

WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT LIBRARY

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2019 - MARCH 2020

INTRODUCTION

This year has been very eventful in many ways. Extensive periods of disruption from renovation work in the cellar and essential repairs to one of the fire escapes were quite quickly being followed by the covid 19 lockdown.

Despite all this interruption to normal working many positive things have been achieved during the year as detailed in this report.

FINANCE

The year started with quite healthy balances of £645,000 although it was recognised that committed renovation work to the cellar and other desired improvements would start to eat into them quite considerably.

Core income for the year was £123,000, down nearly £20,000 on the previous year. The reduction was due to a combination of less money coming in from donations and a March drop in the value of our reserves as the market reacted to the outbreak of covid-19. The reduction in donations could be an early indication that the state of the national economy is finally starting to effect us at the Library. A fresh focus on income generation will be necessary in the coming year.

On the more positive side Salford City Council are continuing to provide us with the annual grant of £22,872 for which we are extremely grateful to the City Mayor and other leading politicians. It was also very pleasing to receive a £25,000 grant from the trade union UNISON towards re shelving the cellar and a grant of £1,500 from the Edgar E. Lawley Foundation. We also continued to receive significant donations from the trade unions GMB and Unite towards specific running costs.

We consistently have a core expenditure in excess of income. This combined with the other factors referred to resulted in a reduction of balances by some £190,000 from the previous year.

GOVERNANCE

We were saddened by the death, after a short illness, of trustee John Ferguson. John was the Salford City Council appointed trustee and had made a significant contribution to the running of the Library. His knowledge and insight will be sorely missed.

We also received, during the year, for different reasons, the resignations of three long standing trustees, Michael Herbert, Veronica Trick and Dorothy Winard. We thank them for their contribution over the years.

The Library has definitely risen to a higher level of operation in recent years. The greater number of activities generated has fed into a greater expectation leading to even greater demands on staff and trustees. The trustees are aware of this and of the need to constantly look at the skills and knowledge base required of the trust as a body to function effectively in the modern environment. To this end the trustees have been looking to bring in 'fresh faces' to take on new challenges. A first tranche of new trustees have been identified but, unfortunately due to covid were not in place by the end of the year.

We will continue to look for new trustees willing and able to continue the momentum.

USAGE OF THE LIBRARY

Prior to the Library's sudden lockdown closure on 18 March we had had another busy year.

Compared with 2018, the number of Reading Room visitors in 2019 saw a puzzling decrease of over 45% (435 as against 825), which clearly needs monitoring (some of the decline will have been due to non-availability of pamphlet material during our cellar work, but that is unlikely to explain it entirely). Meanwhile however our drop-in visitor total was strongly up to 745 (550 in 2018), and event participant numbers went up by over 35% to 1837 (1343 in 2018), with 35 different events over the year. Tour and email enquiry numbers were constant from the previous year.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

We were pleased to be involved in various examples of partnership with the University of Salford: first year Language through Literature students were asked to investigate the linguistic and literary devices used in texts held in the Library relating to Peterloo, and these were put up on the Library blog. For the second year running excerpts from the best student essays from the 'Victorian Literature: Progress and Panic' module were also published on the blog. We welcomed student groups working on topics ranging from Graphic Design to Victorian Literature; we also involved a group of students in a small-scale project digitising photographs by Benny Rothman.

It was terrific to work with sound artist Abigail Ward as part of the ArtistGM programme of artist residencies in archives across Greater Manchester, run by Manchester Histories on behalf of Greater Manchester Combined Authority and GM Libraries & Archives. Abigail created a podcast which introduces listeners to women who fought to improve pay and conditions for poor female workers in the early 1900s, and contrasts their work with that of young female activists today. [It can be listened to here.](#)

The second Engels Memorial Lecture, a partnership between WCML and Marx Memorial Library, was held in Salford for the first time (details below). This joint endeavour will examine Engels, his work, and broader themes associated with his ideas and influence. The yearly event will alternate between the two libraries.

We started work with DIY Theatre with a group of actors exploring our collections on themes around disability and protest, with a view to them creating a performance at the Library.

EXTERNALLY FUNDED GRANTS

a) Voting for Change Project - National Lottery Heritage Fund

WCML and the People's History Museum completed a five-year partnership project, **Voting for Change - 150 years of radical movements, 1819 to 1969**. A grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund allowed us to build on the complementary strengths of both collections to purchase items related to movements and campaigns for the franchise, from the build-up to the Peterloo protest in 1819 to the lowering of the voting age in 1969.

