

CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY SINCE 1945

The **Barnet** Society

Tributes to visionary campaigner for the Open Door Centre -- High Barnet's "amazing" community hub and drop-in cafe

Written by Nick Jones

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David Parry, founder of the highly successful Open Door Centre and drop-in cafe at Christ Church, St Albans Road, has died at the age of 77.

Church leaders paid tribute to his achievement in establishing a meeting point for all ages and groups in High Barnet for which the local community would “be forever in his debt”.

Mr Parry (far left) is seen above in 2014 welcoming the then Mayor of Barnet, Councillor Hugh Rayner, and his wife Susan, when they visited the former Christ Church schoolhouse at the start of its transformation into a community hub.

He was a long-time resident of Byng Road, having moved to Newbury 18 months ago with his wife Jill to be nearer other family members.



His funeral service at St Nicholas Church, Newbury, was relayed by a live stream to the Open Door Centre for the benefit of church members, former colleagues, and friends in Barnet.

Tributes to their father were led by his two daughters and son. Rachel said her father placed service to the community at the heart of his life. He had a deep calling and was always active in lay ministry.

His leadership of the John Trotter Trust that had initiated the “amazing” Open Door Centre reflected his determination to ensure that his voluntary work had an impact in his local community, nationally and internationally.

Its success had brought him great joy, a project that had won two London Borough of Barnet civic awards for outstanding service to the community.

Voluntary service was a thread throughout the family's time in High Barnet. He had been a school governor and contributed to the work of Barnet Health Authority, Barnet Probus, and the Alzheimer's Society.

Jonathan said his father was born in South Wales, the son of a minister. His mother was a midwife. He had remained a proud Welshman at heart and had been an active member or conductor of Welsh choirs wherever he had lived.

After teaching in Birmingham in the 1960s, Mr Parry and his wife left in 1972 to become missionaries in Papua and New Guinea where they lived for 12 years and where he was a member of a permanent commission for higher education.



In 1990 he started a long association with the Leprosy Mission becoming chair in 1995 and then chair of Leprosy Mission International for a further four years.

Mr Parry represented the mission at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, who had been such a strong supporter of the fight against leprosy. Peter Waddup, the mission's chief executive officer in England and Wales gave one of the readings.

On returning to the UK, Mr Parry worked on the governance of higher education institutions both in this country and internationally, and he assisted many colleges and universities.

Roger Brown who worked with Mr Parry for 14 years on the Higher Education Qualifications Council, and later at Solent University in Southampton, said his former colleague made many friends as he combined “cleverness with niceness” and a dry sense of humour.

His cancer diagnosis a year ago had come as a terrible shock to the family. Judy said her father had been determined to celebrate his 55th wedding anniversary with his wife Jill, their three children, and six grandchildren.



One of his great interests was church architecture and his love of St Albans Cathedral had led him in the final months of his life to work towards the St Albans certificate in theology. Jonathan said that latterly his father had become a Freeman of the City of London, and he livery of the Worshipful Company of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators was draped on his coffin.

Mr Parry's fund raising and personal determination to see through his vision of re-opening the flint-faced former schoolhouse as a drop-in facility for the elderly and wider community in High Barnet was recognised in 2021 when he was presented by the Mayor of Barnet, Councillor Caroline Stock, with the London Borough of Barnet civic award for outstanding service to the community.

The original schoolhouse, erected in 1844, was first used for religious services while Christ Church was being built.

Together with the adjoining Pennefather Hall, the three buildings constitute a much-loved feature of the St Albans Road townscape, at one of the main approaches to High Barnet.

After being under local authority ownership, the former schoolhouse was used by the Red Cross until becoming surplus in the early 2000s when Christ Church launched an appeal to buy the building for £330,000.

After completion of the purchase in 2012 work began on the conversion under the guidance and direction of Mr Parry in his role as chair of the John Trotter Trust – named in memory of Captain John Trotter, the Victorian benefactor who lived at Dyrham Park and who founded Christ Church in 1845.



After a decade planning, campaigning, and fund-raising, the Bishop of Stepney, the Right Reverend Adrian Newman, led the celebrations in July 2017 to celebrate the completion of the centre at a cost of £1.3 million – £800,000 raised in individual donations, £230,000 in grants and the remainder through a bank loan.



A variety of organisations make use of the centre – including Chipping Barnet Seniors Day Centre which holds activities there on Monday and Friday.

When fund-raising for the project, Mr Parry said that his vision of an inter-generational community facility reflected the needs of a church and town with a rapidly ageing population.

Data in 2017 showed that more people aged over 65 lived in Barnet than any other London borough bar Bromley; Barnet had more residents over 95 than any other borough; and High Barnet itself had more older residents than the rest of the Borough of Barnet.