

## Twenty-Five Years of the Kate Sharpley Library!

Twenty five years old!! A time for assessment, re-evaluation and, in this case, a renewal of energy. All groups like ours have plans. Plans coming out of our ears. Every time we talk to each other another exciting possibility gets mentioned, another scheme that will give us a chance to make available what we have to more people. What we want to do here, then, is both present some ideas and at the same time discuss some of the practical problems that accompany them. Believe us when we say that any of your comments/ help/ suggestions are more than welcome.

The single biggest cost of the KSL is in preservation and storage. We have material that is, in some cases, unique – or very very rare. We spend large amounts of money on acid free newspaper boxes, acid free plastic pamphlet covers, acid free folders etc. etc. Shelving the Library, with good quality shelves cost us thousands of pounds. This cost will continue to be regular and real. It's also the biggest single cost of person time. No one works full time at the Library. When we are in there we are constantly filing, shuffling papers, sorting out manuscripts. This material has to survive.

We do have a working catalogue. Yes it's a bit rough and could do with refining but it does help us in our work. We have toyed with the idea of putting it on the web. We haven't because we don't want to flatter to deceive. No one works full time in the KSL. It's all volunteer work. We are wary of advertising ourselves too strongly until that changes. We can just about deal with the requests for help we get now (and we would stress the just about). Any increase would tip us over and disappoint people. We try to avoid having a poor reputation for helping. So... the major move for the KSL will be to have someone in there working full time (unpaid) in the next three years. Plans have been made for that to happen but it will bring in some extra costs. We don't have our own photocopier or our own microfilm reader, or our own fax. We have been able to

borrow 'em. That will stop when one of our group goes full time as he was the one doing the borrowing!!! Anyway, we are probably old to have our own now. With a full timer we do think we can have more of a presence, help people more quickly and keep the KSL well maintained.

As you all probably know we regularly produce pamphlets that we hope are interesting, informative and challenging. They sell pretty steadily as well. An obvious move that we talk about regularly is a move into publishing books. There are several titles that immediately made our short list... *Faceries* by Tellez, *The Iron Column* by Paz, *selected writings of Albert Meltzer* are some of them. Of course there is a cost involved both in cash and the time put in. Above all though we are bothered by the question of distribution. How can we get the books out to those who want it? We really don't have those skills. That said, it would be tremendously good to produce regularly some of the exciting material sitting in the KSL in a book form.

We have also considered a (glossyish) perfect bound journal. Think *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* here. It could combine selections from the KSL, contemporary writings and reviews of all sorts of material. There seems to us to be a need here that other publications haven't yet met. We couldn't, though, just do it on our own. We'd need help, volunteers to write reviews and articles etc. Again, the whole problem of distribution needs to be tackled. And thought about.

So that's what we are thinking about working on for the foreseeable future. Thank you for all your donations of money and material. Hopefully we are

seen now as a permanent group that can preserve the history of anarchism for future generations to work with and learn from. Please – all of you who produce any material at all (papers, pamphlets, letters, newspapers, books, stickers, videos, CDs or anything!!) send it to us. Sending it will ensure it will be kept safe and available for others to use as well as enabling us to keep our own history.

Lets get on with it!



## THE EARLY DAYS

### Some notes on the founding of the Kate Sharpley Library

There should be a very old saying along these lines: 'only historians and policemen love people who keep note books' and herein lies the problem for all well-meaning anarchist historians. Anarchists by the very nature of their social philosophy are in permanent opposition to the state, and therefore the object of continuing surveillance. Keeping diaries, notes-books and journals may make fascinating reading for future generations but they can cause great problems for the living.

Twenty five years ago when a group of young Australian anarchists looking for somewhere very cheap to live in London settled on Brixton, they had very little idea that they were to be the pathfinders for literally dozens if not several hundred anarchists and fellow travellers settling in this corner of south London over the next ten to fifteen years. Today Brixton has a reputation for being hip and cutting edge, but way back in 1979 it was just another crap part of London to live in.

