The history of community development in St Albans Catholic School+

24th May 1867 The Mutual Improvement Association for men, was formed. As far back as the early 1860's, the citizens of what was then known as Knightstown (Dover Street) were already conscious of the need for cultural activity and a meeting place for such activity.

28th October 1867 The premises opened. Funds for the building came from memberships and a loan of 30 pounds. Its aim was a mixture of education and recreation, with pool tables in the back room. The constitution emphasis was on education and information sharing. We read with interest that "all loud talking, swearing or profane language, practical joking, smoking, or drunkenness are strictly forbidden". Likewise, "political or religious controversy"

February 1869 Letting of the room firstly to Miss Marchmont for a girls’ school then others, to ease the financial burden.

December 1869 A new committee allowed women to join for half price. A government grant of 25 pounds was received.

October 1874 The room now incorporated a library with 436 books, 1,431 issues and a profit of £5.4.7d. By now, the enlargement of the room was essential. A request to the Provincial Government brought only £50 instead of the hoped for £300. The £50 was voted at once to the building fund. Mr Wynn-Williams appears to have worked hard to reconcile the trustees and committee on one side and Mr Jollie, the Government's agent, on the other. Mr Jollie refused to acknowledge the Association as a Public Library. However, a tender of £134.13.6d was let to a Mr Crabtree "to be finished in eight weeks, with a fine of £5 for each week overdue".

12 May 1875 The new extended room opened with a ball enjoyed by all.

1878 - The next years were years of steady, if slow progress. The hall was again enlarged, gas mains brought better lighting; money was wisely spent on fences, furniture, shelving, curtains and a frontage of asphalt.

Repeated gifts of £5 and of books came from Mr George Gould and from Mr Blakiston but the subsidy no longer came from the Government.

At this time, the trustees sanctioned the raising of a mortgage for building purposes. The Druids offered a loan, Mr Gould gave £50 and with £40 from accumulated funds, the contract was let.

From now on, the buildings played a very important role in the lives of the people of the district. They were used by the Band of Hope, the Templars, the Druids, the Mormons, a Drum and Fife Band, the Railway League, the Salvation Army, a dancing class, a gymnasium and an elocution class and the St Albans Political Association.

In May, 1885, the words "Public Library" were added to the original title, so Mr Jollie must have given in. The usefulness of the Association was now creating general approval and the City Council became increasingly aware that it was an institution to be fostered and helped. In 1904 it subsidised the library's income by £25, which was generous considering the Government grant was only £7.

By 1917, it was obvious that the old buildings must be replaced. Here, the City Council stepped in and offered a new brick building to be erected on a site in Colombo Street North. It was very swampy, owing to a number of springs, but was drained and the building opened in 1921 by the then mayor, Dr HTJ Thacker. In 1922 the name was shortened to "The St Albans Public

Library", while the old site became the property of the Christchurch City Council for access to a proposed tip.

This was the real beginning of the present voluntary librarian scheme, which keeps the library open for five afternoons and six evenings a week. Life membership is given for twenty years' service and the Honours Board pays tribute to the devotion of the staff. In one hundred years of presidencies, appear the names of six women, Miss Gillanders 1928; Mrs Prinsep 1948-49, Mrs

G. C. Bashford 1950-51, Miss A. Bower, Mrs G. Henderson 1954-56 and Mrs O. Moody now serving her fifth year.

In 1930, the library committee added a much needed annex for fiction and in 1950, the City Council built on a small kitchen and other facilities. Recently, more shelves have given added space in the very fine non-fiction section. The main library in town gives great help with a request service and a pool loan collection which is deeply appreciated. Their help in binding magazines and rebinding useful books helps both financially and practically.

May we hope that in the years to come, in spite of radio, television, sports and easy transport, the citizens of St Albans will use and appreciate their own library as the pioneers planned and hoped. (Dorothy Bashford)

1966 SARA was formed as a protest group to the motorway proposal and designation. It worked as a lobby group and held public meetings.

December 1993 The first issue of STANN was produced.

1994 The motorway designation was uplifted. As a result of the 28 years of designation, little Council money had been put into roading or other developments. Consequently, the suburb of St Albans became depressed with lower property values and the chain reaction of a transient population. SARA after 1994 wanted to address this blight on the suburb and from a reactive issues group became a proactive group to rebuild the suburb with community development.

