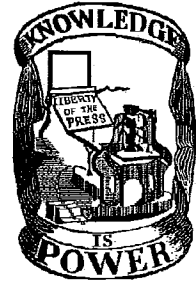


# Shelf Life

The Newsletter of the Working Class Movement Library

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## Trustees Meet

Trustee meetings are not very exciting affairs so we won't bore you with the details. Two things of note relate to the staff and trustees themselves. You may be aware, from previous issues of 'Shelf Life', that our two members of staff were both appointed on temporary contracts pending the completion of negotiations with the City of Salford about our future. Now that has been secured both Lynette Cawthra, our Library Manager, and Mike Weaver, our Library Assistant, have both been offered permanent contracts.

Mindful of the need to expand the knowledge and experience base of the Trust the May meeting of the Trustees asked the officers to approach certain institutions and individuals about joining us as Trustees. We are pleased to report that 4 new Trustees have been appointed bringing the grand total to 18. The new members are:

- \* John Percy, a retired librarian and a long standing friend and volunteer.
- \* David Granville, former editor of the Irish Democrat and currently responsible for the on-line edition.
- \* Representing Salford University, Andrew Cooper, Head of the School of English, Sociology, Politics and Contemporary History.
- \* A representative of Salford City Council, yet to be determined.

## Just Popped In



The Royal Shakespeare Company are currently on tour with a production of 'A Comedy of Errors' and the first port of call (if you can forgive the pun) was on the old Salford docklands site at the Lowry Theatre. One of the stars of the production is a friend of the library, actress Siobhan Redmond, who took the opportunity of some spare time to pop in and make her first visit. Here you can see her being shown round by Maggie Cohen, chair of the Trustees. Siobhan is one of a growing number of theatrical supporters of the library.



## Ewan MacColl Biography Launch

The library was host to the launch on 25th October of 'Class Act', a biography of Ewan MacColl by Ben Harker and published by Pluto Press. Based on very extensive archival research and many interviews, the book begins with his birth as Jimmy Miller in Salford in 1915 to Scottish parents and discusses his cultural activity and achievements over 50 years as a writer, performer, playwright and musician. The library annexe was packed to hear Ben talk about the research and writing of the book and answer questions. This was followed by a performance of three of Ewan's songs by Aidan Jolly.

We were thrilled to receive an unexpected envelope of treasures through the post recently - Percy Vinicombe's collection of early socialist pamphlets and newspapers, dating from 1899 to 1902, via his niece Audrey Carpenter. He was a member of the Stoke Newington branch of the Social-Democratic Foundation, and as well as a variety of SDF materials from the period he also kept items from the Fabian Society and the ILP, and a very nice handbill promoting the 1900 May Day celebrations at Crystal Palace.

Dave Cope found for us a folder of election leaflets and correspondence relating to Salford Labour Party from 1929 to 1959.

Hilda Whittaker attended the recent study day along with Susan and Wolf Reznicek, and brought along more papers which have been sorted from the late Bill Whittaker's collections, including material relating to the organisation of Burnley's annual May Day celebration.

The Library received packages from brothers Sid and Alan Brown within a couple of days of each other. Sid's contained two badges, one of which is a silver Presidential badge together with several rule books of unions which organised Felt Hatters. Looking through them helps us to understand the structure of

## RECENT ACQUISITIONS

the industry and in particular, how women fitted into it. Alan and his wife Sheila's package contained a book about mining disasters in South Wales Collieries with a note explaining that it had been passed to him by the last surviving daughter of the mining family with whom he was evacuated in 1940 during the London blitz.

We have been delighted to add all this material to our burgeoning collections. We are also planning to install mobile shelving in one of our cellar rooms, to help cope with the 'burgeoning'!

## librarian's lines

WCML, together with the Labour History Archive & Study Centre from the People's History Museum, the National Co-operative Archive and Bishopsgate Institute, joined forces to produce an online exhibition to highlight their archive collections as part of Archive Awareness Month 2007. All four archives have complementary collections relating to women, labour and the left. The online exhibition, 'From Kitchen Table to

Conference Table', follows the progress of women from the private to the public sphere through their politicisation, using a time line and case studies. Former Speaker Betty Boothroyd has kindly also supplied an introduction. The exhibition can be found at [www.politicalwomen.org.uk](http://www.politicalwomen.org.uk). This Web site will be viewable for at least the next year.

We have hosted a visit by members of the Manchester and Salford Film Society, who came to view the Society's archive which we are proud to hold here. We also welcomed the delegation of Japanese trade unionists reported on page 4.

We are pleased to be building links with Salford University, particularly the School of English, Sociology, Politics & Contemporary History (ESPaCH). A group of 14 students visited in November, for instance, to view the library's early/mid-19th century periodicals collection which gives an outstanding overview of the radical "unstamped press" of the time. The picture shows Brian Maidment and undergraduates who are studying courses as diverse as Journalism, English and Creative Writing, and Criminology and Cultural Studies.



