

# **WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT LIBRARY**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Not a year for repeating for the Library or anyone. The year has seen almost a total lockdown of activity in Jubilee House, with only a brief period when readers have been able to gain access. Fortunately our staff and, as far as we know, all volunteers and friends have come through the pandemic without serious illness.

Like many similar organisations the pandemic has forced us to look at alternative (and positive) ways of communicating with a broad spectrum of audiences. Many of these will be retained, developed and built into our regular programme of activities.

### **FINANCE**

It has been a very strange year in terms of trust finances. Covid-19 has had a particular impact on expenditure for the year which was significantly less than budgeted, simply because Jubilee House has not been open to the public for most of the year.

Core income was down less than expected given that many trade union branches would not have been meeting as regularly as normal and more precarious security of employment will have impacted on individual donations.

Whilst income from donations has not been hit as hard as expected, there is an underlying trend of reducing numbers of supporters over the last five years that needs to be addressed by a more co-ordinated and systematic approach to fundraising.

Incredibly, though, that part of our reserves exposed to the financial markets has shown tremendous growth leading to an overall increase in income over expenditure for the year. This is money that will greatly assist renovation work on Jubilee House when we hopefully move towards a new long-term lease with building maintenance responsibilities. That is if the markets don't turn in an opposite downward direction.

Salford City Council are continuing to provide us with an annual grant for which we are extremely grateful to the City Mayor and other leading politicians.

### **GOVERNANCE**

The year has seen a number of comings and goings amongst trustees. At the beginning of the year we welcomed new board members Suzanne Humphries, Sam Ingleson and Hazel Roberts. All three have taken on active roles with the organisation although regrettably, because of Covid, there have been no face to face meetings yet between many of the

more long-standing members and new ones. Regular Zoom meetings have enabled good working relationships to develop despite not being able to get in the same room together.

Whilst newcomers have come in there have been three outgoings. John Percy and Ken Wade took the decision, after many years' service, to stand aside on the board for younger members. Both will, however, continue giving active service to the Library in other ways. We also lost Sally Richardson who, for family reasons, had to move away from the area and found it difficult to keep in touch.

## **USAGE OF THE LIBRARY**

The big, cheering news is that in the calendar year 2020, Despite It All, we managed to top 2019's total number of people attending Library events live, even though 2019 included a Radical Readings event with 700 attendees. Having our events available remotely has been a huge hit, and we will never be going back to events held solely in the annexe...

The reading room reopened as a pilot in August, welcoming 'duos' researching our podcast project (see *Externally Funded Grants*). The safety processes instigated for the 'duos' gave us sufficient confidence in the resilience of our risk management to enable us to greet readers officially. We reopened the library to a maximum of two readers per day on 16 September, and until we had to close again on 4 November we were 'full' nearly every day. A lot of effort was required to get just two people into the building, but all were very appreciative to be back. We were disappointed to be unable to reopen after Lockdown 2 (and specifically that libraries did not seem to feature in formal government guidance) but by the end of the year were looking forward to being able to welcome back readers in mid-April.

Email enquiries built back up, having flat-lined during the early days of lockdown, and by the end of the period we were back up to the total of the previous year.

## **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

Working digitally offered us many opportunities for partnership working:

We selected and digitised interesting Communist Party pamphlets to be presented online as part of the [CP centenary celebration](#) on 1 August.

To mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October of the Pan-African Congress in Manchester we digitised various documents for Manchester Metropolitan University, some of which they blew up large to feature in the windows of the old Chorlton-on-Medlock Town Hall, now an MMU building and where the Congress took place.

A film-maker linked to a Salford University project took both stills and film footage of our Engels in Manchester scrapbook and shared the photos with us – a particularly useful resource with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Engels's birth taking place in November. Examples of the pages now feature on our Web site at [www.wcml.org.uk/EngelsScrapbook](http://www.wcml.org.uk/EngelsScrapbook).

