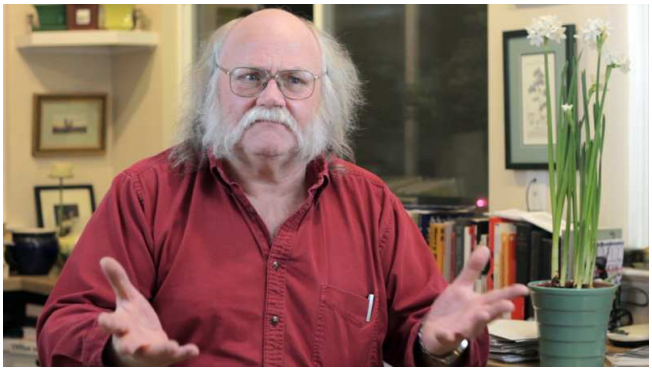
KSL

Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library

Number 122 two pounds Oct. 2026

An anarchist in the archive : Remembering Barry Pateman



Our comrade Barry Pateman was at the heart of the Kate Sharpley Library for thirty-five years. My earliest memory of Barry is of him on the KSL stall at the anarchist bookfair in London. He was in his element. I clearly remember Barry telling me the pamphlet I'd just bought was 'as rare as rocking horse shit'. I hope this brief account throws a little more light on his life and his ideas.

Barry was born and raised in a mining community near Doncaster. Radical political ideas were common, but so was non-school learning and a love of books. 'When I was growing up I met many self-educated working class men and women. They were everywhere in the community I lived in. […] They always recognized the "literary canon" and had, sometimes, a rather exaggerated respect for it. That said they brought their own frame of reference to the classics. I can remember sitting in a pub listening to two old miners tell me that Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe" was a radical novel because they read it as an exercise in solidarity and anti-racism.'[1] There wasn't an awful lot of anarchist literature about though. I remember seeing the large format newsprint 'Freedom Anarchist Pamphlets' series at the KSL and Barry telling me that they were some of the few things available when he was finding his way to the anarchist movement.[2]

In London in the early 1970s, Barry worked with Albert Meltzer, Stuart Christie and Miguel Garcia in the Anarchist Black Cross. He was modest in hindsight about his anonymous writings and other contributions: 'I'd never seen myself particularly important (I'd always put the stamps on the envelopes and book the meeting rooms etc)'.[3] He also took part in the bitter internal disputes of the early 1970s: was anarchism about class and revolution or were such ideas outdated? 'I had been around the edges (and probably too involved) of some rather intense disagreements about anarchism and anarchist practice.'[4] There were other differences: London anarchist Martin said 'I recall Barry Pateman telling me he wasn't sure he was an anarchist when he first got involved, as he liked ska and all the anarchists he met thought jazz was the only music anarchists should listen to.'[5]

As a miner's son, and member of the anarcho-syndicalist Direct Action Movement, Barry was heavily involved in anarchist solidarity during the miners' strike of 1984-85. He lived through a time of 'Mutual aid, not in a fucking book, but in everyday existence'; and of not only defeat but the pain of finding that the anarchist movement couldn't make room for radical apprentices who weren't yet 'full anarchists'.[6]

His experiences as an activist and those disputes about what the anarchist movement should do or could be led him to research British anarchist history. He earned a PhD studying the Spanish anarchist exiles who came to Britain in 1939. He also researched the bigger picture of British anarchism from the 1880s to the 1940s. That laid the groundwork for his involvement in the Kate Sharpley Library. When Albert persuaded Barry to house the KSL, it shifted from a collection of books on all topics of interest to anarchists to a more focussed one. Barry said 'there was so much material by and about anarchists that I felt KSL should concentrate on that.' [7]

We should recognise that Barry's first partner, Jennie Sidney, was important in making the Kate Sharpley Library a welcoming place – even if initially she was not too happy when Barry 'arrived with a minibus full of boxes (twice!!)'.[8] With Albert working on the publications and Barry unpacking, organising and expanding the collection the KSL grew in size and influence. Barry was also an enthusiastic stallholder at anarchist bookfairs, as much for the chance to share materials as for the essential money they brought in. Matt Hart recalled how Barry helped his research into the Anarchist Black Cross: 'When I used to go to the Anarchist Bookfair up in San Francisco, Barry Pateman, every single time he saw me, he would all of a sudden bring up a large stack of old *Black Flag*s that he had collected and literally put aside for me.'[9]

Barry was guided by the example of Paul Avrich, the great American historian of anarchism. When Avrich

Inside: 'We have fed you all for a thousand years'

died, Barry paid tribute to his 'consistent and rigorous insistence on accuracy', suggesting that we 'learn from Avrich's refusal to condescend to the people that made up his histories. He did not have a clever theory and try to prove it, a methodology that treats its subjects like chess pieces rather than people.'[10]

Albert Meltzer died in 1996, leaving Barry and the rest of the Kate Sharpley Library collective to carry on. A much greater shock came when Jennie Sidney died in 1998. Both Barry and Jennie had been teachers in East London and later in Peterborough. The next year Barry moved with their son, Paul, to a new life in California. Barry worked at the Emma Goldman Papers Project bringing his knowledge but also a curiosity about the people (anarchist or not) that Goldman worked with: 'We are rescuing men and women from, as E.P. Thompson writes, "the enormous condescension of posterity." On our desk, ill-lit by lamp-light, they come alive again.'[11] Sometimes people look for the Emma Goldman that they want to see, but Barry brought a vital focus on recording facts: 'Rule 1 of researching: never trust anyone until you've read the original yourself'.[12]

Barry's life improved further when he met his new partner, Jessica Moran, at the Emma Goldman Papers. Jessica also joined the Kate Sharpley Library collective. The holdings of the KSL grew once Barry started buying rare anarchist materials from American booksellers. Sometimes in part exchange, sometimes with donations from friends of the library but more often out of his own pocket. I especially remember visits to Bibliomania and Bolerium (both in the Bay Area), though Barry would never knowingly pass by any second-hand bookshop.

