

Maple Leaf Villa

A Canadian army hut, Winnie-the-Pooh and the origins of Wiltshire's Library Service



1914
AUGUST

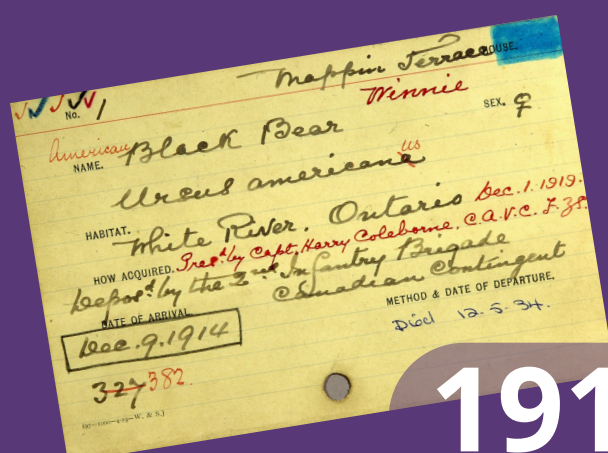
Winnie and Harry camped on Salisbury Plain.

Lieutenant Harry Colebourn stopped at White River, Ontario, on his way to the war in Europe. There, he purchased a female American black bear cub for \$20 from a hunter who had killed her mother. He named the bear Winnie after his hometown, Winnipeg.

1914
AUGUST



On his way to France, Harry left Winnie at London Zoo for them to look after while he was away fighting.



Courtesy of the Zoological Society of London.

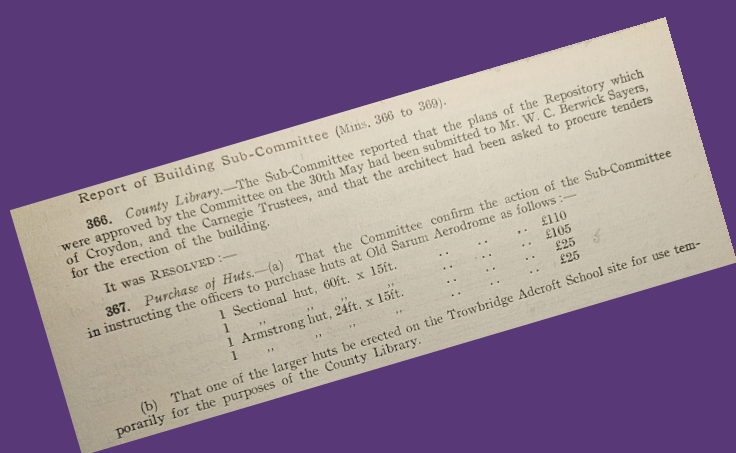
1914
DECEMBER

The County Council received a grant from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust of £6,000 to cover the establishment expenses and part maintenance of a library scheme for a period of eight years. After this date, the scheme was to be financed entirely out of council funds.

1917
MAY

The County Council purchased an ex-Canadian Army hut from Old Sarum Aerodrome for £100. The hut was re-erected 'by a man from Salisbury'* and furnished on the grounds of the Trowbridge Adcroft Council Boys' School on Prospect Place at a total cost of £150. The hut provided an office, a packing area, and shelving to accommodate 7,200 books. An additional small hut was erected to store book boxes. Captain R Wright, MC, was appointed as Wiltshire's first County Librarian at a salary of £250 per annum, with allowances for travel and subsistence.

*Courtesy of Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre, F1/100/17/5.



When the war was over, Harry originally intended to collect Winnie from London Zoo on his way back to Canada; however, the Zoo had taken such good care of Winnie that she had become a beloved figure among the visitors. Recognising her popularity and the joy she brought, he decided to donate Winnie to the Zoo.

Courtesy of the Zoological Society of London.

1919
DECEMBER



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1920
FEBRUARY



The Library Headquarters was opened by The Right Honourable H A L Fisher, President of the Board of Education.

The author, A A Milne, and his son, Christopher Robin, were frequent visitors to London Zoo. Winnie, known for being good-natured, very tame, and willing to give children rides, became a firm favourite of Christopher Robin. Consequently, A A Milne called his fictional character after Winnie, so Winnie-the-Pooh was created.

1924



Photo courtesy of the Zoological Society of London.

A A Milne published 'Winnie-the-Pooh'.

1926

A A Milne published 'The House at Pooh Corner'.

1928

By 1932, it was apparent that the two huts used to accommodate the County Library Headquarters had become 'manifestly inadequate', with leaks and the 'perpetual nuisance from dust created by the coke stoves' that 'every book has to be cleaned before use'. As far back as 1925, it was reported that the wet winter 'had made everything so damp that by March, we found it impossible to keep the books from becoming covered with green mould.'*

**Courtesy of Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre, F1/202/1.*

1932



Keith Struckmeyer, Wiltshire's Director of Education reported that: 'It is estimated that the minimum cost of any extension which can be reasonably regarded as adequate would be in the neighbourhood of £1,700 to £1,900'.

1932
DECEMBER



Courtesy of the Zoological Society of London.

1934
MAY

Winnie died at the age of 20 at the Zoo.

Wiltshire Council

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The new County Library Headquarters was officially opened by Mr E Salter Davies, CBE, MA, Chairman of the Library Committee of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. This new Headquarters had the luxury of a staff toilet which was not available in the hut.

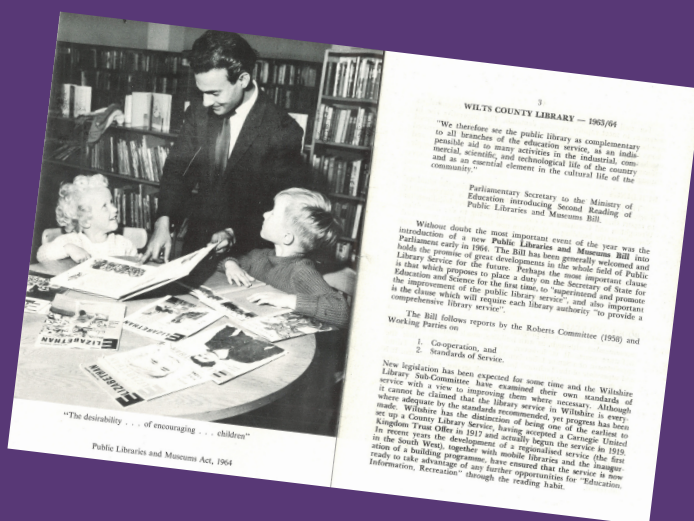
1934
JUNE



1947
SEPTEMBER

Harry Colbourn died, aged 60 and is buried in Brookside Cemetery in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

1964



1969

At the beginning of 1969, the headquarters moved from Prospect Place, where it had been for nearly 50 years, to the former Airsprung mattress factory called 'Chapman's' after the factory founder Hedley Chapman. This building, opposite County Hall, provided the service with much-needed space.



The Library Service moved to Devizes where operations continue today.

2016

2024

Investigations are ongoing to identify if, after 110 years, the hut still stands on the same site where it was erected in 1919 on Prospect Place...