforth residents, using the library's computers was a first step towards buying their own.

The People's Network transformed library life. Carnforth Library became a place not just to borrow a book but somewhere to access online learning, research family history or connect with the wider world. In 2026, Carnforth Library continues to offer computer sessions and courses, with its public computers among the most well-used in the district.

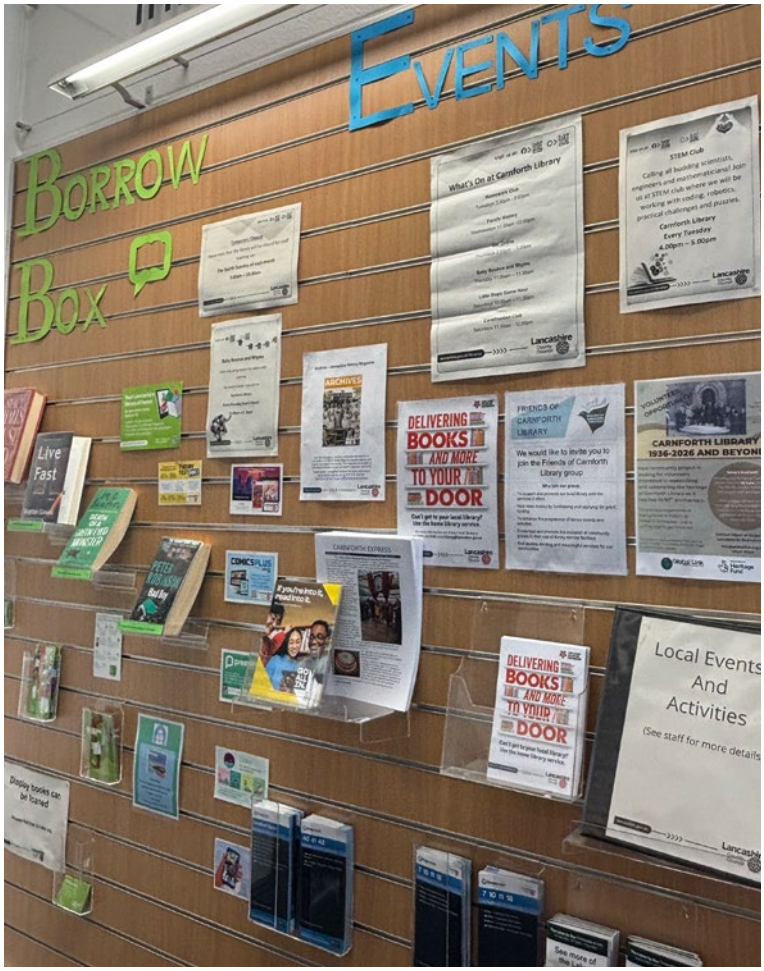


Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Carnforth computers in 2026.
Private collection.

Community activities in Carnforth Library in 2026

- Chat & Craft weekly sessions
- Seed swaps
- Meet your local councillor drop-in sessions
- Adult learning classes and public talks, including author visits
- Baby Bounce and Rhyme
- Health drop-in sessions
- Coffee mornings and book sales
- Jigsaw puzzle table
- Meetings for local groups
- Construction Club for children
- School visits
- Home Library Service
- Children's reading schemes
- 'Warm and Welcome' free tea and coffee station
- Tutoring for local students
- 'Get Online' drop-in computer sessions
- 'Little Steps' games sessions for children aged 2-5
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) Club
- Family history research support sessions



Community information board at Carnforth Library in 2026.
Private collection.

Friends of Carnforth Library

Established in 2024, the Friends of Carnforth Library are a group of volunteers who are passionate about supporting the library and community. The group organises events and activities and promotes the library as a welcoming place for people of all ages.

'Carnforth Library is much more than somewhere to borrow books - it's a place where people come together.'

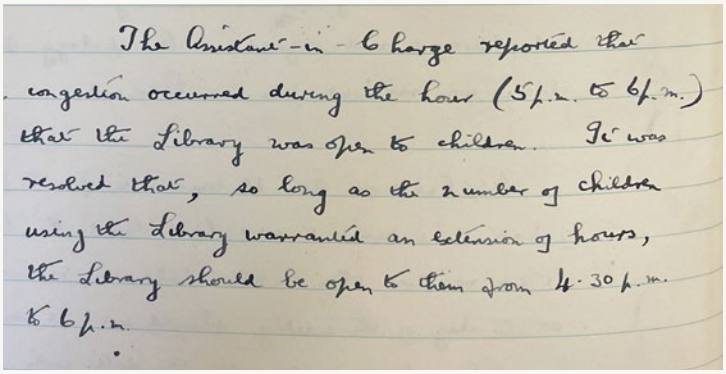
Secretary of the Friends of Carnforth Library

8. Children at the Library

From the moment Carnforth Library opened in 1936, children were among its most enthusiastic users. Over the years, librarians have worked hard to make the library welcoming, lively and responsive to young readers' interests – from story hours and book displays to reading clubs, school visits and Children's Book Weeks.

