



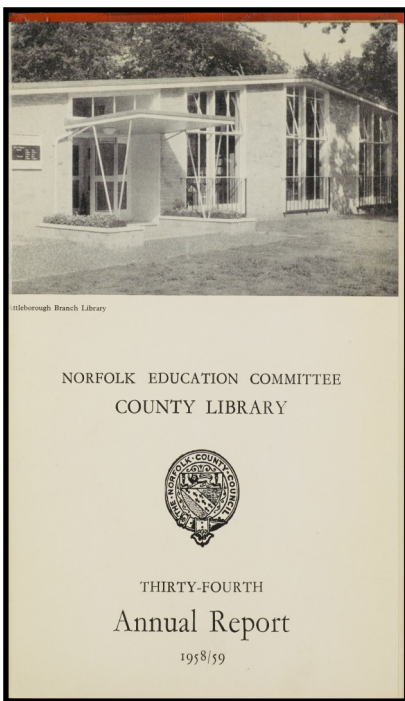
Compiled by Moira Coleman with the
help of members of staff, past and
present, of Attleborough Library

Printed by Barkers Print & Design,
Attleborough

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Attleborough Library: the first sixty years (and before)



1930-1959

In April 1930, Norfolk's Education Department opened a part-time Library Centre in Attleborough [Primary] School. For almost thirty years, the Centre was accessible to the public just once a week, for one hour between 4 and 5 pm on Tuesdays. Successive headmasters acted as honorary librarians, and relied upon volunteers to run the Centre. In 1959, the Education Department paid tribute to the dedicated people who had kept it open every week recording that since April 1930, they issued 272,879 books.

By 1959, in addition to the 'Headquarters' library in Norwich and a mobile library service for outlying communities, there were over four hundred part-time Library Centres throughout Norfolk but only sixteen Branch Libraries. Attleborough was fortunate to be the sixteenth branch in 1959. Scarcity of funding and materials meant that the post-war development of Branch Libraries was slower than the County Education Committee had hoped; in the next two years to 31st March 1961, only three more were opened and the hundreds of part-time Library Centres remained the bedrock of provision. The snapshot of statistics (on page 8) shows that borrowing increased tenfold in Attleborough in the first year after the Library opened. Norfolk County Council acknowledged with gratitude that the project would not have been possible in 1959 without the vision and generosity of Melancthon Lombe Brooke, a retired solicitor who died in 1929.

Attleborough Library moves to new premises in 2019 (see page 10), leaving 31 Connaught Road, its home of sixty years.

This is a glimpse into the building's history and a tribute to Melancthon Lombe Brooke, an Attleborough resident whose legacy made it possible.

The forerunner of this new, purpose-designed 1959 building was a 'Library Centre' run from a school, which is where the story begins in 1930.

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The man behind the library:

Melancthon William Henry Lombe Brooke

The 1881 Census for Attleborough records Melancthon Brooke, solicitor, aged 40, born in Cambridge, living as head of household at 'Point House', although other records suggest that he purchased 'Point Cottage', opposite Point House, in 1887. Point Cottage (pictured on page 3) is where he is recorded in working life and retirement, where he died in 1929, and where, in 1908, he completed work on his book: 'The Great Pyramid of Gizeh...' (see page 10 for its full title).



His book was based on correspondence with academics and on manuscripts and books in the British Museum and numerous libraries. He writes of 'the City Library in the Guildhall, at which last any book can be inspected without further formality than signing the visitor's name in the register at the entrance of the Reading Room.' His research began in 1878 and continued for the next thirty years 'when leisure afforded the opportunity'.

In his book, Melancthon Lombe Brooke scrutinises recorded measurements of the Great Pyramid, adding his theories about their relevance to 'standard' British weights and measures, of which he is critical; and he argues against the introduction of metrication, mooted even then.

In his will, Melancthon Lombe Brooke specified the white limestone pyramid to be erected over his own tomb as: '91 inches around the base and 58 inches to the apex'. Today, the pyramid survives in Attleborough Cemetery (author's picture above in January 2019): the limestone is discoloured and encrusted, but the measurements are exactly as he directed. Fulfilling the rest of his will proved to be more complex and took thirty years, as the next page explains.

The legacy of Melancthon Lombe Brooke

Under the terms of Melancthon Lombe Brooke's will, his sister Lucy was granted a life interest in his estate. This entitled her to remain at Point Cottage, supported by an annual income, for as long as she wished. However, once Lucy had no further use for it, or in the event of her death, his Trustees were: **'To permit my said dwellinghouse premises and land to be for ever after used by the inhabitants of Attleborough as a library reading room and pleasure grounds together with my said books pictures and garden effects...'**



Above: Point Cottage, Besthorpe Road, author's picture, December 2018.

Coincidentally, the new home of Attleborough Library from 2019 is within sight of Point Cottage, diagonally opposite on the Norwich Road (see picture on page 10).

The will also directed that a board of five Library Management Trustees should oversee the appointment of 'a custodian of the Trust premises... preference shall be given to a retired schoolmaster if one can be found who is fully qualified and desirous of filling such post'.