We digitised some interesting material from the Manchester and Salford Film Society (the oldest film society in the UK, whose archive we hold) to mark its 90th anniversary in November ([www.wcml.org.uk/90NotOut](http://www.wcml.org.uk/90NotOut)), hosted a video interview recorded in the anniversary month with Marjorie Ainsworth, President of the Society, and held a joint event with them to mark their birthday.

Len Johnson was the subject of the Library's contribution to [the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Creative Care Kit](#) for young people (click on the link to the second edition of the care kit). 22,000 copies were distributed to young people who are not online, and so may have been feeling more isolated and lonely during the pandemic.

We have digitised some of our Greenham Common material to contribute to an IWM War and Conflict Subject Specialist Network project, Connecting, sharing, learning (led by a former WCML volunteer) and are working with IWM North to ensure this is seen by as broad an audience as possible.

We sent our 'top 100' undigitised tapes to be digitised as part of the [North West Sound Heritage project](#).

We took part in a Tolpuddle Radical History School event highlighting radical libraries and their reimagining in these times, and continued good, if remote, network links over the year with the Society for the Study of Labour History Archive and Resources Committee, HiDDEN, SCON (Salford Cultural Organisations Network), Independent Libraries Association, Greater Manchester Archivists' Group and others. We also participated in the Salford University online Welcome Week.

In March we were delighted to welcome a team from Creative Manchester, part of the University of Manchester, to undertake 360 degree photography of the building to allow us to create a 'virtual tour', which we will be able to use in a variety of different ways in future. We're very grateful to them. We also took the opportunity to carry out a major 'refresh' of the hall and Ceramics Room cabinets prior to the photography.

## **EXTERNALLY FUNDED GRANTS**

### **Arts Council England Emergency Response Fund**

To our surprise and delight we were successful in May with our joint application, with Salford outdoor arts organisation Walk the Plank, to the Arts Council's Emergency Response Fund for our project [Begin the World Over Again](#), which aimed to deliver a dynamic digital aspect to the sharing of the Library's amazing collection, exploring digital possibilities in more depth via a creative engagement project supported by artists. This followed on from our joint project the previous year, [Bones of Paine](#); an enthusiastic group of six people from the Bones of Paine writing group signed up to form 'duos' with six different artists to research aspects of our collection as the basis for episodes of a podcast. The podcast launched at the [Being Human Festival](#) in November, which was also History Day. [You can listen to the podcasts here](#), and browse more about the themes and the project in general [here](#).

## **Digital Heritage Lab**

We were successful in our application to participate in the Lottery-funded Digital Heritage Lab project, running from September 2020 for nine months, and staff attended a variety of highly relevant online training sessions. We have also been working with a Digital Skills Mentor, Janet Alderman, Digital Programmes Manager at Culture24, who has supported and advised us on digital strategic planning, processes and skill development, as well as encouraging and provoking new ideas and new ways of thinking.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

One of the saddest effects on the Library of the pandemic was not being able to have our splendid volunteers in the building. We kept in touch via emails and a recreation on Zoom of the monthly volunteer lunch, but it wasn't the same. We were pleased to welcome new volunteers into the team during the year however, undertaking tasks remotely such as working with audio material, writing posts for our blog, and creating transcriptions of our podcast and of online talks.

## **STAFF**

A decision was taken very early on that irrespective of what happened staff would continue to receive full pay for the duration of any lockdown.

As always we are greatly indebted to the staff, without whom the Library would not be what it is and couldn't possibly function. Lynette Cawthra, the Library Manager, Jane Taylor, Librarian, and Lindsey Cole, Library Assistant couldn't be bettered. Whilst not directly an employee of ours Jan Walker is still part of the team, doing the cleaning of the building, an important task that has perhaps taken on greater significance over the last year.

Although Jubilee House has been closed for long periods that doesn't mean that staff have been idle. First working from home and later back in Jubilee House, Jane and Lindsey have been using the opportunity to enrich our online catalogue, undertake a wide range of online training opportunities, and introduce many new improvements. We have for instance been working on creating processes and procedures to help with our proposed archive accreditation application.

Lynette has done the majority of her work, in isolation, from home keeping the wheels well oiled and turning. She has also been instrumental in innovating new ways of communicating with the outside world, and those who have tuned in to our regular Wednesday afternoon 'Invisible Histories' talks can see a great future for her as an impresario.