Young Readers in the Early Days

Within months of Carnforth Library's opening in 1936, librarian Jessie Carnell reported 'congestion' during children's opening hours so access was extended. Early reports noted the 'exceptional keenness' of junior readers. Borrowing was seasonal: the library was especially busy during the darker winter months, while in summer many children spent more time outdoors, at clubs or playing sports.



The Assistant-in-Charge reported that congestion occurred during the hour (5 p.m. to 6 p.m.) that the Library was open to children. It was resolved that, so long as the number of children using the Library warranted an extension of hours, the Library should be open to them from 4.30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Carnforth Library Committee meeting minutes, November 1936.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Librarians tried hard to make the library welcoming rather than strict or school-like. Posters and colourful displays themed around topics such as fairy tales, school stories and classics were regularly updated to attract attention and brighten the room. Lancashire librarians made picture books out of magazines and birthday cards to keep very young children quiet while their mothers browsed the library, as no such books were published at this time. It was reported that this did little to reduce the noise made by the youngsters but at least it transformed it into shrieks of delight at pictures of trains or donkeys.

> ***'I remember as a child how the library impressed you when you came in. It felt modern and important and gave you the feeling that you had arrived.'***
>
> ***Carnforth resident recalling childhood visits in the 1940s***

Children's interests were carefully considered. In Carnforth, school leavers were introduced to the adult library at age 14, instructed in the use of reference material and encouraged to explore books connected to their hobbies. Questionnaires in the late 1940s even asked children whether they preferred 'fat or thin books', colour illustrations and what time of day they most enjoyed reading.

Books Children Loved

Many Carnforth residents remember favourite books and authors they borrowed from the library as children, such as Enid Blyton and *Biggles*. Others were drawn to books about trains and travel.

Many children's classics available in 1936 remain favourites in 2026, including *The Railway Children*, *Swallows and Amazons* and *Ballet Shoes*, all of which can still be borrowed.

Illustrations and book covers were considered just as important then as now. Librarians recognised that attractive dust covers encouraged children to pick up books and begin reading.

Photograph by Corrie Barklimore.

Children's book exhibition in Morecambe. Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Wartime Changes

At the outbreak of war, Carnforth schools began closing earlier, at 3pm, so the Library Committee brought forward children's opening hours to allow pupils to use the library for homework.

The County Librarian believed that libraries would provide stability during difficult times, reporting that a 'well-managed library' could have a steadying influence on children during wartime.

Book shortages particularly affected children's publishing, although the overall quality remained high. Many children developed a keen interest in books about aircraft, ships and other wartime machinery.

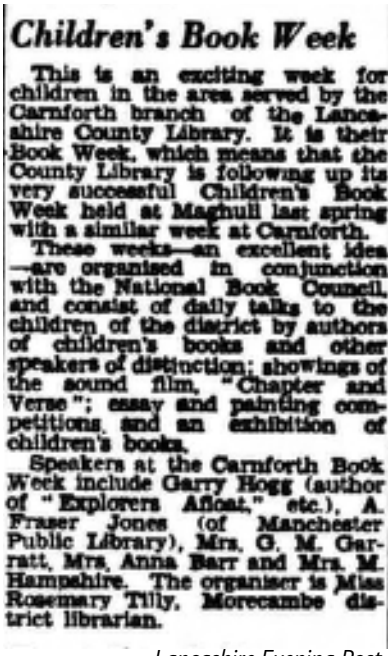
The 'Library' Air Raid Shelter

Many older Carnforth residents remember the wartime air raid shelter next to the library, which wasn't demolished until the 1960s. After the war children used it as a play area, daring each other to run through the pitch-black tunnel from one end to the other.

Children's Book Week, 1944

During the war, in November 1944, Carnforth hosted only the second Children's Book Week held in Lancashire. Organised by librarian Rosemary Tilly and a local committee, the event was promoted through schools, churches and a window display in the Westmorland Electricity showroom on Market Street.

The library closed to normal business for the week while local children, parents and teachers attended story and poetry readings, a film and talks by distinguished authors and speakers. Essay and illustration competitions offered book token prizes supplied by the National Book Council. This organisation later became BookTrust, which still supports young readers at Carnforth Library in 2026 through children's packs.



