

Friends of The Women's Library Annual Report 2020-2021

Last year's AGM was our first venture into the world of Zoom meetings. It was an encouraging experience: not only was it not too difficult for Friends to chat and message each other, but it was manifestly easier for the membership to (virtually) convene from all over the UK. This emboldened us to resume our talks programme, which the first onset of the Covid-19 pandemic had put on hold. With tremendous help from Gillian Murphy, Curator of Equality, Rights and Citizenship at LSE Library, and also Maria Bell, Learning Support Services Manager at LSE Library, to whom we are extremely grateful, we launched an online programme whose success has been truly heartening. In addition to enabling Friends to attend who could not normally travel to our London meetings, we have been gratified to attract (thanks to publicity from sister institutions the Women's History Seminar of the Institute of Historical Research, the Women's History Network, and the Royal Historical Society) cross-European and transatlantic audiences. Our talks have also led to a small increase in our membership, and we naturally hope this trend will continue.

All our speakers have risen to the challenge of providing intellectually and visually stimulating presentations – we were particularly pleased to have continued our recent practice of showing films at AGMs by featuring WILPF's 'The Women who said NO!' in November last - and the plethora of questions and comments on screen at each session have been testament to the interest all the speakers have aroused. We warmly thank Carmen Mangion, Anne Logan, Alison Ronan, Charlotte Bill and Jane Grant, Mary Evans, Lucienne Boyce, Amy Kaufman, Eleanor Reed, and Helen McCarthy for their contribution to the continuing life and liveliness of the Friends. Everything points to our maintaining a 'hybrid' real life/online talks programme when pandemic regulations allow for a physical return to LSE Library.

An important aspect of the Friends' work in the past has been their contribution to the print and manuscript holdings of TWL. Early in 2021, Friend Caroline Derry volunteered to scan auctioneers' posts for us, and discovered that some papers relating to a planned biography of Ethel Smyth were for sale. The prospective author was another suffragist – Christabel Marshall, better known as the playwright 'Christopher St John'. The collection contains a few items relating to and signed by Smyth, together with letters of Marshall concerning the preparation of her work, and gossip about the theatrical and musical circles she frequented. Boldly entering the virtual saleroom, Dr Derry secured the purchase for a modest sum, and we look forward to consulting it when the Reading Room is re-opened – at the time of writing, hopes are high that this will follow the further relaxation of Covid restrictions on 21 June.

Throughout the year the Executive Committee has conducted its business through emails, phone calls and occasional Zoom meetings. As Chair, I warmly thank Susan Pares (Secretary), Lorna Hawthorne (Treasurer), Judith Bourne (Membership), Catherine Clay, David Doughan, Mary Evans, Jean Gooding, Jane Grant, Mary Joannou and Gill Sutherland for their constant support and attention to detail. Two long-serving Committee members are taking leave, one permanently. Jean Holder, after decades of service as a Library volunteer, and as a member of the Committee including stints as Secretary and as Chair, is taking well-earned retirement. All Friends will join us in thanking her heartily. At the same time Katharine Milcoy, Committee member and Website Monitor, has been obliged to take

extended sick leave. We look forward to her return to health and to the Committee. Dr Anne Logan has volunteered to be co-opted, and we hope to return to full strength by the time of the next AGM if not before.

Thanks to the support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Friends, and LSE Library – in particular Gillian Murphy, Curator of Citizenship and Equality, and Debbie Challis, Education and Outreach Officer - a magnificent project came to fruition online. This was *Time and Tide: Connections and Legacies*, led by Friends Committee member Dr Catherine Clay of Nottingham Trent University, with the assistance of Dr Eleanor Reed. A victory snatched from the jaws of Covid-19, which alongside a Centenary Edition of feminist magazine *Time and Tide* (in print and digital formats) offered a free online Festival of Women Writers and Journalists in November 2020; a free online panel discussion in February 2021 exploring past and present feminist campaigns, inside and outside the UK Parliament, to mark the centenary of the interwar feminist organisation The Six Point Group; and a free online exhibition of women's magazines, *Making Modern Women: Women's Magazines in Interwar Britain*, curated by The Women's Library using material from its holdings.

In one respect only, technology has not been on our side. Pre-pandemic, we had hoped to commence a programme of recorded interviews with veterans of the Movement for Ordination of Women. Although interviews are destined to be fully transcribed, the integrity of the recordings themselves is of great importance, and M.O.W.'s archivist at LSE, Fabiana Barticioti, has advised us that Zoom and similar platforms will not result in recordings of archival quality. We must wait for 'normal life' to resume in order to carry out the project with the appropriate equipment. A further (temporary) casualty of the pandemic has been the essay prize which we planned to offer to 3rd-year dissertation and M.Sc. students whose research was largely based on the holdings of TWL; they have of necessity been denied access to the collections in the academic year 2020-2021.

Over this summer, we plan to refresh our website, including the format of our membership form. We hope all Friends will continue to send us news and suggestions at friendsofthewomenslibrary.org.uk, we thank them all for their continued support, and look forward very much indeed to the time when we can once again meet in person.

Anne Summers (Dr)
Chair, Friends of the Womens Library