Point Cottage was never used in the way Melancthon Lombe Brooke envisaged. A note appended to the probate copy of his will confirms that the property was vested in his sister Lucy on 9th July 1931. By October 1931, the property had been sold. By 1932 Lucy appears on the Electoral Register for Beddington and Wallington (Sutton, Surrey), where she died in 1942, aged 95.

The Lombe Brooke Trust, established to fulfil the conditions of the original will, still had the task of fulfilling Melancthon Lombe Brooke's wish for Attleborough to benefit from a library. They achieved this by passing the responsibility, and eventually the accrued investments, to Norfolk County Council's Education Department. Even so, it was not until July 1959 that the Trust handed these funds to the Norfolk County Treasurer. The investments realised £4,470 11s 10d, a major contribution to the cost of the new library, as the next page shows.

1944—1959: from frustration to fruition

A Norfolk Education Department report of 1959 says: 'When the Post War Library Development Scheme was approved by the County Library Committee in 1944, we all hoped that Attleborough would soon be provided with a new library, but many obstacles have had to be overcome...' Not least of these was the lack of a suitable site. Thos. Wm. Gaze & Son of Diss wrote to the Chief Education Officer on 31st August confirming that their firm had recommended demolition of the Old Rectory to the Church Commissioners. Subject to their approval and planning permission, a favoured site would be available in Connaught Road. With a home in view, the planning and building process began. Ten firms submitted prices based on the designs of G.W. Oak, Architect to the Education Committee, and the outcomes are summarised below in extracts from Education Committee reports of 1959. Melancthon Lombe Brooke's legacy contributed more than 50% of the total cost:

	£	s	d
The 0.39-acre site [purchased in 1956]	400	00	00
Main building contractor, L.J.E. Bye	6,682	18	03
Furniture, Messrs Roneo Ltd.	969	09	00
	8,052	07	03

The planning and design have attempted to provide an expression of a public building... by a liberal use of space and scale... The dimensions of the Library are 48' x 33' with an approximate capacity of 12,000 volumes, arranged on wall shelving and island stacks. The staff enclosure controls the public movement both 'in' and 'out' from the Entrance Hall and Library... Large glazed metal windows from near floor to the sloping ceiling provide natural lighting... A simple unspectacular colour scheme confined to white, cream and soft blue has been used so as not to detract from the contribution made by the books and users of the Library...

Sir Nikolas Pevsner writes of 'Attleborough Branch Library' in the 1962 edition of 'Buildings of England: Norfolk North-West and South'

A very pleasant, fresh little building of 1959 by G.W. Oak, architect to the Education Committee. Steel-framed, clad in buff brick under a very shallow pitched roof, the two roof slopes of unequal length. Tall metal windows to N & S. Apart from tiny offices at the W end, the interior is one big space.

1959 to 2019: from 'one big space' to 'Open Library'



Left: 1959 view (Norfolk Education Committee image AL/6) looking E to W. At the far end (under the wall clock) is the large staff desk. Compare this with the view below, taken from the same position.

Right: the modern staff desk is small and functional but visible and welcoming from the front entrance door.

Below: view from E to W, with one of the self-service kiosks visible where the original staff desk once stood. Wheeled stacks, introduced in 1998, have enabled staff to rearrange and zone the space quickly and easily, ensuring room for tables, chairs and computers as well as zones dedicated to different user needs, including those of younger readers, shown on the next page.

Author's images, January 2019



The 'one big space' was flexible and adaptable, responding to changes in information technology that were unimaginable when the building was designed in the 1950s. Then, the 'staff enclosure' was essential and remained until 1998. It provided counter space for maintaining paper-based records of issues, returns and renewals, all of which ensured face-to-face contact with every borrower on every visit.

All this would begin to change with the introduction of 'Norlink', which revolutionised Norfolk's library service. Attleborough was the first installation in a county-wide implementation of the computerised system which took six years to complete. Every item in the County's stock was identified with a barcode. Every library was equipped with a scanner. Every borrower was issued with a card also incorporating a barcode which identified their borrower number. The next step was to give borrowers online access, which has extended to an even wider range of media accessible to them wherever they are by PC, tablet or smartphone. Now the 'one big space' includes a bank of computers that can be booked by users, provides two self-service kiosks for borrowers and offers out-of-hours access through 'Open Library'.



Then and now: pride of place and people

No town in the County has a Library more attractive than here at Attleborough, but premises, however good they may be, cannot ensure the success of a library, this depends on the human element. We shall do our best from the base at Headquarters in Norwich but the Library will depend on the people of Attleborough. May it grow and develop to fulfil the highest hopes that its benefactor, Mr Lombe-Brooke, envisaged for it.

(Statement by the County Librarian, 15th June 1959)

Over two hundred people attended the ceremony when the new Attleborough Branch Library was opened at 3 pm on 6th July 1959 by Miss Kate Gaymer, BA, MBE.

In August 2016, a quite different event attracted another two hundred people to the Library, spilling outside into its grounds. They were there to celebrate a first visit by the Children's Laureate, Chris Riddell. A member of the Library's staff recalls the pride and excitement that the event generated: 'We expected about 50 people but they kept coming—more than 200 attended. The event was due to end at 4 pm but it went on until 7 pm'.