It was an absolute delight to have added such a wide range of treasures to our collection, and to have involved so many people in helping find out more about these and presenting that research to a wider external audience. The full story is at www.wcml.org.uk/VotingForChange.

b) Bones of Paine – Arts Council England

In November 1819 the bones of radical [Thomas Paine](#) were brought to Salford only to be refused entry to Manchester by the authorities, with the horrors of Peterloo still fresh. To mark the bicentenary of this bizarre event and to celebrate Paine's revolutionary writings and ideas, the Library and Salford outdoor arts organisation [Walk the Plank](#) applied for Arts Council England funding; in applying for the first time for arts funding we said that we wanted to explore delivering creative/artistic ideas ourselves rather than being a conduit for those of other people. We knew Walk the Plank had a great track record of delivering spectacular events, but having worked with them we now have an understanding of how quickly high quality artists and performers absorb (and adapt) a creative brief and turn it into something special. The creative output produced by Louise Wallwein's writing group was excellent, and the participants in the finale procession with our giant Paine puppet (the last of its seven outings) were engaged and enthusiastic, as shown in this tweet: 'Bravo for a brilliant #outdoorarts event on the last day of November!'

The project enabled us to develop a range of excellent new links, and one unexpected project outcome was the creation of a poem by young poet Oliver James Lomax, inspired by him accompanying our Paine puppet round rainy Manchester on the bicentenary of Peterloo.

VOLUNTEERS

We continue to be very well supported by volunteers. We have been slightly handicapped in that trustee Veronica Trick, who was forced to resign on health grounds, had been our Volunteer Co-ordinator and as yet we have been unable to find a replacement. Veronica had done an excellent job and the gap left behind has demonstrated the necessity of finding a replacement. As an interim the volunteers themselves have taken on the task collectively of organising aspects of work formerly carried out by Veronica.

Talks with volunteers about a replacement have opened up a whole new discussion about the participation of volunteers in day to day activities and how this can be expanded into non traditional areas. We would particularly like to see volunteers involved in future development and planning discussions for the Library. Once again covid-19 has intervened but it is hoped that further exploration of expanded participation by volunteers will be resumed as soon as possible.

STAFF

As always we are greatly indebted to the staff, without whom the Library would not be what it is and couldn't possibly function. They are always prepared to go out of their way to ensure that all visitors are made most welcome and make maximum gain from Jubilee House.

Lynette Cawthra, the Library Manager, Jane Taylor, Librarian, and Lindsey Cole, Library Assistant couldn't be bettered.

We continue to receive the benefit of the incredible knowledge of our retired librarian Alain Kahan on one day a week, and whilst not directly an employee of ours Jan Walker is still part of the team doing the daily cleaning of the building.

Exhibitions:

The year saw two guest exhibitions: *Sylvia and Silvio*, curated by Alfio Bernabei, about Sylvia Pankhurst and her companion, Silvio Corio, illustrating their campaigns centred on social justice, human rights and anti-fascism, and *The Basque children: child refugees from the Spanish Civil War* from BCA'37 UK, the Association for the UK Basque Children. Our own volunteer exhibition team presented two exhibitions, one, *Peterloo: news, fake news and paranoia*, marking the Peterloo bicentenary and the other, *Thomas Paine: citizen of the world*, part of our Bones of Paine commemoration, which told the story of Paine's adventurous and eventful life, his narrow escapes from death and his involvement in both the American and French Revolutions.

Events:

The year started with a successful Radical Readings fundraiser *Those who were there: the people at Peterloo have their say*. **May** saw the tenth Annual Frow Lecture, John Callaghan's talk *1919 – every place a storm centre* (a quote from then Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, whose words convey something of the turbulence in the colonial world as seen from London in 1919; we also celebrated Museums at Night with our poet friend Oliver James Lomax performing poems written as a response to Peterloo material in our collections, alongside new work. Also that month, the editors of a new anthology of radical writings for children, *Reading and rebellion*, told us about researching and selecting examples of the kinds of materials that, between the years 1900 to 1960, left wing and progressive parents wanted their children to read. And returning by popular demand, Townsend Productions' one-man show *The ragged trousered philanthropists* used Magic Lantern and projected animation alongside live music and song.

There was further theatrical drama in **June** with Breathe Out Theatre's new production *The Riot Act*, exploring the Lancashire cotton workers' protests which culminated in the Lune Street riots in 1842 Preston. The month also saw the start of a series of evening talks on state violence, 'Not just Peterloo', with four speakers covering topics from the 'Plug Plot Insurrection' and Peterloo to the policing of the 1984-5 miners' strike.