Children's Book Week

This is an exciting week for children in the area served by the Carnforth branch of the Lancashire County Library. It is their Book Week, which means that the County Library is following up its very successful Children's Book Week held at Maghull last spring with a similar week at Carnforth.

These weeks—an excellent idea—are organised in conjunction with the National Book Council, and consist of daily talks to the children of the district by authors of children's books and other speakers of distinction; showings of the sound film, "Chapter and Verse"; essay and painting competitions, and an exhibition of children's books.

Speakers at the Carnforth Book Week include Garry Hogg (author of "Explorers Afloat," etc.), A. Fraser Jones (of Manchester Public Library), Mrs. G. M. Garratt, Mrs. Anna Barr and Mrs. M. Hampshire. The organiser is Miss Rosemary Tilly, Morecambe district librarian.

Lancashire Evening Post, 8 November 1944.

Reading Schemes and Modern Library Life

From the 1970s onwards, children's reading schemes became an important part of library life across Lancashire. Programmes such as the Unicorn Book Club encouraged children to read widely in return for badges and book prizes.

In 2026 Carnforth Library continues this tradition with schemes for different age groups, including summer challenges and the Lancashire Reading Trail.

Lancashire Reading Trail display, 2026.
Private collection.

Over the years Carnforth Library has supported young people to gain Brownie and Guide reading badges and complete voluntary work for Duke of Edinburgh awards.

The library continues to work with local schools, welcoming class visits and supporting reading projects.

Modern displays still use many of the same techniques recommended by librarians in the 1930s: themed book selections, colourful posters and face-out displays to encourage browsing.

Timeline of Children's Activity at Carnforth Library

1936	Carnforth Library opens; children's opening hours are quickly extended due to popularity.
1938	Carnforth Library is involved in a pilot scheme to suspend fines for overdue children's books. Following the success of the pilot, fines for junior borrowers are abolished across the county, a policy that remains in place in 2026.
1939	Children's opening hours are brought forward at the outbreak of war. The first evacuees arrive in Carnforth; many join the library.
1940	The first children's story hour is introduced at Carnforth Library.
1944	Carnforth hosts Lancashire's second Children's Book Week.
1947	Lancashire County Library Service appoints its first Organiser of School Libraries.
1980s	The Unicorn Book Club is launched across Lancashire libraries.
1994	Lancashire's Children's and Schools' librarians reject the idea of stocking computer games because of cost and risk of damage.
1999	A Carnforth High School pupil is one of 12 young people chosen to judge Lancashire Children's Book of the Year, won by *Skellig*.
2026	Baby Bounce and Rhyme sessions restart at Carnforth.

Carnforth Library's children's section in 2026.
Private collection.

9. The Mobile Library Service

Since 1939, the mobile library has brought books and library services to communities across the Carnforth area. Serving remote farms, villages, schools and community hubs, it has overcome wartime restrictions, harsh winters and changing times to keep reading at the heart of rural life, supported by generations of dedicated mobile library staff.

Introduction of the Mobile Library

The South Lonsdale mobile library service, covering the Carnforth area, was established in the summer of 1939 by Lancashire Library Service and was only the second of its kind in the county. Its aim was to supply books to people out of reach of main libraries and village library centres.

County Librarian Raymond Irwin directed arrangements for the new service, developing the specifications for the van, which cost £400 and carried shelving for 1,500 books. Later vehicles increased capacity to 2,500 books.

First Carnforth mobile library van, 1940s.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Inside the Carnforth van.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

The van was shared with Garstang District, with the Carnforth area served by five journeys per month. As well as providing a direct service to smaller villages, isolated farms and cottages, it replenished stock at village library centres and schools. The first driver was George Rothwell of Garstang, who was accompanied by a library assistant.

An article in the Lancashire County Library Staff Guild Bulletin of May 1940 describes a busy day on the van visiting village centres, hamlets and private houses. The assistant shelved returned books and selected new issues for the next stop while the van was on the move. The article also describes the cold conditions on board and the need for wellingtons in winter.

Mobile Library During and After the War

Wartime brought significant challenges. The driver was called up for war service and petrol rationing reduced visits from monthly to every six to eight weeks. However, the 1942 ban on the use of petrol for private motoring led to a notable increase in book issues, as more people relied on the mobile library.

By March 1947, half of the 10,000 people in South Lonsdale were using the mobile library. Staff got to know their customers and their preferences, so were able to select appropriate books for the van. Readers could also request books for the next visit. The staff also became used to dealing with the unexpected. One borrower, needing to collect hen food on the day of a visit, left a note explaining that their books had been returned in a parcel left in the outdoor lavatory!

