



Station bookcase falls victim to fire safety rules

By John Lawrence

Commuters and residents reacted with dismay after the popular book exchange at East Finchley tube station was suddenly closed last month and the shelves removed altogether a few days later.



Well stocked: The station book exchange was a popular way to share good reads

Thousands of books have been shared via the exchange since it was installed eight years ago by The Archer team member Lynn Winton. It was upgraded just last year thanks to the design and carpentry skills of local men Richard Neville and Dan O'Dwyer.

However, London Fire Brigade decided that the bookcase, and others like it at tube stations all over London, were a potential fire hazard, forcing Transport for London (TfL) to shut them down.

Readers immediately got in touch with The Archer to point out that the books were no more dangerous than the piles of Metro newspapers left untouched just feet away in the station forecourt. Marcin Notecki told us: "I have not seen a sillier display of short-sightedness."

Lynn said: "I have been inundated with comments including 'this is a perfect example of red tape gone mad' and 'please don't let this wonderful community initiative be lost'. I'm still hopeful that common sense will prevail and I hope to see it back in its rightful position where we can share the joy of reading, reusing and recycling our books." The East Finchley bookcase itself has been kept in storage

at the station but may not be used again. Paul Baxter, TfL's customer service manager for the High Barnet area, told The Archer that new shelves that meet regulations may be introduced at least at surface stations like East Finchley.

"TfL are going to trial cabinets made by Tambour at a couple of surface stations with a view to being able to bring back the book exchanges at the surface stations. We are waiting for them to be approved by the London Fire Brigade," he said.

The bookcase ban sparked a wave of coverage in the media, prompting interventions by Finchley and Golders Green MP Sarah Sackman and London Mayor Sir Sadiq Khan, both calling for the decision to be reversed.

A London Fire Brigade spokesperson said: "Ensuring the safety of those using the London transport network is our priority. We are working with Transport for London with regards to their responsibility to remove all book libraries from subsurface stations. This is due to combustible material posing a fire safety risk if it is stored on these premises. Non-subsurface stations have been asked to remove book libraries from display until they have the correct fire safety plans in place." *Your letters Pg11.*



Raise a glass: Birds of a Feather stars Linda Robson and Lesley Joseph with comic actor Christopher Biggins at the North London Hospice fundraising event. Photo North London Hospice

Stars quizzed to help the hospice

Soap stars, celebrity chefs and national treasures enjoyed a night on the town together and raised more than £20,000 for North London Hospice. Birds of a Feather stars Linda Robson and Lesley Joseph were there with comedy actor Christopher Biggins, all taking part in a quiz night at chef Aldo Zilli's restaurant in Mayfair.

The inaugural entertainment-themed Big Fun Quiz was organised by EastEnders star and East Finchley resident Michelle Collins in memory of her friend Melvyn J Taub, a musician and tour manager, who was cared for by the hospice.

Others enjoying the occasion included fellow East Enders Colin Salmon, Harriet Thorpe and Francesca Henry, along with film star Nick Moran and singers Mari Wilson, Clare Grogan and Nick Heyward.

Michelle Collins said: "I was so pleased to be able to organise this event. The evening was really special, and I am so thankful to everyone who came along to support."

North London Hospice cares for over 3,500 people with a life-limiting illness every year and it costs more than £16million a year to run the charity.

Anna Cooper, Director of Fundraising and Communications said: "We are so grateful to Michelle for hosting our Big Fun Quiz. We are thrilled to have raised such an incredible amount of money for our charity. Around a third of our funding comes from the NHS which means that we need to raise the rest ourselves which is why events like this are so important."



Good friends: Chef Aldo Zilli and event organiser Michelle Collins

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