


Marx Memorial Library & Workers' School

Library of Marxism, socialism and the working-class movement.
Research centre and organiser of courses, lectures,
workshops and cultural events.



End of Year Report 2022

 marxmemoriallibrary



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MARX MEMORIAL LIBRARY
& WORKERS' SCHOOL

An Introduction

OUR PEOPLE

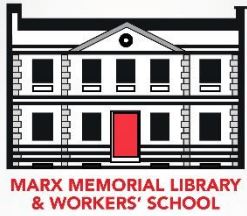
The work of the MML - spreading knowledge and understanding on Marxism and the history of socialism and the working class movement - has always been an enormous collective endeavour. With limited resources, a small staff and an incredibly ambitious programme, our dedicated trustees, volunteers and members of our sub-committees play a huge part from giving our red front door a lick of paint to drawing up syllabuses and tutoring our classes. Our members, patrons and affiliates – a growing cohort of friends and supporters – play a vital role in both funding and informing our work. We collaborate with a large network of labour movement, heritage, academic and local community groups too, facilitating our reach and granting each other mutual support. This report is a tribute to all those who pitch in and make the MML what it is today.

OUR WORK

Our main achievements in 2022 have been:

- Obtaining funds for a major resilience and planning bid from National Lottery Heritage Fund setting us in good stead for the future.
- Adapting to post-covid with a busy onsite programme while maintain a strong online presence, facilitating access to both our collections and education programme.
- Improving and enhancing our ties in the labour movement at this critical time; bringing affiliation numbers up and working on education and outreach in this area.





Collections

WHAT'S NEW?

Lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 meant people trawling through their attics and basements at home, much to our delight. Examples of significant acquisitions include:

- The papers of International Brigader Cyril Sexton donated by his son, Clive Sexton.
- A scrapbook of Annie Mills - National Unemployed Workers' Movement activist - donated by Derek Newton.
- A signed photo of Lyudmila Pavlichenko, Soviet sniper in the Red Army (pictured).
- Periodicals including the *Irish Democrat* donated by the Connolly Association and issues of the Paris Commune newspaper *Père Duchêne*.



ACCESS

It has been wonderful to reopen our reading room to a normal service this last year, welcoming researchers from around the world three days a week. Areas of study included:

The Artists International Association; The Poster Film Collective; British Imperialism in India; International Brigaders from Leeds; The biography of Noreen Branson; The Institute for Workers' Control; Socialist music and song; The history of the Electrical Trades Union.

A new large desk in our reading room now enables readers to browse over-sized items, including our posters and large format newspapers.



We endeavour to improve access to our collections across the board. This means working on cataloguing and digitising material as appropriate. Newly-catalogued collections include the Robert Williamson Collection which incorporates papers on campaigns against the South African apartheid regime in Glasgow, our early twentieth century trade union periodicals including *The Siren* (pictured), while work continues apace listing items in the Printworkers' Collection.

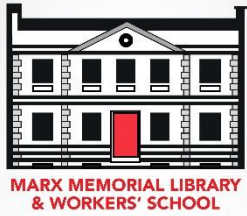
Focuses for digitisation have been the photography of our object collection, with over 140 images taken of our ceramics collection which we are now working on uploading onto our online catalogue, Soutron. Over 1800 images have now been scanned from our Printworkers' collection documenting disputes, conferences and solidarity actions.

PRESERVATION

Our major crowd-funder for boxing our bound newspaper volumes including the full run of the *Daily Worker/Morning Star* was hugely successful raising over £4,500 for this purpose. Boxing is now well underway. Our storerooms now benefit from blackout blinds shielding paper documents from UV light. We have signed a support contract with Harwell which insures us in the case of a large-scale disaster like a flood.

ACCREDITATION

We continued to work towards archive accreditation, reviewing our existing policies on Access, Collections Care, Collections Information and Disaster Planning, and developing - for the first time - a Digitisation Policy, a Volunteer Policy and a procedure for accession to and deaccession from the collection, thus ensuring our collections are managed according to best professional practice.



Education

OUR PROGRAMME

The MML hosted five online courses in 2022 and 28 lectures, launches and classes, engaging over 1000 in our work. Benefitting from a growing tutor team and invitations to special guest speakers, our programme was wide-reaching with contemporary relevance.

Book launches covered the Spanish Civil War, the Peasants' Revolt and China and India's place in the world. Courses included introductions to Marxism, Marxist economics and historical materialism.



Joint sessions with Friends of Socialist China, the International Brigade Memorial Trust, the Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies and the Working Class Movement Library – including our annual Engels Memorial lecture with Professor John Bellamy Foster and an anniversary lecture on the foundation of the USSR with Professor David Lane – brought new audiences to the MML.