Ida Pickles, Mobile Library Driver

Pickles (far left) and four fellow female competitors pause for lunch at the Hest Bank Hotel during a 100-mile motorcycle trip, 1921.
The Hest Bank Inn.

Ida Pickles drove the mobile library van during the Second World War after the male driver was called up for war service. Quite a character, she loved anything mechanical. Pickles got her first car aged 17 in 1904, in an era when only 5% of motorists were female. Not long afterwards she drove from Land's End to John o'Groats.

Pickles later discovered motorbikes and during the 1920s took part in endurance trials and hill climbs, often being the only woman to successfully complete courses hundreds of miles long, while carrying out her own repairs.

During the latter half of 1948, Morecambe Library District, covering Carnforth, acquired its own van and no longer shared the Garstang vehicle. The driver was Mr H Parker. By 1954, this van was calling at 237 places every four weeks.

Annual book issues from mobile libraries across the county reached one million in 1955.

The service thrived despite the challenges caused by petrol rationing following the Suez Crisis of 1956-57, the blizzards of February 1958, prolonged mechanical issues and foot-and-mouth disease in 1968, which restricted access to rural areas.

Mobile Library During the Later 20th Century

Tom Palmer drove the van for 28 years from 1957 and is still remembered by locals. By this time the drivers were also expected to carry out basic vehicle maintenance.

By 1974, the County was operating 13 mobile library vans, with three retained as spares to cover breakdowns or absence for servicing and MOTs.

Single staffing was introduced on mobile library vans in the 1990s, with drivers also operating as library assistants. The number of vans gradually reduced as part of cost-saving measures.

> ***'Mr Palmer was very reliable, outgoing and friendly. He knew where everything was and clearly had a love of books himself, as he would talk to you about them and make recommendations.***
>
> ***For those of us living in rural areas, the mobile library became like a community hub. When it came to the village, you would often meet people there that you hadn't seen since the last visit and have a chance to catch up. You could even ask Mr Palmer to pass a book on to a friend in another village. The mobile library was a really important source of information and communication.'***
>
> ***Regular mobile library user during the 1970s and 1980s***

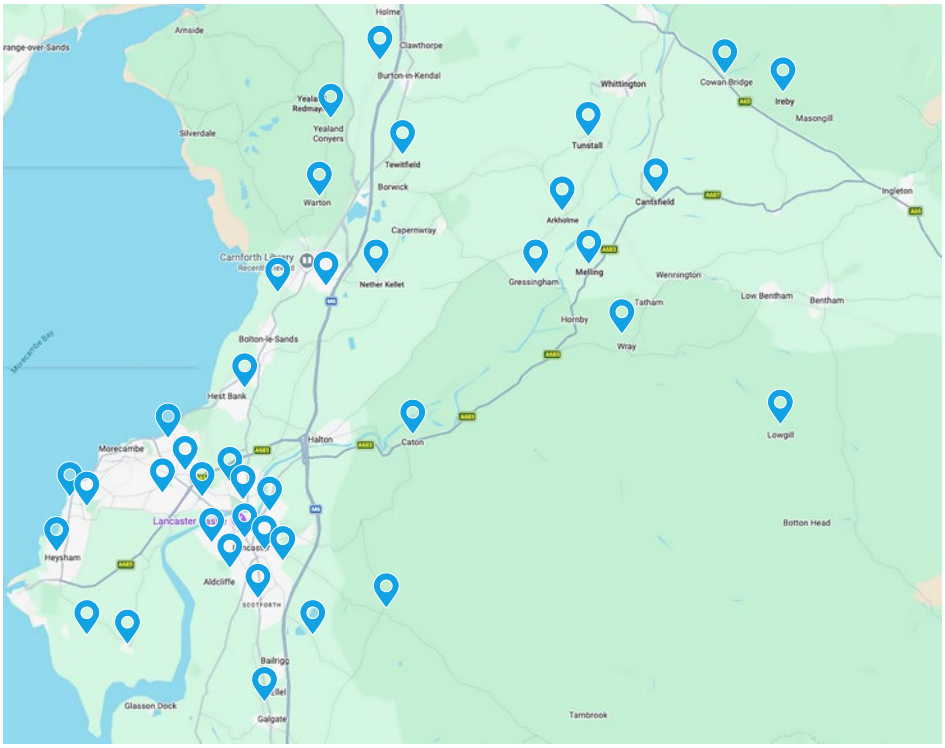
Tom Palmer, van driver in the Carnforth area from 1957 to 1985.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

The mobile library van that Tom Palmer drove in the 1980s.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Mobile Library in 2026

In 2026, the County Library Service has five vans in operation and one spare, visiting over 700 stops. The Carnforth van, named *Vroom with a View*, serves around 500 borrowers and issues 1,000-1,200 items over a three-week cycle, travelling as far south as Galgate, north to Yealand and east to Ireby.

