

Shelf Life

The Newsletter of the Working Class Movement Library

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Farewell Ruth Frow 1922 - 2008

Ruth

All friends and supporters of the library will, by now, be aware of the sudden death, on January 11th, of our co-founder, Ruth Frow. Ruth was active right to the end, attending a library committee meeting in the late afternoon of the 9th January and then dropping off two committee members on her way home. She then sadly suffered a stroke, quickly followed by a heart attack.

Ruth's and her late husband Eddie's contribution to the movement cannot be too highly stated, and this has been reflected in the many tributes that have flooded into the library.

We could not put better in words what they and their life's work was about, and what we can best do

to preserve their memory, than the sentiments expressed in one of those tributes.

'Ruth would have said that the effective continuation of the library is not a memorial to Eddie and herself but a memorial to all the ordinary, and in my eyes, extraordinary working class people who against many odds fought and fought again for a truly better world of values. For me, the faces of those great unsung socialists who were the backbone of my childhood flash before me. It is for them, and others like them, that we must ensure the library survives and acts as an inspiration to future generations of what humanity, at its best, is capable of achieving.'

Two close friends of Ruth's contribute here their personal recollections of her and Eddie.

Memories of Eddie and Ruth

Sheila Lemoine was one of the founding members of the 'Friends of the WCML'.

I was introduced to Eddie and Ruth by one of their post graduate students with whom I worked at Wythenshawe College of Further Education in the late 1960s. I visited their King's Road house with him on one of their 'open days', falling into immediate empathy with both them and their book stuffed house. I became a supporter, I went on their guided walks, they came on mine (Peterloo), we organised day schools in the Crown and Kettle and gradually I became more and more involved. At the time of the GREAT MOVE, all 28 furniture vans, I was translated into becoming secretary of the forthcoming 'Friends of the WCML' at the Crescent and



helped carry, hung, and lifted, with many others, to fill and display the many rooms in Jubilee House and then helped in organising and attending early events, both in the house and the annexe.

Their scholarship, their exacting standards and their wealth of warmth and kindness to 'an old Fabian' like me gave me endless delight and admiration. With other 'Friends' we became friends to them both, visiting them at their caravan in North Wales, attending many events, attending Eddie's 90th, and his funeral, and making marmalade to assist fund raising for the ever needed bookshelves, till I could no longer make it in the alcove kitchen of my retirement flat. Ruth then carried on valiantly right up to her death.

They were irreplaceable, each of them unique, and their legacy is the Working Class Movement Library, open to all scholars and secure for its continuing future. They were unforgettable and will live in our hearts and minds for the rest of our lives.

Travels With Ruth

Royston Futter was Salford's Cultural Services Manager in the 1980s and instrumental in bringing the library to Jubilee House. He became a trustee and close friend of Ruth and Eddie's. Here he shares some of his 'off duty' moments with Ruth and expresses sentiments shared by all of us.

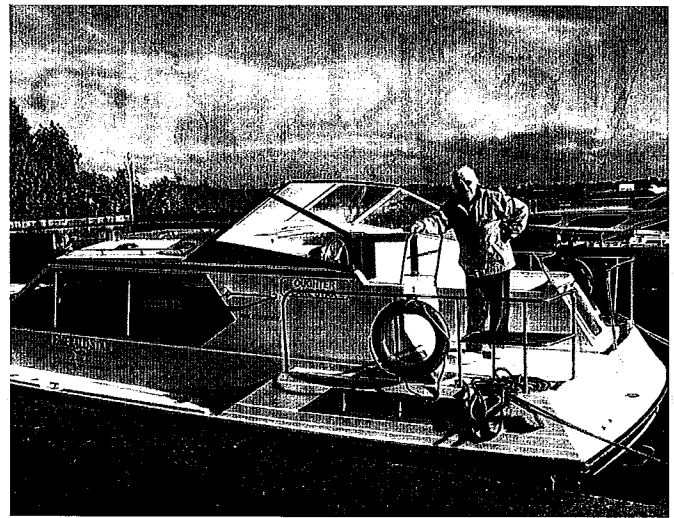
It all began cloaked in suspicion, so wary were Ruth and Eddie of this strange young man from Norfolk bearing gifts in the guise of a possible new home for their library, their pride and joy, they felt it would be appropriate to have their solicitor present at our first meeting.

A few months later relations had improved to the extent that I was installed as a guest in the spare room of the flat occupied by the Frows in Jubilee House when working late during the Lowry Centenary Festival.