In the late 1970's and early 80's squatting was about the only way for young people without money or references to find accommodation in London. Once you had taken control of your first squat and got over the feeling that you are about to be evicted at any moment, it's a very relaxed and simple matter to spread one's wings. Helping others to find a squat, organising large scale occupations of empty buildings, finding free space to be creative or even setting up a rent-free business, the scope is limitless! Once settled, it was only a matter of time before the Brixton anarchists decided they needed a social centre. With no rent to pay, no deposit to find and no resident landlord to worry about it took just a matter of days to establish what was to be called for the next 15 years or so the '121 Anarchist Centre' at 121 Railton Road, London SE24. '121' was first squatted by local South London anarchists who were already active in the area before the arrival of overseas comrades.

Number 121 Railton Road was a large corner building covering three stories plus cellar, it's ground floor was formerly a shop. In the early days no real attempt was made to do anything with the building other than to hold meetings, parties and act as a hostel for the numerous comrades visiting the big smoke.

As the number of anarchists in Brixton grew and contact was made with local anarchists (one of the big lies about the 121 anarchists was they were all outsiders) 121 was transformed into an almost 24 hour a day activity centre, housing a bookshop (admittedly running very erratic opening times but none the less it was to remain open for 10 years), a cafe and a disco

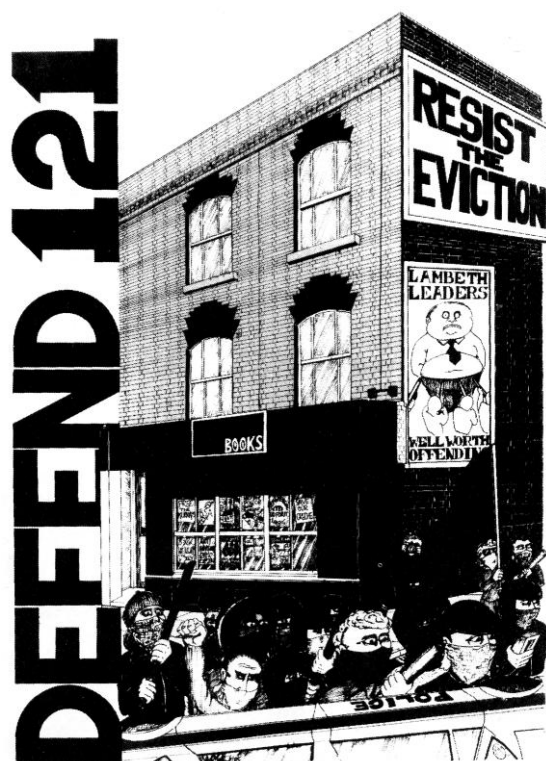
in the cellar - the only place where one could be sure the floor would not cave-in.

The centre also acted as the offices for several anarchist publications, the most famous being 'South London Stress' (for non-Londoners it must be explained this was a word play on the local rag 'South London Press').

With all this activity taking place, with new comrades arriving and old ones departing almost on a weekly basis, a lot of books were donated to the centre. It was only a matter of time before someone decided to start a library. The first library was a lending library, however even anarchists can be forgetful or just plain dishonest: unlike Marxists we are not saints! In time the large front room above the shop was lined with shelving and an impressive collection was assembled. As many of the books donated were either expensive or rare or both, the library was reorganised into lending and reference sections and the books had to be marked.

Some years previously Albert Meltzer met Kate Sharpley in Lewisham and had kept in touch with her until her death. When the comrades were discussing giving the library a name her name was put forward. She was an anarchist, a Londoner, a one time activist and, if truth be told, at that time the 121 Collective was heavily influenced by an anarcho-feminist faction so being a woman put her name way ahead of Bakunin & Co.

However choosing to name the small collection after a totally unknown comrade was not by any means an act of originality by the 121 Collective.



## THE EARLY DAYS

Anarchists love to confuse the agents of the state. When a group named after Marius Jacob (who had died 50 years earlier) were active in Paris in the 1970s, the police spent much time looking for the anarchist Jacob! The local Brixton police once mistook the number 121 for “One To One” unintentionally turning what was mostly an anarchist-communist collective into a group of anarcho-individualists.