The mobile library serving the Carnforth area in 2026 is based at Heysham Library.
Private collection.

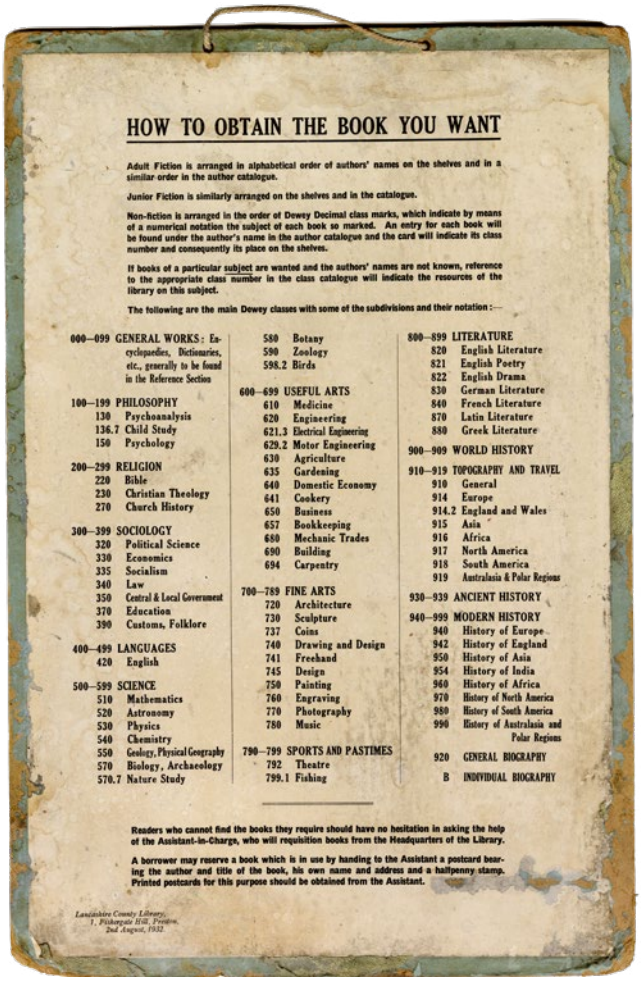


The Carnforth area mobile library stops in 2026.
Map data ©2025 Google. Stops plotted by Julie Penny.

10. The Evolution of the Library Book

The journey of the 'book' from 1936 to 2026 reflects how libraries have continually adapted to changing ways of reading, learning and accessing information. From shelves of carefully catalogued printed volumes to e-books and digital resources, Carnforth Library's story shows how the book has evolved from a solely physical object into part of a wider information landscape, while remaining central to library life.

In the first half of the twentieth century, public libraries were shaped by new thinking about education, access, and the role of reading in everyday life. As the County Library was being established, Lancashire's first County Librarian, John Cowley, proposed a structured approach to provision, dividing collections into general reading and student use for teachers and learners. He made recommendations on the number of books that should be stocked in relation to the local population size.



HOW TO OBTAIN THE BOOK YOU WANT

Adult Fiction is arranged in alphabetical order of authors' names on the shelves and in a similar order in the author catalogue.

Junior Fiction is similarly arranged on the shelves and in the catalogue.

Non-fiction is arranged in the order of Dewey Decimal class marks, which indicate by means of a numerical notation the subject of each book so marked. An entry for each book will be found under the author's name in the author catalogue and the card will indicate its class number and consequently its place on the shelves.

If books of a particular subject are wanted and the authors' names are not known, reference to the appropriate class number in the class catalogue will indicate the resources of the library on this subject.

The following are the main Dewey classes with some of the subdivisions and their notation :—

000—099 GENERAL WORKS: Encyclopaedias, Dictionaries, etc., generally to be found in the Reference Section

100—199 PHILOSOPHY
130 Psychoanalysis
136.7 Child Study
150 Psychology

200—299 RELIGION
220 Bible
230 Christian Theology
270 Church History

300—399 SOCIOLOGY
320 Political Science
330 Economics
335 Socialism
340 Law
350 Central & Local Government
370 Education
390 Customs, Folklore

400—499 LANGUAGES
420 English

500—599 SCIENCE
510 Mathematics
520 Astronomy
530 Physics
540 Chemistry
550 Geology, Physical Geography
570 Biology, Archaeology
570.7 Nature Study
580 Botany
590 Zoology
598.2 Birds

