

## History of Libraries in Pittwater

The first community library in the Pittwater region was Newport Children's Library. It was part of a baby health clinic on the north-west corner of Gladstone St and Barrenjoey Road and opened on 30 October 1954. There may have been a small library in North Narrabeen on Pittwater Road but little is known about it.

In 1939 the NSW Government passed the *Library Act* which encouraged local councils to provide a free library for their rate payers and offered some financial support. In 1954, Warringah Council (Pittwater was at that time included in Warringah) resolved not to adopt the *Library Act* to establish a library in the shire, on grounds of expense.

However, ten years later Councillor McLean remarked that 'despite TV and radio, the people still want books' and in May 1964 Council did adopt the *Library Act*. Planning for a new library in Dee Why soon began. The architects Edwards, Madigan, Torzillo, Briggs and Partners won the Sulman architectural award in 1966 the year the library opened. The first Chief Librarian, John Ellis, held office for 24 years from 1965 to 1989.

Mona Vale Branch Library was officially opened on 3 September 1972. Created by the same architects who had designed Dee Why Library, it was believed to be the best equipped branch library in NSW at the time. Fiction lined the outer walls and non-fiction books were in central free standing shelving. The reference library was housed on an open mezzanine floor. The high vaulted roof and windows introduced natural light and another innovative idea was a 'pit' which housed the children's books and reading area. The first Branch Librarian was Jane Hunt. A local issue was highlighted by the library's book mark inscribed 'Please leave the sand on the beach.'

From April 1970 the Friends of Mona Vale Library formed to help stock the library which had a particularly good record collection thanks to their efforts.

Datapoint's Data\*Library system was introduced in Warringah libraries in 1985 with the optimistic statement:

'it is expected that queues will be a thing of the past when Warringah Shire Library system is replaced by Data\*Library.' After many years of operating without a card catalogue, a publicly accessible computer catalogue was made available in the library from 1989.

In May 1992 when Pittwater seceded from Warringah, Mona Vale Branch became the central library for the new council area. Having been designed as a branch of a much larger library system, the building was inadequate to house not only the bookstock but also the new technologies that had been incorporated over the years. At the turn of the twentieth century Pittwater Council voted for a new library building at Mona Vale. Architects Brewster Hjorth designed a semi-subterranean building with plenty of natural light to adjoin the old building which became the Council's Customer Service and Planning area. This new split-level library opened for business in August 2004 and was officially opened by then mayor, Councillor Lynne Czinner.

The people of Avalon petitioned for branch library in 1980. Three years later Avalon Community Library opened, staffed by volunteers. This library moved premises a number of times but in 2002 was finally housed in a modern, purpose-built building in the Avalon Recreation Centre designed by Brewster Hjorth Architects. The library is still operated by the Avalon Community Library Association but receives considerable financial support from Pittwater Council.