During the early 1980's ‘the Bookshop’ as number 121 Railton Road was more commonly known came under many attacks, some serious, some farcical. The farcical were the attempts of Lambeth Council (the alleged rightful owners of the building) to evict the comrades: wrong papers presented to the courts, ill briefed solicitors, court dates mixed up. In many cases the judges sided with the comrades only because they found the local council so totally inept. The serious threats came from crypto-fascist followers of the National Front who would burn down anything connected with left-wing or anarchist causes. Black gangsters also were a big problem, the Bookshop was right on the so called ‘Front Line’, one of London's major drug markets and a shop like that could be a very nice location to deal drugs from.

In addition to the various anarchist groups - Anarchist Black Cross, South London Direct Action Movement etc. - the Bookshop also housed a squatters network and magazine, a prisoners rights organisation, the London office of the Greenham Common womens peace movement and, during the great miners strike, the London support desk of the South Wales Miners. Not the most popular collection of state-friendly organisations. During one of these problematic periods it was decided that the KSL could no longer stay at 121. The collection had become too valuable to be seen going up in smoke. Many old comrades had contributed their life-long collection of books and papers to the library. Even the Socialist Part of Great Britain had contacted the KSL and handed over their collection of foreign language syndicalist papers, including quite a few Yiddish papers. The library also had many rare first editions both of books and journals. As old comrades died and other moved overseas, unwilling to drag their books with them, the library kept growing. At one stage it had a very fine collection of fascist literature, collected by comrades researching the progress of the ultra right. Later this material was sold to raise money for the KSL and to make room for more libertarian minded material.

A police raid in August 1984 effectively sealed the decision to move the library. The KSL would cease to be a lending library with open access to all, turning into a specialist research library, arguing that those

people wishing to acquire a general overview of anarchism could reasonably find such information in any good bookshop.

For the next few years the KSL became a squatter itself, holding out in the wonderfully posh sounding St. Georges Residences, just across the road from the Bookshop. This beautifully designed Victorian block of flats, originally built to house music hall artists, were saved from demolition by the resistance of anarchists and other squatters who recognised quality building much more than any so called town hall expert. As the library continued to grow it was in serious need of cataloguing and reorganising, this could only be done away from the pressure of seizure or fire and with this in mind the KSL moved out of London for good.

Col, June 2004

### Credit

This issue produced by the Kate Sharpley Library collective Sep-Nov [!] 2004: KSL, BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX and KSL, PMB 820, 2425 Channing Way, Berkeley CA 94704, USA

Thanks for your orders, donations and assistance (especially our Webmaster and Online Documents Helper). Thanks to donors of cash & goodies. Feedback welcome. [www.katesharpleylibrary.net](http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net)

### Readers respond

“The latest pamphlet (Di Giovanni) was great. You always surprise me with the quality of texts that I never even heard of before.”

### New Pamphlet

**Paul Pomonis (Ed. and trans.) The Early Days of Greek Anarchism: The Democratic Club of Patras and Social Radicalism in Greece**

1-873605-73-0 £3 (£2 Sub's) Anarchist Library #6

During the days of the First International, Anarchism took root in Greece: the first Greek Anarchist publication came out in 1861. The Democratic Club of Patras (founded in 1876) was organised to spread Anarchist ideas. Their newspaper *Hellenic Democracy* brought down a wave a government repression, but the seed had been planted...

### No Comment: [UK] defendant's guide to arrest

2004 edition, updated and reprinted, funded by (Damages from) The Metropolitan Police

“If you think you might one day run the risk of being arrested you must find out what to do... An interview is a no-win situation. For your benefit the only thing to be said in an interview is ‘No Comment’”

Free (send stamps) from No Comment c/o BM Automatic, London, WC1N 3XX / [www.ldmg.org.uk](http://www.ldmg.org.uk)

## KATE SHARPLEY LIBRARY: WHAT AND WHY

### What we do

A library is much more than books on a shelf. There's a structure to it as well as mere volume. There are books, of course, but once you've got them you have to house them, preserve them and make sure you can find them again. And then, beyond the shelves of books are the drawers of pamphlets, and the cabinets of newspapers, and the boxes of manuscripts, and the piles of ephemera...