Mid 1990s The NeighbourNet Computing group started out as the St Albans Infolink. The aim was to make computing accessible to the lower socio-economic people of St Albans and thereby help bridge what is known as the digital divide

1998 SARA (as management group for the position) successfully applied to the CCC for funding from the Social Initiatives Fund to finance a Community Facilitator position for the suburb. A contract was given for three years (1998 – 2001). The job description contained headings such as Community Liaison, Community Board Liaison, Community Development, Community Projects and Community Communication.

**Opening Day of the St Albans Community Resource Centre** (SACRC) in October 1998. Most of the events have been organized by SARA alone, or in conjunction with the City Council Leisure Unit.

Simultaneously, The St Albans Public Library, which had been run by volunteers for many years, was going through an evaluation. After lengthy consultation the Council decided to bring the mobile Library Bus to Edgeware and refurbish the Library building as a Resource Centre. SARA was offered an office in this building, which at the time of the Community Facilitator position starting was just being renovated. A large part of the position became the furnishing and development of the building over the next three years. This was successful but with it has come the increased administration and managerial duties a building like this requires. When the SACRC became available, one room was set aside for St Albans Infolink to use

2001 From the end of 3 yr report for Social Inititives Fund ... “Before I describe what has been achieved in these areas, it is important to point out that one of the performance targets in Community Liaison was “to establish a home base at the Edgeware Library for the gathering and dispersal of information for all parties involved” and that this “home base” would provide an office from which the facilitators (myself and Doris McLennan in a job share position) would work. What soon became apparent was that we could not work in an office within this building, which was otherwise in a state of vacuum, without developing the building. We, in fact, became building coordinators by default with the added responsibilities of helping set this facility up from scratch.

I was part of the St Albans Community Resource Centre Interim Committee, and as we were both on the spot so to speak, we became very involved in the setting up of the building. This included things like – overseeing renovations; developing a constitution, management plan and budgets. Finding furnishings, curtains and a pool table; organizing cleaning, heating and security systems; setting up an administration system including OSH, the promotion and hireage of the building and generally liaising with Council in the maintenance of this building.

“This has been an enjoyable part of the job, but what was supposed to be providing us a home base, became, by default, a considerable part of our job description.

“It has been very rewarding to see different local groups becoming established with the existence of a building as a focus point. The development of the St Albans Art Society and the St Albans History Group are two good examples. We have helped by finding funding for diverse groups, for example, the St Albans Community Choir, Sunbeam Kindergarten and the St Albans Baptist Church”

“Also the type of funding for this position has been an important aspect of its success. The management by the St Albans Residents Association has enabled this position to maintain an independence from the City Council; allowing advocacy for the residents without influence from the City Council. The residents have found this an important distinction.

The Resource Centre itself has been a very effective Resource in the development of this position. The combined approach of ownership by Council, but management by lay people in the community has been an effective way of making sure this Resource Centre is a low cost venue for the residents of St Albans. This has ensured this facility becoming the central focus point for St Albans.

*Personally I feel that we have just touched the tip of the iceberg of community development in St Albans. There is scope for increased attention to such categories as the elderly, migrants and disabled, all groups in our society that tend to get marginalized. After twenty-five years of inaction due to the motorway designation, I feel it will take some time to redress this imbalance. Community Development is not realized overnight and the outcomes cannot be achieved through sporadic, occasional funding. For St Albans to retain permanent benefit, I would strongly recommend that this project be continued. “ Douceline Wardle*

2000 St Albans Infolink group resolved to incorporate the group under the umbrella of the SACRC as the NeighbourNet room.

Since then, the room has seen a gradual increase of numbers using the room, both for private use of computers with the help of volunteers and computing courses.

April 2001 the Community Facilitator contract was renewed for another three years.

September 2010 Earthquake

April 2012 Site of the St Albans Public Library is presumed to be owned by the council. Council have reneged on agreement with SARA in regard to the management of the centre. Council have initiated no discussion in regard to the situation with the community centre. House bought for extension still unavailable though it would be perfect for community offices, NNet etc.

Emma Twaddell (this is just a draft)

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