

WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT LIBRARY

ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2021 - March 2022

INTRODUCTION

Another difficult year for the Library as we follow society and try to manage moving out of lockdown whilst at the same time continuing to protect staff and volunteers.

Our covid risk assessment was regularly updated and things started to be slowly relaxed when we opened for a reduced number of readers on the 12th April, the earliest possible date we were allowed to do so. Opening to drop-in visitors was more complicated but we were delighted to be able to do this on Friday afternoons from 22nd October.

Whilst access to the building has still been limited, we have managed to allow people to gain virtual access and tour our rooms thanks to support from Creative Manchester, part of the university.

FINANCE

A surprisingly agreeable outcome to the financial year just gone in terms of the Trustees financial position.

For the second year running we are showing an actual increase in income over expenditure. This time £20,000, almost entirely due to two bequests received during the year.

A more sober view should be taken though, in that if we were to

exclude income earned from interest, it would show that our core expenditure exceeded income by nearly £25,000. If we are to be able to utilise our reserves for capital developments then that gap will need to be closed considerably.

The coming year could be quite trying with capital expenditure already committed to architectural fees of £18,000 relating to the extension and agreement to renovate the extension, replace the website and upgrade the catalogue software. The, as yet unresolved, efforts to improve our internet connection could lead to potentially a £2,500 - £3,000 additional annual outlay.

With the covid risk assessment being relaxed from April we can hopefully expect far more people entering Jubilee House and being involved in Library activities. This will, in turn, bring more income in but also generate additional costs. The annual grant of £25,000 from Salford City Council remains essential to us and we again wish to thank the Mayor and Councillors for their continuing support.

GOVERNANCE

The year has continued to see new trustees coming in as we look to the future and bring in new 'blood'. Newcomers at the beginning of the year were: John Callow, Les Doherty, Carla Henry, and Oliver James Lomax.

Meetings have continued to be held by zoom, both the quarterly trustees meetings and the various project groups. Whilst four newcomers came in we also had to accept the retirement of two of our principal stalwarts in recent years, Maggie Cohen and Eleanor Lewington.

We wish them both well and know they will fill their time up with other things, including volunteering at the Library.

USAGE OF THE LIBRARY

We re-opened the Library to a reduced number of readers on the 12th April, the earliest possible date we were allowed to do so. Opening to drop-in visitors was more complicated but we were delighted to be able to do this on Friday afternoons from 22nd October.

This has also meant we have been able to host a new exhibition, Literature in the Mines, with pop-up banners from the Piston Pen and Press project and an accompanying display of related material from our own collections, including mineworkers' poetry, songs and fiction from the 19th century to the present.

Project co-leader Michael Sanders has recorded specially for us a series of six very short introductory videos about the exhibition, and these can be viewed at www.youtube.com/wcmlibrary/videos.

EXHIBITIONS: A tentative reopening allowed us to host a new exhibition, Literature in the Mines, with pop-up banners from the Piston Pen and Press project and an accompanying display of related material from our own collections.

This was replaced by a second guest exhibition from the same source, 'Working Class Readers in Victorian Manchester & Salford', accompanied by material from our own collections.

EVENTS: During the year we managed a total of 29 Invisible Histories talks, all live-streamed online (still all viewable at www.youtube.com/wcmlibrary/videos), with some also taking place with a live audience in our Annexe.

In total our YouTube channel was watched for over 62,000 minutes in 2021, by nearly 9,000 people.

This year it was our turn to host the annual Engels Lecture, an annual event, in November, organised in collaboration with the Marx Memorial Library. Our lecture this year, by zoom, was presented by Amelia Horgan speaking to her recent publication 'Lost in Work: Escaping Capitalism'. To reach a wider audience who may not be aware of Engels, we also ran a series of complimentary events during the week including films, online videos, and a conducted tour of local sites associated with Engels.

We also had an online evening of poetry with trustee Oliver James Lomax as well as an online event with the Workers Education Association to celebrate 85 years of workers music.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: We had 'Good Morning Britain' in the building filming as they highlighted the story of boxer and activist Len Johnson during Black History Month.

We participated in the first Manchester Festival of Libraries (linking with the Portico Library, and running a joint event with Salford City Libraries which saw Stuart Maconie speak at Eccles Library) and also in the art project 'Big Ben Lying Down With Political Books' which was part of the Manchester International Festival in the summer.

Out of the usual run of things our gardening volunteers offered a tour of the rare plant specimens in our garden as part of Heritage Open Days in September.

We have been focusing heavily on digitisation work. New volunteers have helped digitise unique or rare material such as our Pit and Factory Papers, our General Strike newsletters, material relating to Len Johnson and the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress, No Conscription Fellowship archival material particularly relating to Hyde, and our volume of Coal Trade Papers.

Staff also updated their skills by making a successful application to the Digital Heritage Lab programme and thereby attending a range of online workshops on digital preservation, social media etc. Lindsey, our Library Assistant, undertook a ten-week online course on digital skills for library professionals, aiming at bolstering her development in a way we can't offer her in-house.

We produced our first publication for a few years – a booklet about the huge 1969 anti-apartheid demo in Manchester by Geoff Brown. We reached a milestone with the 50,000th catalogued item to be added to Adlib (to add to the 30,000 items brought across from our legacy system).

In total 749 books/pamphlet records and 1574 archive records were added to the catalogue during 2021.

We continue to accept donations of material and lend items to others' exhibitions both actual and digital.

Finally, we were very pleased to welcome, in September, that much maligned politician Jeremy Corbin who spent more time engrossed in the collection than time strictly allowed him.

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.

Lynette Cawthra, the Library Manager, Jane Taylor, Librarian, and Lindsey Cole, Library Assistant continued to do a fantastic job.

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.

We were a little taken aback when Lynette indicated in the Autumn that she intended to retire at the end of March. Once the initial panic was overcome, we set about seeking a replacement.

Out of over 40 applications we whittled the number down to six for interview. A number of these excellent candidates proved to be appointable but in the end we plumped for Belinda Scarlett, the curator of the National Football Museum in Manchester.

Belinda started with us at the beginning of March, to allow for a hand over, and has settled in very nicely.

VOLUNTEERS

We were able to welcome back some of our volunteers during the year.

October onwards has seen volunteers working with different parts of the collection, helping welcome drop-in visitors and making tea after talks.

Even while the Library was shut we were grateful to volunteers for writing blogposts, editing transcripts of our talks and digital sound recordings, and getting on top of a garden which had gone untended in 2020.

CONCLUSION

The Trust has come through a very trying period very well with the new group of trustees starting to bond with fresh ideas and ways of working starting to come through.

With the continuing disruptions to 'normal working' and need to find new innovative ways of communicating 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, once again, a big thank you to them.