600—699 USEFUL ARTS
610 Medicine
620 Engineering
621.3 Electrical Engineering
629.2 Motor Engineering
630 Agriculture
635 Gardening
640 Domestic Economy
641 Cookery
650 Business
657 Bookkeeping
680 Mechanic Trades
690 Building
694 Carpentry

700—789 FINE ARTS
720 Architecture
730 Sculpture
737 Coins
740 Drawing and Design
741 Freehand
745 Design
750 Painting
760 Engraving
770 Photography
780 Music

790—799 SPORTS AND PASTIMES
792 Theatre
799.1 Fishing

800—899 LITERATURE
820 English Literature
821 English Poetry
822 English Drama
830 German Literature
840 French Literature
870 Latin Literature
880 Greek Literature

900—909 WORLD HISTORY

910—919 TOPOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL
910 General
914 Europe
914.2 England and Wales
915 Asia
916 Africa
917 North America
918 South America
919 Australasia & Polar Regions

930—939 ANCIENT HISTORY

940—999 MODERN HISTORY
940 History of Europe
942 History of England
950 History of Asia
954 History of India
960 History of Africa
970 History of North America
980 History of South America
990 History of Australasia and Polar Regions

920 GENERAL BIOGRAPHY
B INDIVIDUAL BIOGRAPHY

Readers who cannot find the books they require should have no hesitation in asking the help of the Assistant-in-Charge, who will requisition books from the Headquarters of the Library.

A borrower may reserve a book which is in use by handing to the Assistant a postcard bearing the author and title of the book, his own name and address and a halfpenny stamp. Printed postcards for this purpose should be obtained from the Assistant.

Lancashire County Library,
1, Fishergate Hill, Preston,
2nd August, 1932

Lancashire County Library sign, 1932.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Cowley proposed that libraries should actively support adult education with fiction comprising only 30% of book stock (in many other counties it was 50%), alongside non-fiction, poetry, drama, biography, travel, popular science and art. A list of 20,000 volumes was compiled to guide stock selection.

By 1931, Lancashire already had one of the highest levels of book lending in Britain, still relying mainly on small village centres like the one at North Road Council School in Carnforth. More than 1.7 million books were issued, with Lancashire recording a higher proportion of readers than the national average.

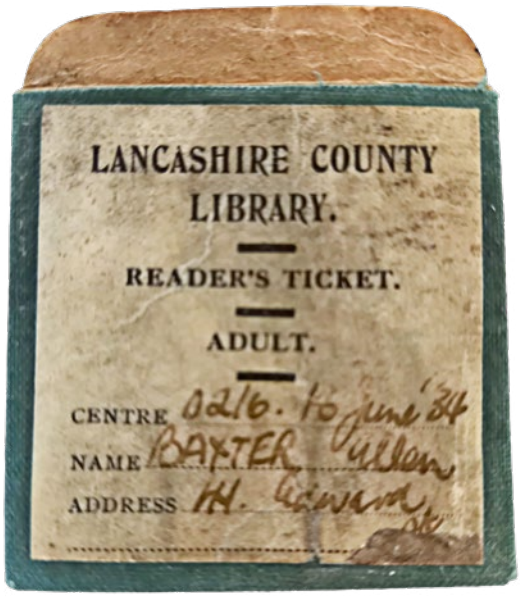
Borrowing at Carnforth Library in 1936

When Carnforth Library opened in 1936, it had a stock of 1,850 books serving a community of just over 3,000 people.

In her first report submitted six weeks after opening, librarian Jessie Carnell noted that there were already 1,016 registered readers, including both adults and children – about a third of the local population. Out of 5,076 total loans so far, 3,695 were to adults and 1,391 to junior readers.

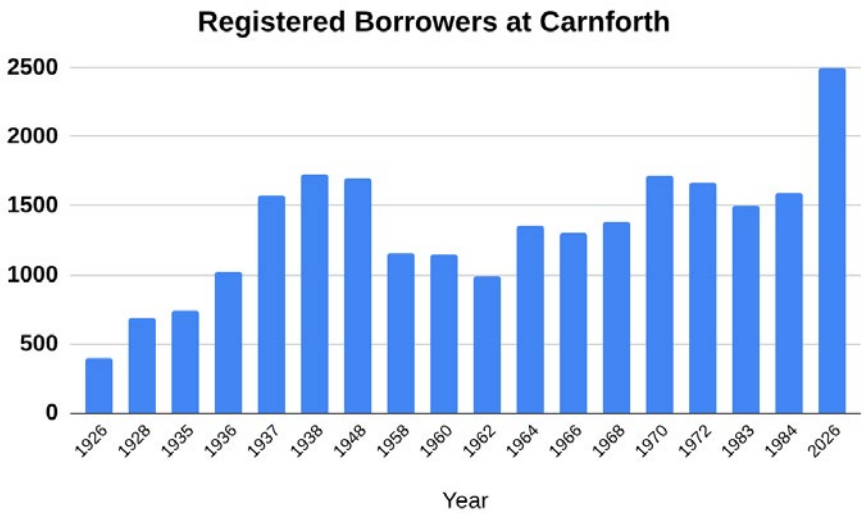
Adults could borrow one fiction and one non-fiction book at a time, while children aged 11-14 could only borrow one book. Late returns resulted in reminders and, in extreme cases, temporary suspension of borrowing rights.