## **Exhibitions:**

We have welcomed online guest exhibitions about [posters from the Irish civil rights era](#), [the centenary of an extraordinary strike by Derbyshire boot and shoe makers which lasted for over two years](#), and more recently [the centenary of the Communist Party of Great Britain](#). Our exhibition *Thomas Paine: citizen of the world*, which had been due to end in March 2020, found its life extended online as [we put up on our Web site](#) the booklet containing the text of the exhibition boards.

## Events:

Although we'd never heard of Zoom until last March we have made the most of it ever since, from online trustee meetings and volunteer lunches to staff training workshops. Our public use of it has been the most far-reaching aspect of our 'reinvented' library – we have hosted 37 free online talks over the last year, with audiences always considerably higher and more geographically spread than we could ever have dreamed of welcoming to our annexe. Twice we have hit our Zoom limit of 100 attendees – for an evening of his poetry read by Oliver James Lomax, and for a talk about a forthcoming graphic novel about the amazing life of Thomas Paine. Not having to consider speaker travel expenses is a further bonus, particularly since those who have kindly given time to share their expertise have come from as far afield as Aberdeen, Sussex and in one memorable case Toronto!

Topics were as varied as:

- [the ritual monsterring of women through the class system](#);
- [the Northern Carnival Against the Nazis](#);
- [conscience and dissent in Britain during the First World War](#); and
- [British labour movement solidarity in the 1913-14 Dublin Lockout](#).

We marked Black History Month in October with [a talk on Len Johnson by Deej Malik-Johnson](#), LGBT+ History Month in February by [welcoming Ray Woolford to talk about activist Kath Duncan](#), and International Women's Day in March with [a talk on the Scottish suffragettes by Sarah Pedersen](#).

We offered up musical and spoken word treats with *Radical Sounds*, curated by trustee Maxine Peake, a virtual event which premiered both on our Facebook page and our YouTube channel on the evening of the August Bank Holiday with a peak of well over 200 concurrent live viewers, plus a further 1,000 people enjoying it later on YouTube. Similarly over 200 people watched the live-stream of the third annual Engels Memorial Lecture, which we co-hosted in November with Marx Memorial Library. We also participated in an online digital art event, LOITER, which culminated in a video by German artist Christian Selent projecting onto our building images linked to Paul Lafargue's *Right to be lazy*.

All our talks have been recorded and you can catch up with any or all of them at [www.youtube.com/wcmlibrary/videos](http://www.youtube.com/wcmlibrary/videos). We have also received kind donations from people who have enjoyed the talks.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

2021 saw a 40% increase in usage of our Web site over the previous year, including over 40% new visitors. This includes a big increase in social media referrals i.e. people coming to our Web site from Twitter/Facebook/Instagram. The Library followers on Twitter increased by nearly 20% to over 8,200, and 'likes' on our Facebook page increased by 13% to over 6,800. Our Instagram account followers also increased significantly, due in part to the success of our podcast, and our Pinterest numbers also went up.

There have been 22 new posts on the library blog during the year, some offering insights into uncovered-in-lockdown items in our collection such as [hand-coloured 1930s political cartoons](#) and [a piece of cloth woven in prison by activist Claudia Jones](#). We were offered guest blog posts on a wide variety of subjects, including [Manchester suffragist campaigner, essayist and poet, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy](#) and ['Is Stormzy a present-day working class activist?'](#). We were also pleased to host posts from students on the University of Salford's 'Language Through Literature' module and 'Victorian Literature: Progress and Panic' module.

## **CONCLUSION**

In very depressing circumstances the Trust has come through remarkably well, and is even beginning to put in place ideas and ways of working that will make the Library better placed to provide a quality of service to the movement as and when we return to any sort of normality.

It has to be said that much of our buoyancy over the last twelve months has been down to the staff. With all the hardships and uncertainty no employer could wish for a greater commitment than has been shown by all three members of staff, and the Trustees wish to place on record a big thank you to them.