## Jim Allen Archive

The library is very pleased to house the Jim Allen archive, which his family have very kindly entrusted to us. Jim was a socialist writer of international significance, who made a major contribution to British TV drama in the 1960s and 1970s and to British film in the 1980s and 1990s.

He was born in Miles Platting, Manchester in 1926 into a Catholic family. Jim left school aged 13, and, after a series of jobs, joined the army, and later Merchant Navy, travelling the world. On coming back to England he became a member of the Socialist Labour League and remained a convinced Marxist for the rest of his life.

In the 1950s he worked in the mines and edited a rank and file newspaper The Miner. He was expelled from the Labour Party after attacking Hugh Gaitskell in an editorial in the Blackley Socialist. Whilst working on building sites he



began writing, beginning his TV career with scripts for Coronation Street.

His first full length TV drama was The Lump produced by Tony Garnett and set in the world of the building workers that he knew intimately. Allen first worked with Ken Loach on The Big Flame, a story of union militancy set in the Liverpool docks (it was filmed onsite) and produced by Tony Garnett. Later collaborations with Loach included The Rank and File and Days of Hope, a major 4 part political drama series covering the years 1916-1926, broadcast in 1975. With the onset of the Thatcher government television executives started to play safe and Allen's work was no longer commissioned. He then wrote three films: Hidden Agenda (about Ireland); Raining Stones, and, lastly, Land and Freedom (about the Spanish Civil War); all were directed by Ken Loach. Jim died in the summer of 1999.

The archive includes some of Jim's earliest work for television and draft scripts for his films Raining Stones and Land and Freedom. There is also a copy of his play Perdition and an extensive collection of articles written about the controversy which surrounded the production of the play. In addition to Jim's writing, we have a wide range of articles collected by him on a number of different subjects. These, together with his personal library, give an insight into his political development, his interests, and, in some cases, appear to have formed part of the research for his projects.

### Wilberforce in Perspective

In the 'Recent Acquisitions' column of the last edition of 'Shelf Life' reference was made to the fact that 'opposition to slavery was not only the preserve of religious and middle class radical groups'. One of the most referred to members of this preserve and the person often presented as abolishing slavery singlehandedly was the politician and philanthropist William Wilberforce. This has prompted one of our friends, Alan Brown, to remind us of the writer William Hazlitt's opinion of him as expressed in his 1825 'The Spirit of the Age':

*'He must give no offence. Mr. Wilberforce's humanity will go all lengths that it can with safety and discretion; but it is not to be supposed that it should lose him his seat for Yorkshire, the smile of Majesty, or the countenance of the loyal and pious. He is anxious to do all the good he can without hurting himself or his fair name.'*



# Trade Union Support

We know we are always asking trade unions for financial support, without which we wouldn't be able to carry on, but, in return, the library is a living thing and there to be used by the movement. Early in November the north west region of NUT made use of our NALGO room to have a Divisional Secretaries' meeting here, and they had a tour of the library thrown in. Limited resources permitting, we would welcome others making use of what facilities we have.

We were delighted when the north west region of UNISON visited us with a delegation of Japanese public sector trade unionists who were very impressed by what they saw during their brief stay with us. Just two small examples of things we can do to repay the support we get from the movement.

On the financial side the last quarter brought in over £2,000 from various parts of CWU, GMB, NASUWT, NUJ, NUT, UNISON, UNITE plus three trades councils. Thank you all.



Japanese Trade Union Delegation



## Successful Conference

The library held a successful conference about the Manchester Martyrs on 24th November. Demand for places was high with the conference being sold out weeks in advance. The conference was chaired by Irish community activist Bernadette Hyland. The morning session featured Tristram Hunt on Engels, Ireland and the Burns sisters, Roger Swift on the Irish in Britain, and Christine Kinealy on commemorations of the Manchester Martyrs in the USA and Ireland. In the afternoon Michael Herbert discussed the campaigns of the Connolly Association in the 1960s: Eileen Murphy talked about two plays she had written about the Manchester Martyrs and acted some extracts; finally Bernie Murphy sang beautifully and movingly a number of songs connected with the Martyrs such as God Save Ireland. The event was organised jointly with Professor Christine Kinealy of the University of Central Lancashire to whom the library expresses its thanks for an excellent day. It is hoped to organise similar events on Irish history in the future.

## All Their Own Work

The library would like to thank the following who have donated copies of their work to the library; George Binnette, Malcolm Chase, Terry Eagleton and Ken Loach. We are always keen to add contemporary as well as ancient pieces of the written word relevant to the collection so if any of our readers would like to donate copies of their own work please contact our librarian Lynette Cawthra.

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