Our programme also featured timely contributions on the Labour Party's relationship to the Trade Union movement. Guest speakers included Laura Pidcock and Ben Sellers in conversation on the current attacks on trade union

freedoms. A new collaboration with the *Morning Star's* Science and Society team examined Science and Marxism.

Finally, a joint series with the Barry Amiel & Norman Melburn Trust brought speakers including Vijay Prashad and Donald Sassoon to the MML to discuss issues ranging from the rise of the far right to what imperialism means in the twenty-first century.

WHAT'S NEW?

From July 2022 we invested in a high specification camera and speaker system enabling us to live stream all our events on Zoom. While numbers attending onsite almost matched our 2019 figures, we were still able to facilitate our national/international reach by making our content available live through Zoom.

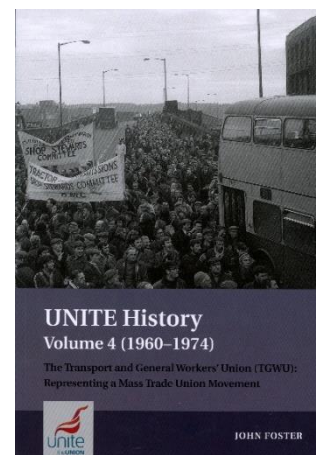
For the first time the MML hosted and tutored an RMT young members course with very positive feedback. This is something we want to repeat and roll out more widely. Meanwhile, in 2022 preparation began both for our conference on Labour Movement Education and on our 90th anniversary programme.

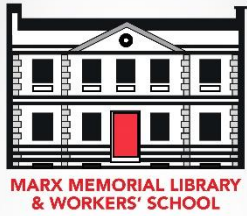
PUBLICATIONS

Theory & Struggle (2022); this issue featured reflected on trade union struggles past and present with pieces from Lord John Hendy KC and Arthur Scargill. The Reviews section drew on international issues and discussions with reflections from Jenny Clegg and Mary Davis. Academic subscriptions include University of Birmingham, Oberlin College, London School of Economics, Liverpool Hope University, and Princeton University.

Unite History Project: Our five-year publication and research project came to an end in December 2022. The last two volumes of the suite of six are now with the publisher; we look forward to celebrating the launch of this important tool at the MML in 2023.

Our Full Marx column continued to appear in the *Morning Star*, addressing questions ranging from history through philosophy, economics, environment, and revolution.





Outreach & Engagement

TOURS, WORKSHOPS & GROUP VISITS

We reopened to our usual offer of public tours, group visits and bespoke archive workshops. We welcomed a whole host of different groups including executive committees and staff teams from some of our affiliate trade unions including the NEU, ASLEF and BFAWU.

We hosted school and student talks and workshops drawing on our archives for groups from Durham University, Roehampton University, Berkhamsted School and St Angela's School.

Teams from sister organisations including the Feminist Library, the Museum of the Order of St John and Islington Local History Centre enjoyed special tours. Moreover, we hosted a session for a cohort of apprentice librarians from the University of Westminster.

In the summer we trialled Saturday opening; our two tours were fully booked, suggesting a real demand for extended opening hours and drop-in sessions, something we are hoping to further explore in the coming period.



OPEN DAYS, STALLS & EVENTS



For the first time since 2019 MML hosted our annual open day on International Workers' Day. May Day saw General Secretary of the RMT Mick Lynch and Bernadette Keaveney of the Morning Star speaking from our steps on Clerkenwell Green.

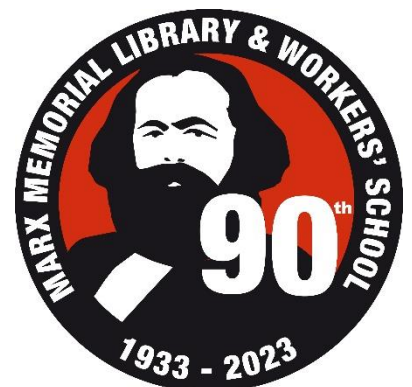
Our annual Karl Marx Oration was given by Harsev Bains of the Indian Workers' Association and Rob Griffiths of the Communist Party.

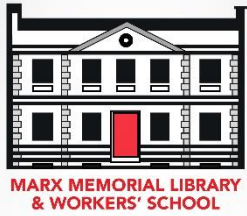
The October Book Sale brought in record sums and saw a high attendance from students from London, in addition to enthusiasts from across the country.

MML was represented at the Barbican's radical book sale, Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival, the Durham Miners' Gala, and Institute for Employment Rights conference.

COMMUNICATIONS

- We redesigned our e-newsletter and launched special communications to our members and patrons in the form of quarterly e-bulletins.
- Our newsletter subscriber list grew and now just short of 3,000 receive fortnightly updates on our events and activities.
- We continued to maintain a lively social media presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and reached 10,000 followers on Twitter.
- Steve Smith won our design competition for a new logo celebrating our 90th anniversary (pictured).