The returns shelf in the centre of the library, behind the librarian's desk, was popular among users, as people checked to see what was back in stock.



Morecambe Library borrower's ticket, 1930s.
Lancashire Archives and Local History.

Early borrowers at Carnforth, as at many other libraries at the time, would often mark a particular page with a small dot so they could identify books they had already read. This practice suggests that books were circulating so rapidly that readers could easily lose track of what they had already borrowed.



Graph showing the number of users of Carnforth Library over the years.
Graph by Lesley Sutcliffe.

Issues of Censorship in Libraries

Britain has not had formal censorship laws since the 1600s but later legislation has regulated 'obscene' material and shaped the role of libraries in supporting intellectual freedom. This includes the Obscene Publications Acts of 1857 and 1957 and the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964. In practice, however, libraries have always exercised a degree of informal selection to avoid causing offence.

During the early years of Carnforth Library in the 1920s and 30s, there was ongoing debate about what constituted acceptable reading material. This reflected wider questions about the place of fiction in public libraries and concerns about the value of 'light' literature. The period following the First World War saw considerable political pressure on publishers and several well-known books were suppressed, such as *The Well of Loneliness*, *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. This placed librarians in a difficult position, caught between public duty and professional judgement.

Censorship was a live issue in the profession. At a Library Association conference held in Morecambe in 1930, a session entitled 'Is a Censor Desirable?' discussed whether librarians should restrict access to 'corrupt literature'. While the speaker supported censorship, most delegates argued that such decisions should rest with the individual reader.

> ***'Researching about book censorship has made me think about questions of power and 'who decides?'***
>
> ***Project Volunteer***

One local figure with strong opinions on the subject was Councillor A W Gorton, Chairman of the Morecambe Library Committee. At the 1930 conference reception, Gorton claimed to have obtained a children's book which he thought was 'nothing but rubbish' and asked the Chief Librarian to withdraw all books by the author! He was not alone in taking matters into his own hands: a report in the *Morecambe Guardian* in 1931 noted that some borrowers crossed out words in library books that offended them.

By 1969, Lancashire librarians were advised to follow Library Association guidance that books should not be excluded unless they were illegal, and not removed to satisfy particular groups. However, the guidance also acknowledged that some material should be issued on request only, and until quite recently certain titles were kept 'under the counter', including at Carnforth.

Controversy about books such as *The Satanic Verses* in Lancashire libraries in the late 1980s and concerns in 2026 about 'banning books' show that questions of censorship in libraries have far from gone away.

Books in a Changing World

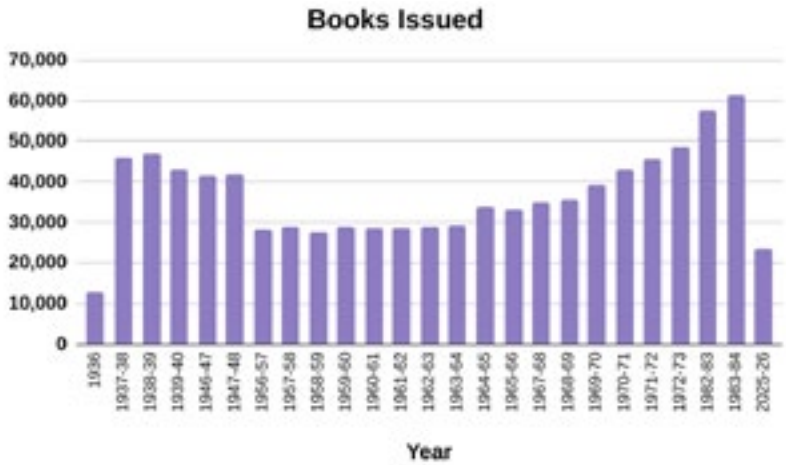
Over time, borrowers at Carnforth could gradually take out more and more books at once. By the 1990s it was six, but the introduction of the Talis computer system in 1999 meant that users could borrow 20 books at a time. This remains the case in 2026 when library customers use plastic cards with bar codes to check out books.