It was, Ruth said, the flat which had clinched the deal, all the universities would have taken the collection in, only Salford had the wit to see that the Library's main assets were its founders.

I feel that those years, when able at last to develop the collection into a true and remarkable library and with staff to assist with the professional aspects, were happy ones for both Ruth and Eddie and it was this period that led to the Library becoming what it is now, a truly amazing resource.

Others remembering Ruth will talk of dedication,



erudition, kindness, devotion to the cause and a life spent helping anybody who needed it.

I remember wonderful buns, very individual recipes, strange presents, great philosophical discussions (ok then I admit these usually took the form of fairly jovial arguments), lots of holidays, meals at our house, travels all over and a life spent helping people whether they wanted it or not.

Just last year as we were crossing Lough Ree, in a cabin cruiser in a force 8 gale, with waves breaking over the top of the boat both my wife, Pam, and I very seriously wondered whether to call for assistance and to break out the life jackets. We were reassured by the sight of Ruth, head buried in a book, looking up and wondering whether to put the kettle on.

I will never forget visiting a tiny café in the mountains of Spain during an electricity blackout with a letter of introduction to the owner. When we first arrived Ruth asked me which one of the people sitting in the café might be our contact. I said that I thought there was a fair chance that the one with one eye and one arm was our man and so he was, an IB veteran who plied us with paella and muscatel (we told Eddie it was a fruit drink). Nor will I forget the sight of Ruth in a Spanish supermarket demanding honey, nuts and raisins for Eddie, very slowly, very clearly, and of course, in English.

If there ever was a better friend or a harder worker then I have yet to meet them, she could be exasperating at times but always found a way to compromise without losing sight of her ideals. Few of us will get anywhere near their achievements but I feel it would please both Ruth and Eddie if we were just a little bit proud to have played a part in their lives. I know that I am, and that I will miss her very much.

Looking to the Future



Heritage

LOTTERY FUNDED

We're On Our Way

Much of this edition of Shelf Life has inevitably been about paying tribute to Ruth whose sudden death saddened us all. How pleasing for her then to learn shortly before her death that our application to the Heritage Lottery Fund has been successful. Ruth was always concerned about the future of the library and much of our work over the recent past has been about securing that future. What with our long term lease and grant secured from Salford City Council, recent substantial inheritances, and now massive help from the Heritage Lottery Fund Ruth departed content that the library created by her and Eddie would be around for a long time yet.

Their desire to make the library an educational centre for the promotion of the history of working class movements is at the core of the project. It will open up the contents of the library as never before and make it more accessible and useable than was ever possible before the advent of modern information technology.

Access

There's no point having a fabulous collection of material if nobody knows what we've got or how to find it. Most of our books are catalogued, thanks to previous Heritage Lottery funding in the early 1990s, but very few of our other treasures are, certainly not in a format that is readily accessible. We will be doing away with our current system and putting in a new one provided by the software company ADLIB who specialise in systems for archives, museums and libraries. At the end of the three year project a significant amount of our more unique and precious items will be catalogued and accessible to anyone, anywhere, via our website, which will also receive a make over and become more user friendly and informative.

We are in the process of recruiting an archivist and a librarian to oversee the process. Hopefully they will both be in post by May, and will remain with us until the end of the project in December 2010.

We also want more members of the public coming through the door and money has been made available to provide improved external signage so that we are easier to find. Inside the building we intend smartening up, redecorating, and converting some of the ground floor space into an exhibition area where people will be able to see changing displays from the collection.

Education

This part of the project involves appointing a community learning co-ordinator - someone with a background in education, ideally also with experience such as drama skills. They will create resource packs for use by schools in History and Citizenship lessons. The packs will supply information on working conditions, child labour, the role of women and the effects of automation and changing economic conditions. To ensure that the riches of our collections are shared particularly with people in the local area, the packs will be combined with other resources like drama and music to engage pupils in local schools, and help them learn more about their Salford roots. 39 primary schools in Salford have expressed an interest in working with us in this way. We will also send a promotional leaflet to schools in the wider Greater Manchester area, drawing attention to the existence of the resource packs on the WCML Web site, and their potential value as part of classroom work.

Later on in the project the community learning co-ordinator will focus on resources for 'return to learn' adult students, in collaboration with local trade unions (via the North West region of UNISON) and the Workers' Educational Association.