

Sara Bell (Library User)

Born in 1956

Born: Haverstock Hill

Parents occupation: Father was an interior designer, Mother was a housewife, and later did bookbinding from home

Sara has used the Swiss Cottage library from childhood to adulthood. As a teenager she would come to the library to bunk off school. It was a quiet and serene haven, and she would read the books on art and embroidery instead of being at school. She went to Hampstead comprehensive secondary school but hated it, so she would sneak into the library alone or with friends. Sara said she doesn't have particular memories of the library staff from this time, except that they would never ask questions when Sara and her friends came in during school hours.

When she was older, she used to come with her son, and now comes with her grandson, or occasionally alone to have a cup of tea in the cafe. When she came with her son, she remembers more interactions with the other users, mostly other parents and they would just have 'kid-orientated conversations'. Her son is now forty, but when he was younger, they would come to the toy library to borrow toys. Now she brings her grandson, who loves to read and will 'come away with fifty books'.

Sara thinks that the building is 'fabulous' and well-deserving of its Grade 2 listing - Swiss Cottage library demonstrated Camden's ability to 'do good building fits'. She particularly loves the outside of the library at nighttime when the lights shine through, and the children's library is a colourful space. However, it is a shame that the old swimming baths got knocked down as this whole area of Swiss Cottage acts together as a hub. The reduction in staff in the library is also a shame now that they've been replaced with 'dreary machines'.