Library borrowers' tickets, 1980s/90s and 2020s.
Private collections.

The postwar years saw competing forms of entertainment, most notably television, though librarian reports from the time suggest that this did not impact book borrowing levels as much as was feared. At the same time, Carnforth Library's weekly opening hours gradually increased.

Carnforth Library Opening Hours
1936 – 12 hours per week
1960 – 25.5 hours per week
2026 – 34 hours per week

Book services expanded to include Braille, large print and talking books for blind and partially sighted readers, showing how libraries adapted to people's needs. In 2026, the popular BorrowBox app allows users to access e-books and digital newspapers, magazines and comics.



Graph showing the numbers of books borrowed over the years at Carnforth Library.
The statistics for 2026 do not include e-books as these are not recorded separately for each library.
Graph by Lesley Sutcliffe.

As the role of the library has changed into more of an information and community service, particularly with the arrival of public computers, traditional reference sections have shrunk. Items traditionally held at libraries, such as legal and parliamentary volumes, no longer need to be stored on hard copy.

Despite these changes, books remain central to the library experience in 2026. They are still used for display, inspiration and discovery. While it is impossible to know what books and libraries will look like in another 90 years' time, their history suggests they will continue to adapt to new technologies and changing ways of reading while remaining places of learning, imagination and community.

Time Allowed [redacted] Days.

This Book is due back on or before the last date stamped below.

PW

782.1

9973

4 JUL 57	4 NOV	22. OCT. 1981	IDL FROM UB TO NK D.B. 28.5.92
22 APR 58	28 DEC 61	2. DEC. 1981	
2 MAY 58	15 NOV 62	15. MAY 1982	15. MAY 92
21 MAY 58	10 FEB 1965	11. AUG. 1983	03. JUN 92
31 MAY 58	13 APR 1965	16. FEB. 1984	22. JUN 92
11 DEC 58	18 OCT 1965	3. JUL. 1984	23. 02. 95
13 FEB 59	1 NOV 1966		10. 06. 9[illegible]
	25 AUG 1966	10. DEC. 1985	21. 11. [illegible]
9 MAR 59	20 FEB 1970	10. SEP. 1988	22. JUL 00
24 JUL 59	24 APR 1972	IDL FROM UB TO BPM D.B. 24.1.92	17 JUL 2009
L.S. 2.11.09	2 AUG 1973		
27 JUN 60	2 AUG 1974	08. JAN 92	17 APR 2010
18 FEB 61	3 JUN 1975	27. JAN 92	29/12/15

CENTRAL LIBRARY

Extract from "Rules"

Hours — 9.30 a.m. - 7 p.m. Daily (Saturdays 5 p.m.)
Wednesdays 9.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.

Fines—1d. per day beyond the 14 days allowed for reading.

Books ma[illegible] telephone or personal
applicat[illegible]

Change o[illegible] be
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Acknowledgements

The project team wishes to express our thanks to everyone who has supported this project, in particular:

- Lancashire Libraries
- Lancashire Archives and Local History
- Friends of Carnforth Library
- Carnforth Town Council
- Carnforth Community Primary School
- Project Consultant Historian Professor Corinna Peniston-Bird
- Mourholme Local History Society
- Lancaster City Museums
- Regional Heritage Centre, Lancaster University
- Carnforth Heritage Visitor Centre
- Carnegie UK
- Local historians and various local, national and international libraries and archives
- All those who shared their memories of working at and using Carnforth Library
- Descendants of people connected with Carnforth Library

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The Loop – newsletter for Lancashire County Library staff 1999–2004 (DDX 117/ACC11372/53).

Other Archives

Carnforth Congregational Church archives.

Devon Archives: Exeter City Library Committee minutes (ECA/1/11/1/4/12).

National Archives: R Tilly (WO 440/24993), British Council in Iran (BW 49/13, BW 49/20).

National Library of New Zealand: Transcripts of recordings on notable librarians (MS-Papers-8130-4), A G W Dunningham Papers (97-002-59/5), New Zealand Library Association Records (79-042-22).

National Records of Scotland: Carnegie UK Trust – Capital grants for libraries: Lancashire (GD281/5/22); County Library signs 1926-1950 (GD281/5/128).

North Road Council School diaries, 1914-1936.

Online Databases and Websites

Ancestry – www.ancestry.co.uk.

British Newspaper Archive – www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

CILIP – The Library and Information Association - https://www.cilip.org.uk.

Find A Grave – www.findagrave.com.

HM Land Registry – www.gov.uk.

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Carnforth Library 1936-2026

Ninety Years at the Heart of the Community

This project is made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund,
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