There's always plenty of jobs to be done and never enough hours in the day for what you could read. If you soak up knowledge from the atmosphere, you do it very slowly. The stuff you get a chance to read is either the stuff you can't resist or 'What is this shit?' That's part of the joy of being a research collection: good or bad, excellent research or journalistic drivel is not relevant in the end. Is it a study of or propaganda for Anarchism? is it by an anarchist? is it an ill-informed hatchet-job on Anarchism? Then come on in. Even the shit will make somebody's roses bloom. The time comes that you bless the comrades who only had time to be anarchists and not write about jazz... or flowers... or warlocks... A lot of time is taken up with trying to understand what you're holding in your hand. Do we want it, where will it go, have we got another copy? Usually easy with a book. Harder with a flier in Polish. And of course, books, pamphlets, newspapers and articles all need to be catalogued and everything joins the queue to get filed.

### Why we do it

But because it can be hard work and because some of it is rubbish from the pens of lying bastards doesn't mean that we don't love doing it. We do this to preserve and promote anarchist ideas and anarchist history. Not in a vague and fuzzy 'learning is good' kind of way, but because if we don't do it, who will? Signed first editions of *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* will always find a home. There'll always be someone willing to explain Stirner's debt to Hegel; but none of that really touches what we think anarchism or the anarchist movement is. We respect Kropotkin, but don't think of him as a prophet, let alone a god. Anarchism is the sum of years of struggle of thousands of comrades. Ideas are honed in argument, and in practice. You can call the idea of a world without oppression and exploitation the beautiful ideal, like the Italians did, but it's not an ideal for passive contemplation. Working in the library sometimes gives you a very strong sense of the human reality of that movement. Some of these books have escaped the government bonfires of totalitarian Germany and Russia and 'democratic' America. In them you can follow the ties of comradeship: a bound volume of a paper, representing ten years of struggle, is passed on to the new generation...

### What we've done

So, what are our achievements? Number one is that we're still here which is both obvious and also quite surprising. With a budget of nothing beyond what comrades give us or we contribute ourselves, the library has expanded and been organised into a working thing. And the expansion hasn't just been new books but also reaching back and gathering rare and obscure material. To the best of our abilities (remember, this is a volunteer operation) we deal with the enquiries that come our way either through access to material, photocopying or good old-fashioned advice.

As well as teaching ourselves how to operate a library we've also learnt to be publishers. Our bulletin goes around the world, serving up some of the short pieces we've rescued from old newspapers, manuscripts and memoirs. We've also published many pamphlets, returning forgotten accounts to the notice of today's comrades, or shining new light on events ignored or misrepresented by the 'experts'. And we've helped to bring out books like Guérin's *No Gods No Masters* or the reappraisal of *The Friends of Durruti Group* by Guillaumon. For many years now (we're on our fourth website) we've had an internet presence. This includes an online version of our bulletin: a handy resource for those who know us and a good way of reaching interested people who don't know us yet. Publishing makes more work and paper work, but it also promotes both the Kate Sharpley Library and the idea of Anarchism.

So, with the help of our friends - who sort, shelve, write, type, read, review, edit, design, donate or translate - we keep working on the library. Here's to twenty five more years preserving and promoting Anarchism.

### That was then: The view in 1996

"It is run solely by volunteers which perhaps explains why its massive retrospective cataloguing project is behind schedule... The library has perhaps taken on more than it can hope to achieve: it also runs a publishing programme currently comprising 13 titles"

Chris Atton in *Alternative literature: a practical guide for librarians* (Gower, 1996)

Ah, the olden days when we only had thirteen pamphlets. The list now stands at something like thirty-eight! And besides the natural time lag as things come in, we don't even have a cataloguing backlog any more. At least, not of English-language material. Sadly, the catalogue would probably take up too much space to print in the bulletin, at least if we want anything else mentioned in the next ten years!



