

# Memories on a Monday: Building Memories

## Monday 4 May 2020

Welcome to **Memories on a Monday: Building Memories** - sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

On the corner of Station Road and Jolly Butcher's Hill, where Wood Green High Road meets Lordship Lane and Station Road, stands River Park House. Number 225 High Road, Wood Green. Many of you will know it as the main offices for Haringey Council. But that has not always been the case. Council departments only began moving into this building from other sites 15 years ago – in 2005. We thought today we would share images of this building, and its predecessor, and see how this site has changed and how it connects with a film made for TV in 1978....

Distinctive with its copper reflective-glass façade, River Park House has 11 storeys and stands high as the tallest building in Wood Green. It was featured in 2018 as part of the spotlight on Wood Green during the [London Festival of Architecture](#), along with neighbouring award-winning [Blue House Yard](#).

River Park House's name today is taken from its location right by River Park Road. The origin of the road name was associated with it being built on the old loop of the New River (the loop was removed but another section still flows nearby further up Station Road). Built in 1973, the building replaced the demolished Wood Green Public Library – which we shall see more of shortly.

The building was originally known as Sunley House. Here we see it under construction in 1973, as seen through the eyes of local artist Arthur Newstead - '[The Building of Sunley House](#)'. At this stage of its building development it had only reached six storeys when Arthur painted it:



From the collections Bruce Castle Museum & Archive. © The estate of Arthur Newstead

Some of you who may have visited River Park House not long after it opened as council offices from 2005, might have seen the painting on display in the building:



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But what has Sunley House to do with a film made for LWT television? However it came about, Sunley House played a starring role! It was the main feature and film location of the play written by Alan Bennett and directed by Stephen Frears. The main protagonists are played by Dave Allen (it is not a comic role) and Robert Stephens. Here is the synopsis of the storyline for *One Fine Day* (1978) – summarised by IMDb online:

*“George Phillips, a middle-aged Londoner, works as an estate agent for the firm of Frobisher, Rendell and Ross. His home life is soured by clashes with his wife over whether their teenage son's girlfriend should be allowed to stay over at their house, a situation the timid, melancholic George dislikes but hasn't the guts to forbid. His professional life is dominated by his attempts to find a buyer for Sunley House, a once-fashionable 1960s office block which has lain unoccupied for over a year. When his wife leaves for Colchester to look after her elderly father, George avoids conflict with his son by staying over and sleeping at Sunley House. Meanwhile, his workplace rival, a younger man called Rycroft, is also trying to find a buyer for Sunley House (and thereby usurp George's place in the firm). One morning George finds himself locked in and has to crash through a window to escape. When Rycroft finds the broken window, he sets out to find the culprit.”*

With views of Wood Green bustling about below, we can enjoy from the high levels of the office block rooftop scenes of the former [Gaumont Cinema](#) and surrounding areas. Inside, the office block is completely empty, except for a cheese plant in the foyer, and rows of telephones laid out regimentally on the floors at the higher levels. You can take a look at the play in [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) of the film online.

Prior to Sunley House, this corner was the prime location for another former iconic building – the old Wood Green Public Library. In 1907, the library was

opened with funding from the foundation of [Andrew Carnegie](#), a Scottish philanthropist who supported educational and learning institutions around the UK and also the USA. With its dark-red brickwork, clock and cupola, it was a notable landmark for residents and passers-by. One resident had fond memories of Saturday visits in the 1920s and '30s, during his childhood, to choose books, read the *Children's Newspaper* and *Boy's Own* paper in the reading room and obtain information for competitions from the reference room upstairs.

Below is a view of the newly-opened library; and the second photograph shows it during its opening celebrations in 1907:



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From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

This photograph (below) shows a more unusual viewpoint of the library, looking down the hill. It also shows the road sign River Park Road positioned prominently on the wall.



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By 1914, the world had changed with the onset of the First World War. This photograph (below – sent as a postcard and franked 21 December 1914) shows the transformation of the library to its new temporary status of Army Recruiting Office.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)  
As retired librarian and Friend of Bruce Castle, Roy Hidson, has written in his history of Wood Green Library during the period 1914-18:

“On September 30th the Council had granted the War Office two rooms at the Public Library for recruiting purposes. The Eastern Command of the Army agreed to pay £120-00 for the use of the rooms.

By the middle of 1915, the surge of men into the forces was leading to a serious labour shortage and the library appointed a Miss H.B. Harris as temporary assistant. This awoke the wrath of the Wood Green District Trades and Labour Council who feared the increase of women workers would result in the reduction of the wages of skilled men. The Chairman wrote to the Council stating, ‘*This Council protests against the appointment of a woman over 30 years of age as Temporary Junior Assistant at the Public Library, for the princely sum of 10s per week, and hopes the Wood Green District Council will bear this protest in mind when appointments to these positions are made in future.*’ “

We are mindful that this demand came three years before women (but only those over 30, and owning property) were allowed the right to vote in 1918 (and it was four years before the outrage shown by male tram-workers on Wood Green High Road in 1919 over their jobs, pay and women taking over their roles, known as the ‘Battle of Wood Green’ – the first one).

During the 1920s – as in this photograph below – the library was put back to its original use and the hustle and bustle of the busy high street resumed, a scene perhaps not dissimilar to one we might experience today (when we are out of lock-down, of course).



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

This final image (above) shows happy young Dutch visitors on a visit to Wood Green during Coronation Week in 1953. A time for coming together, learning from one another and enjoying each other's company.

And on that note, this concludes this Building Memories post, looking at old photographs and paintings for the history of this corner in Wood Green. Hopefully we will be back to experiencing life outside more fully and building our own memories soon.

Until tomorrow, take care and stay well,

Best wishes

From us all at Bruce Castle

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