

Friends of The Women's Library

Chair's Report June 2019-June 2020

Up until the lockdown of March 2020, our activities continued as normal. Our talks programme for 2019-20, '*Subjects and objects of government: women from the 19th to the 21st century*' got off to an excellent start. In November we heard from Dr Alison Ronan, Visiting Research Fellow, Manchester Metropolitan University, on '*The Women Who Said Yes*': the 17 women parliamentary candidates of the 1918 General Election; in January, Tara Finn of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office spoke on her doctoral research: '*A Necessary Evil?*' Prostitution and the armed services in the records of the Association of Moral and Social Hygiene 1915-1945'; and in February, Susan Pares enlarged our understanding of post-suffrage activism with '*An Ordinary Feminist Life*': Margaret Pares 1878-1963'.

However, sadly, owing to regulations around the Coronavirus pandemic, we had to cancel our screening of *Versailles 1919: the Return of the Dangerous Women*, which would have been introduced by Dr Ronan; Jennifer Gordon's talk on her recent book, '*Suffragettes of Kent: suffrage 'spade work' in the Garden of England*'; and Professor Mary Joannou speaking on a figure who deserves to be better known, '*Clara Dorothea Rackham (1875-1966): suffragist, socialist and social Reformer*'. We hope that it will not be too long before our programme can be revived, but of course must wait on the course of events beyond our control.

We have continued to make contributions to the holdings of TWL wherever possible and appropriate. A medal issued to doctors working for the Women's Hospital Corps set up by Louisa Garrett Anderson and Flora Murray in 1914 was donated by a member of the Friends. We were able to purchase a 1912 pamphlet of the Church League for Women's Suffrage, and have placed a reserve on a badge of the Women's Social and Political Union designed by Sylvia Pankhurst, on publications by Ethel Mannin and Elizabeth Haldane; on an 1882 publication on the Married Women's Property Act; and on a form for the Suffrage Declaration organised by Clementina Black in 1906, with signatures which will repay further research. Reserved items will be delivered to the Library when 'normal service' can be resumed there, as will the important archive of the late Cynthia Cockburn, the well-known activist in international feminist and pacifist campaigns. We are happy to report that when, early in 2020, the Committee informed LSE's Archives and Special Collections Manager, Anna Towlson of the availability of this archive, its value was swiftly acknowledged, and it will enter TWL post-Corona.

As for future contributions: at the end of 2019 we learned that Rita Pankhurst, who had died in Ethiopia in May, had left a most generous bequest of £5000 to the Friends. All of us are indebted to Rita, daughter-in-law of Sylvia, who as Head of Library Services managed the transfer of the then Fawcett Library to the City of London Polytechnic (later London Guildhall University, which merged into London Metropolitan University.) She was of course an outstanding influence on the development of today's Women's Library, and is deeply mourned. We hope that this gift will enable us in time to make a suitable purchase of a series of volumes for the Library, even at the astronomical prices of much of today's academic publishing. Suggestions of suitable purchases will be welcomed.

Our other expenditure has included helping to fund the reception held at the Women's History Conference in September, where our membership forms were distributed to all participants; and we have committed to a contribution to the costs of a 'Festival of Women Writers and Journalists', celebrating the centenary of *Time and Tide*'s first issue, which should have been held on Thursday 14 May 2020 to launch a year-long AHRC-funded project, *Time and Tide: Connections and Legacies*. Directed by our committee colleague Dr Catherine Clay in collaboration with project partners Five Leaves Publications, Women in Journalism (WIJ), TWL@LSE, and the Friends of TWL, the project will include an exhibition at LSE in spring 2021 as well as a number of publications. Many Friends will remember enjoying Catherine's presentation on *Time and Tide* in our talks programme in April 2018 and her *Time and Tide* walk in May 2019, and will look forward to the full realisation of these plans.

In January 2020 we were pleased to make a preliminary announcement of a new project: that of supplementing TWL's archival holdings on the Movement for the Ordination of Women by recording interviews with veterans of the campaign, and transcribing them for permanent retention in the Library alongside the recordings. The occasion when Fabiana Barticioti presented her account of cataloguing the MOW archive as part of our talks programme, where a highly-informed audience included a number of former campaigners, strongly suggested that these pioneers would have a great deal more to contribute to the record, and that it would be of considerable research value. Clerical members of the Friends agreed to be interviewed, and Friends both lay and clerical put us in contact with many other potential subjects, as did Dr Devora Libermann of LSE. Our member Canon Dr Judith Maltby put us in touch with Grace Heaton, a doctoral student at Oxford whose research covers precisely this topic. Grace has added many more names to the list, and offered to conduct many of the interviews. Initially, emails to acting and retired clergy posited a start date for the project 'shortly after Easter'; then they ended with the words 'pandemics permitting'; then they began with the phrase 'I hope this finds you well'. We now hope that our own demographic and that of the veterans of the campaign may not actually be under house arrest until 2021!

Finally, we should remind you that in the virtual world much of TWL remains accessible. If you go online to <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/> and click through the 'Browse' section, alighting on the image for 'Women's Rights' you will find that a large range of organisational reports, minutes, pamphlets, newspapers and journals have been digitised, with material covering much more than suffrage. Much of this digitisation programme has benefited from Friends of TWL funding. In addition, LSE has digitised a number of TWL's rare books, Beatrice Webb's diaries and the records of the Fabian Society. Good hunting!