## STUART CHRISTIE REVIEWED

Christie, Stuart *Granny Made Me An Anarchist: General Franco, the Angry Brigade and Me* Scribner, London, 2004. Pbk, 423pp, illus. ISBN 0-7432-5918-1 £10.99

This is the third version of Stuart's autobiography to be published. The first came out in 1980 (as *The Christie File*, published by Cienfuegos Press in the UK and Partisan Books in the USA) and more recently Stuart issued a version in 2 volumes in his own ChristieBooks imprint, which was a limited edition. I haven't seen the more recent version so can't comment on it, but the new edition seems to share a fair amount of material with the first edition but there is obviously some text here which has been written much more recently, and equally other text which has been omitted. I'll let someone with more time (and inclination) work out exactly how much has changed between the editions. Suffice to say that even if you read the first edition, this new one is well worth getting as well.

The book is split into three sections. The first, Scotland, details Stuart's early years, dealing with his family background, which shows, if nothing else, how, for many of us, it is the values that we get from our immediate family in our formative years that partially determine the sort of politics (if any) we later take part in. This is quite an evocative section of the book and one, which has much humour and pathos. Here also is Stuart's account of his becoming first a "beatnik" and then a politically aware activist in anti-nuclear weapons and other activities. Then come the meetings with real anarchists, including the larger than life characters in the Glasgow Anarchist Group, resulting in his tearing up of his Labour Party membership card in 1963 outside Glasgow's Mitchell Library following a conversation with Bobby Lynn and a librarian, Ronnie Alexander (no relation as far as I know!)

Becoming immersed in the anarchist movement (such as it was) meant inevitably that Stuart became increasingly aware that not only was the Spanish Civil War an important episode in anarchist history, but that the victors – General Franco and his henchmen were still in power and still behaving barbarically. Not only that but there was still an on-going anarchist resistance to the fascist regime. Stuart, having taken on board the necessity of resistance and direct action against the State inevitably was drawn to considering that he should get involved in some way.

And so the second part of the book details his move to London and eventual involvement with the anarchist activists involved in taking on Franco's regime, showing the world that not everybody had accepted his government and that despite the repressiveness of the regime, that resistance was not futile and was continuing. Stuart's account of the preparation of his role in a plot to kill Franco is engrossing, yet shot through with

humour. Sadly, despite the precautions he had taken he was easily apprehended by the Spanish secret police. (Memo to future would be activists – check out the location of the Secret Police headquarters and don't sit opposite drinking your beer in their "local"!)

Being caught red-handed with explosives, albeit the components rather than actual ready-to-go devices, could have resulted in him facing the death penalty.

Fortunately, he was "only" given a 20-year sentence; possibly because the Franco-ist state was beginning to open up to European tourism and the bad publicity a death sentence would have brought might have lost the Spanish economy a lot of money. And so, still only 18 years old Stuart was banged up in Carabanchel Prison in Madrid. His experiences here were not as bad as he might have feared. Spanish prisons were sufficiently corrupt that given enough outside support and inside solidarity, the conditions could be ameliorated. Not exactly ideal but survivable. Also what was crucially important was that in Britain there had been a growing campaign for Stuart's release, which culminated in his being pardoned after only about three years inside.

So in 1967, Stuart made his way back to London. A very different London than the one he had left in 1964. London was swinging big time but Stuart had other things on his mind. Prison had not dimmed his enthusiasm for anarchism and for action and so he was back in the thick of things, linking up with both Spanish exiles and local anarchists. Together with Albert Meltzer they set up a prisoner's support group, the Anarchist Black Cross, and started their publishing program, including the duplicated 'zine *Black Flag*, ably assisted by various other comrades.

Now for those who don't remember them, the late 1960's were a time of intense political turmoil in the world at large, with the war in Vietnam and the massive demonstrations against it, the student-worker uprising in Paris in 1968, the attempt at liberalisation in Czechoslovakia (all one country then!) and then ensuing crushing of that by Russian tanks, the demonstrations in Central America and their brutal suppression and so forth. And running alongside this there was the whole peace and love hippie scene.