In **August**, the month of the Peterloo bicentenary, we were very pleased to host a screening of *Our Sam, the Middleton man*, ReelMCR's new community film about Samuel Bamford, leader of the Middleton contingent at Peterloo. A very different film was screened in **September** - *The plan that came from the bottom up*, which chronicles the extraordinary story of the Lucas Aerospace engineers, who 40 years ago responded to the threat of redundancy with their own plan of action, developing alternatives to the military products their company made. Also that month we welcomed Shelagh Delaney's biographer Selina Todd to discuss Delaney's upbringing, life and work while Rob Lees (MaD Theatre Company) talked about the experience of bringing Delaney's work to life on stage in 2019.

As part of the 'Not just Peterloo' series, looking at the policing of popular protest, a witness event in **October** brought together 50 years on a panel of people who were at the demonstration in Manchester in 1969 against the controversial South African rugby tour - 7,000 people marched, to be met by nearly 2,000 police officers. 150 protestors were arrested, with 77 charged.

In early **November** we welcomed John Green to give the Engels Lecture. His topic was *In the footsteps of Marx and Engels - Willi Münzenberg, a forgotten giant of the working class movement*. Later that month we were very busy with the culmination of our Bones of Paine project, including a public reading of Paine's *Common sense* by American Studies students from the University of Manchester, and of course the spectacular final parade with our giant puppet, accompanied by skeleton dancers and jazz instrumentalists, processing down the Crescent as we finally succeeded

where William Cobbett failed 200 years earlier and - metaphorically at least - got Thomas Paine's bones across the river from Salford to Manchester.

2020 began with celebrations of LGBT History Month (the screening of documentary *Invisible women: the story of two LGBTQ revolutionaries* with commentary from the two women in question, Luchia Fitzgerald and Angela Cooper) and International Women's Day (with Katherine Connelly, editor of *A suffragette in America*, Sylvia Pankhurst's text based on her experiences during lecture tours of North America in 1911 and 1912).

The popular Wednesday afternoon series of Invisible Histories talks continued throughout the year before lockdown intervened, with 13 talks in total on topics ranging from the story of the women who met to protest the terms of the Versailles Peace Treaty in 1919, to British terrorist novels of the 1970s.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The Library followers on Twitter increased to 6,900, and 'likes' on our Facebook page increased to over 6,000. Our Instagram and Pinterest account followers have also increased significantly.

There have been 18 new posts on the library blog during the year on a variety of subjects, including a Home Office document from 1912 regarding the health of a suffragette who was on hunger strike in Holloway, and a racecard parody from the time of the 1820 general election in Ipswich, presenting each candidate as a rider in colours representing their party allegiance alongside betting odds predicting the outcome of the election.

JUBILEE HOUSE

Whilst the Library moved to Jubilee House in 1987 it doesn't mean that it hasn't grown. Almost on a daily basis new items are being added to the collection, mainly by donation. What seemed in 1987 to be acres of spare rooms have now been filled and space has become a premium. Our current lease with Salford City Council expires in 2037, before which we will have to have erected 'House Full' signs or make room for expansion. The trustees are satisfied that there is currently no real alternative to remaining in Jubilee House so have agreed to negotiate with the City Council on an offered new 125 year lease with a view to possibly expanding at some time in the future. The City Council's proviso being that the Trust takes on the responsibility for the day to day maintenance of the building.

With this in mind trustees agreed to extensive renovation work in the cellar to make it more conducive to the storage of paper and to maximise storage space. Work has now been completed and a new shelving system has helped relieve pressure on space for the time being.

Jubilee House is a Grade 2 listed building and the work we have done in the cellar has thrown up a whole new set of procedures and potential costs not faced by normal buildings and will need to be taken account of in any lease negotiations.

CONCLUSION

The Trustees wish to record their gratitude to the staff, volunteers, friends and supporters for their invaluable contributions to the Library. They are also grateful to all who contribute either individually or through their organisations.

We will work to ensure the long-term future and continuing development of the Library in accordance with its values and principles and play a part in helping the working class to understand and learn from its past in order to use that knowledge in the struggle for change in the future.

It would be remiss of us to end this report without mentioning the devastating impact of the covid-19 pandemic on peoples, mainly working class, across the globe. It has shown just how small and interdependent the international community is, and how necessary is the need to work together if we are to recover and move towards a better world.