Marx House

IMPROVEMENT WORKS & INVESTMENT

Our historic building – 37a Clerkenwell Green – is in need of regular maintenance and repair. 2022 saw volunteers giving our red door a new coat of paint. The Lenin Room and stairwell were also re-decorated.

Drawing on the recommendations of our Fire Risk Assessment and a visit from the London Fire Brigade's Heritage Officer, we began planning and commissioning work replacing our first-floor fire door and improving the security of our ground floor fire door, work which has since been completed in 2023.



We invested in new equipment including a camera, mic and projector to enable hybrid events and meetings. Two new laptops facilitate the work of volunteers on-site. A new external hard drive also means we are able to make more regular off-site back-ups of our digital assets – most notably our digitised collections.

OUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

Our volunteer programme goes from strength to strength. This last year it was wonderful to be able to invite the team back on-site and recruit new volunteers - including through Voluntary Action Islington and University College London's Archives and Museum Studies courses - to work on a whole host of different activities.

Here, Daniela and Louise describe their experience working with us in 2022.

Daniela Major:

"My time as a volunteer at the Marx Memorial Library gave me very valuable perspectives on how heritage institutions work...I was particularly struck by how diverse the workload was and how volunteers are very easily integrated in the structure and the activities of the MML. My volunteering experience also helped me clarify what I want to do after my graduate studies, as it strengthened my interest in working with archives. In fact, I had to interrupt my volunteering at the MML because I am moving to the North of England where I found a job as an Archive and Records Assistant. I am sure that the experience I acquired at the MML was an important factor in my getting the position."

Louise Green:

"I started volunteering at the MML in order to gain experience and skills to make a career into working in archives. I have found everyone to be really welcoming and I have got to know and understand the library and archives collection at the MML, particularly through the retrievals and returns. Looking through the boxes of acquisitions was fascinating to see the variety of items gifted to the MML and some of the process of how they are moved into the collection. Seeing how documents are carefully stored and how the environment is cared for to protect the documents with dehumidifier and insect trap checking shows how the details are important. I assisted at an evening event so I can see how much is being done to encourage community engagement with the MML. My experience at the MML has really invigorated my ambition to study Archives and Records Management at university. I would certainly recommend it."



Finance & Fundraising

MEMBERSHIP, PATRONS & AFFILIATION

Membership numbers have continued to creep up - reaching 750 at the beginning of 2023 -, with retention facilitated by our new Direct Debit system and an improved ability to take card payments onsite. We still have a way to go to meet our 900 target for 2023 so any assistance encouraging friends family and comrades of existing members to apply would be gratefully appreciated.

While the cost-of-living crisis meant that some of our Patrons necessarily peeled away, we have maintained numbers - at around 35 - with a few more joining our ranks. Patrons were invited to a bespoke virtual tour and a drinks reception prior to the launch of 2022's issue of *Theory & Struggle*.

For the first time in at least a decade the number of MML national trade union affiliations has surpassed a handful of three or four; we now boast eight: RMT, ASLEF, CWU, NEU, Unite, BFAWU, FBU and UCU. We hope these affiliations encourage mutually-beneficial collaboration and are delighted, for example, that BFAWU now routinely hire our meeting room and that the NEU have started working with us to promote our school workshop programme.

INCOME GENERATION

We are ever conscious of the need to bring in diverse income streams to ensure our important work is sustainable in the long term. Outside of income generated through our education work and research service, key streams include:

- Venue hire: we let our Main Hall again for the first time since the pandemic, bringing in over £4,000, something we hope to further develop into 2023.
- Merchandising: with footfall on the up at Marx House, we have begun to push our shop again and brought in a new branded tote bag.
- Royalties: Our contract with Mary Evans Picture Library – supplemented by additional reprographic and licensing work undertaken by the MML team – brings in over £2000 per year.

NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND

Our funding bid for our project 'Marx Memorial Library at 90: Enduring and Engaging' to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in Spring 2022 was successful. This ring-fenced funding injection of £93,710 will create capacity to carry out audience research to inform a new engagement strategy. This will incorporate a new evidence-based approach to our work with schools and the local community.

With the goal of appealing to broader audiences we will be taking a thematic look at our collections. Archival material on subjects including campaigns for colonial liberation, the experience of refugees and struggles against racism and sexism will be pulled together in a new suite of subject guides.

Resilience will be a key focus; a fundraising feasibility study, commercial viability study, governance review and a closer look at our options for building redevelopment will feed into a coherent scalable plan for our future.

We want the Marx Memorial Library to complete this initial project in early 2025 more resilient, with a clear business and fundraising plan, a comprehensive knowledge of our building and its possible uses, and a dynamic engagement plan.

2022 saw the commencement of this major project with the recruitment of Matt Dunne, our new Archivist & Volunteer Coordinator, and the initial phase of our audience research programme.