It soon became apparent here and elsewhere that the peaceful demonstrations, petitions, leaflets and magazines weren't having much effect on the powers that be. Wars continued, the nuclear threat still hung over us, the state still crushed any dissent that looked too threatening or couldn't be co-opted or contained. And so protest took a more militant turn. The Angry Brigade was born. Now, as Stuart makes abundantly clear in this book he was far too busy earning a living as a gas fitter, converting people to North Sea gas (and his tales about that are most amusing!) and his prisoner

## STUART CHRISTIE REVIEWED

support activities to have been involved in anything like the Angry Brigade. Not only that but he was under almost continual surveillance. However his known links with Spanish and other European direct actionists meant that as far as the political police and their lapdogs in the press were concerned if there was political bombing and shooting going on then suspect number one was that well-known Scottish anarchist.

Now it still isn't known how many people were involved in the Angry Brigade. One suspects that once the idea became known (and that was only after many actions had taken place that were not reported by the press) it became a useful label for any activists who wanted to up the ante. Consequently it is quite likely that many of the people who were involved in community struggles, prisoner support, the underground "scene", student protests, direct action etc may well have known someone who knew someone who was involved. And being in the thick of things it's not surprising that Stuart knew some of the people who got charged with conspiracy to cause explosions in the Angry Brigade trials.

The book reprints some of the Angry Brigade communiqués, many of which were printed by *International Times* a much-missed publication of the period, which shows what the AB was about – i.e. using explosives and the like to attack the property of those who they felt should be made accountable for their repressive actions against the working class. The attacks were on places such as army recruiting offices, ministers, capitalist bosses and the like, but which were not intended to harm people. These were often specifically targeted to show solidarity with ongoing disputes and struggles.

As we now know, despite the police's attempted fit-up, Stuart and three others walked away from the Stoke Newington Eight trial, whilst four others were sent down for conspiracy to cause explosions. Sometime after the trial the Angry Brigade issued its final communiqué announcing that it was stopping its campaign. The main reason was that they had no intention in being associated with the Provisional IRA's terrorist campaign. They also didn't want to see any more people sent down for their activities.

Stuart, meanwhile, with his partner Brenda, tried to rebuild his life. Strangely employers weren't too keen on taking him on, despite the fact he'd been cleared of the charges against him. And so they moved north to Huddersfield to set up Cienfuegos Press and continue the work of *Black Flag* and the Anarchist Black Cross.

The story ends around 1975 with the death of Franco and the celebrations that followed, which is pretty much where the first edition ended as well. Now we know that Stuart has exactly been idle since then so perhaps there's a second volume in the pipeline (I know

that ChristieBooks issued two [three] volumes of the autobiography, "General Franco Made Me A "Terrorist" being the second [followed by *Edward Heath Made Me Angry*, see note below])

I suppose I'd better mention that I spotted the "deliberate mistake" on page 256 which refers to the "Kate Shipley Library" being Albert Meltzer's most enduring legacy. (I hope the people at the Kate Sharpley Library won't be too miffed!) Also the book would have been improved by the inclusion of an index – it would certainly have made writing this review a little easier!

Anyway, I've only scratched the surface of the book here, there's much more in it, and well worth the reading. It's at an affordable price and published by a mainstream publisher so people shouldn't have any problem getting hold of a copy (and order it at your local library too!!) I expect most readers will come away feeling that the book is both entertaining and thought provoking. In some ways this an extraordinary story, and yet it's also the story of a working class Scottish lad, who just so happened to have had the luck to have the right sort of Granny.

I'd have to say that this an essential purchase for anyone wanting to know more about the 60's and early 70's. This isn't a detached academic text or the work of a pop sociologist, this is how it was by someone who was there and can still remember what happened!

Recommended – 9/10

Richard Alexander

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[http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/blackchip/Granny\\_Made\\_Me\\_An\\_Anarchist.htm](http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/blackchip/Granny_Made_Me_An_Anarchist.htm)

### Distribution note

We will soon have copies of *Granny Made Me An Anarchist*, write if you want one.

We do have copies of the Third volume of Christie-books edition (*Edward Heath Made Me Angry* which covers 1967-1975). We hope to have a review in the next issue. In the meantime, cheap copies are available from either KSL address. It's indexed, illustrated, A4, 308 pages. Regular price £34, Subscribers £25 (\$30 in USA). More details on our website.