A snapshot of statistics, 1959-2019

1958-59 (LIBRARY CENTRE)	In its last full year of operation from 1 April 1958 to 31 March 1959, the part-time Library Centre issued 7200 books to 438 readers. Then, in the period 1st April 1959 until early July, when the new Library opened, the Centre issued another 3510 books to 143 readers. The Centre was open only once a week for one hour.		
BRANCH LIBRARY	Books in stock*	Borrowers in period or year	Items issued AV items = audio-visual media
July 1959 to 31 March 1961	12000	In its first eight months of operation, Attleborough Branch Library issued 30,860 books to 1218 readers. In its first FULL year of operation, the Library issued 36,796 books to 1421 readers.	
1969 (approx.)	13700	2000	Recorded as 1600 issues per week, an approximate annual total of 83,200
1999	15043	Not recorded but 53,780 VISITS	128,606 books 6,232 AV items
2009	16048	Not recorded but 69,626 VISITS	110,343 books 7,011 AV items
Year to March 2018	8965	2,513	69,462 issues 42,144 visits which include borrowing and other activities on offer in the Library

***Books in stock:** when the Library opened in 1959, its stock of '12000 volumes' would have been hardback books. Since then, changes in technology and borrower demand have resulted in a wide variety of stock other than the books recorded here. Shelving has been adapted over time to accommodate and display a range of media unimaginable in the 1950s including paperback books, then audio and video tapes, later CDs and DVDs, journals and magazines. In addition, stock now includes storybags for very young children, drawing and modelling materials, toys and games.

1900-2019: changing places



Left: Detail from 1900 plan of Attleborough's rectory and its glebe. Reproduced by permission of Norfolk Record Office from DN/ADR 9/1/9. The plan accompanied an application by the Diocese of Norwich to the Board of Agriculture for permission to sell the glebe, which was then classified as agricultural land.

By 1900, Attleborough Rectory's glebe, an area of productive land once essential to support the rector, was no longer thought necessary and was sold piecemeal by the Diocese of Norwich, opening the way for building development along the N side of Connaught Road. The site purchased for the Library comprised part of plot 511 (shown above and classified then as 'meadow'). The Education Department described their response to the special character of the site in a 1959 report on the completed Library project:

'The site... [is] elevated above the road, with a southern aspect and having a sprinkling of native trees which give a mature aspect to the building. At the back visible in the distance is the ancient and renowned church. These advantages and restrictions required special care in the planning and architecture of the Library, some quiet modern quality without disturbing unduly the environment or neighbourly atmosphere of the area.'

A new rectory and Holly Court would eventually occupy land between the 1959 Library and the 'ancient and renowned church' but the site has retained its hedge and its character. A large oak tree fell, an uprooted victim of the October 1987 storm, and caused damage to the Library roof and interior, but otherwise the 'sprinkling of native trees which give a mature aspect to the building' has survived. The cover images record the scene in January 2019.

When the Library vacates 31 Connaught Road, Norfolk County Council will sell the site.

Notes, sources and acknowledgements

HYPERLINKS : valid when accessed in February 2019 and when read using Adobe PDF Reader (recommended)

Note: The principal source is a random collection of materials including photographs and copies of Norfolk County Council Education Department and Library Committee correspondence and papers from the 1950s. The author is indebted to Attleborough Library staff for permitting access to it. Thanks are due also to Spire Solicitors (Attleborough office) for their help in responding to queries.

Attleborough Heritage Group, *A look at the history of Attleborough's streets: No. 5—Connaught Road and New North Road and No. 6 Surrogate Street and Thieves Lane* (Attleborough, 2013)

Attleborough sale of glebe: part of DN/ADR 9/1/9 (at Norfolk Record Office)

Attleborough: Norfolk Parish Studies Collection 27 (Norfolk Central Library Local Studies Department, 1987)

Civil registration details (births, marriages and deaths) for members of the Brooke family from 1840-1942, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> and also via the General Register Office (now part of HM Passport Office) at <https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/> (from where certificates may be ordered online)

County Library Reports 1958-61, Norfolk Education Committee (1941-1969 reports held at Norfolk Record Office, <https://www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk/>)

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Ordnance Survey maps of Attleborough for 1883 and 1906 (25":1 mile) and 1953 (6":1 mile) accessed and viewed via the National Library of Scotland's collections at: <https://maps.nls.uk/>

Pevsner, N., *Buildings of England: Norfolk, North-West and South* (Harmondsworth, 1962)

Trade directories, postal directories and gazetteers for Norfolk accessed via the Historical Directories of England and Wales collection digitised by Leicester University at: <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/>

Will of Melancthon William Henry William Lombe Brooke and codicils: probate copy, dated 1 November 1929 (photocopy held in Attleborough Library papers, see Note above).

UK Census records, including the 1939 England and Wales Register, accessed via <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>



Left: The premises that will house Attleborough Library from late Spring 2019: Attleborough Community & Enterprise Centre (at the junction of Church Street and Norwich Road), NR17 2AH

Author's image, December 2018