Barry encouraged people to think about anarchy, anarchism and history. Barry was a generous student of anarchism, who would take time to support other people's research, whether by reading their manuscripts, pointing them to sources or simply talking enthusiastically about anarchist history. He shared a lot of information but also represented a personal connection to the history of the movement (in the same way as Albert Meltzer had for him). Barry was one of the moving spirits of San Francisco's Alexander Berkman Social Club (formed in 2008). He was willing to be a speaker at meetings and conferences even if he self-deprecatingly claimed 'in retrospect I had fuck all worth saying'.[13] Barry wrote many encouraging introductions and book reviews, and followed the example of Paul Avrich, 'preferring to remain silent than chastise.'[14]

Barry worked closely with AK Press, who have co-published several works of anarchist history with KSL. He also read manuscripts for them, and shared others that came to the KSL from Cienfuegos Press via Albert Meltzer. One project with AK Press that took Barry and Jessica years was the annotated edition of Alexander Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*. As well as providing context on people and events for the modern reader, it transcribed the diary Berkman kept while writing *Prison Memoirs*.

It was fascinating to work with Barry in the KSL as he was so interested in what the material there could tell us. Picking up a history of freethought, previously owned and annotated by Mat Kavanagh led Barry to ruminate on what it meant to see Kavanagh 'working out what knowledge he can take from this book that will be useful in his discussion on anarchism and anarchy with his work mates.'[15] Many of my conversations with Barry have stayed with me. I remember filing copies of *Red Action* (Marxist but not Leninist) in the library and Barry saying he would write something about them one day. Since Barry, as a DAM member, worked with them in Anti-Fascist Action, it might have expanded on his later remark about their anti-fascist work being 'the best thing they ever did.' We talked a lot about his research into exactly what happened to split the Anarchist Federation in 1945. That was the long-delayed harvest of his early researches into British anarchism.[16]

For Barry anarchism was all about getting to anarchy, and anarchy was all about everybody being able to realise their full potential. He warned about what we lose if 'we raid the anarchist past to justify the anarchist present'.[17] It's been fascinating to re-read his introductions, re-watch interviews and see Barry worrying away at questions of anarchist history. In his foreword to Jared Davidson's biography of Philip Josephs, an immigrant worker in New Zealand (and importer of anarchist literature) Barry asked: 'What tactics should we use, and how malleable and flexible can they be, yet still remain anarchist? […] Above all, what is it that makes people anarchists and not syndicalists, or libertarian communists, or individualists, or whatever? Make no mistake – they saw a difference and the very least we can do is to explore it. […] All those pamphlets folded and put in a pocket to read at work, at home, in the pub, or on the bus. […] We need to ask how these readers processed what they had read in the light of their own experiences. They were not empty vessels waiting to be filled by the word.'[18]

Barry and Jessica moved to New Zealand in 2012. Barry continued to work on the Kate Sharpley Library right up until his death in September 2026. The library collective is poorer without him, but we aim to carry on. He has left us with a lot to think about.

John Patten

Notes

1, Barry Pateman '"Nameless in the crowd of nameless ones…" : Some thoughts on The Story of A Proletarian Life, by Bartolomeo Vanzetti, 1923' *KSL Bulletin*, no.81 (February 2015) https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/vhhp2j.

2, There were eight, published 1970-71 See https://thesparrowsnest.org.uk/search.php?query=Freedom+Anarchist+Pamphlets&logic=and –

some were reprinted by Freedom Press in their *Fighting the Revolution* pamphlets (two volumes, both 1971).
3, Barry Pateman 'Anarchist History: confessions of an awkward pupil' *KSL Bulletin*, no.84 (October 2015) https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/02v7v0.
4, Barry Pateman 'The Kate Sharpley Library Then, Now and Next: An Interview with Barry Pateman' *KSL Bulletin* no.63-64 (October 2010) https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/0vt50w.
5, Martin H on libcom, 2012.
6, Barry Pateman 'Tensions in Anarchism' (a talk at the Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair in San Francisco). https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/h44m7w.
7, 'Then, Now and Next: An Interview'.
8, 'Then, Now and Next: An Interview'.
9, 'A History of Anarchist Prisoner Support (with Matt Hart)' Final Straw Radio June 11, 2025 https://archive.org/details/tfsr-20250608-MattHartOnAnarchistPrisonerSupport.
10, KSL Collective 'Paul Avrich 1931-2006: a historian who listened to anarchist voices' *KSL Bulletin*, no.46-47 (July 2006) https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/2z358c.
11, Barry Pateman 'Barry Pateman is On The Edge' *Open Road: the newsletter of the Emma Goldman Papers* (Winter 2000). https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/3r23ht.
12, 'Barry Pateman is On The Edge'.
13, 'Anarchist History: confessions of an awkward pupil'.
14, 'Paul Avrich 1931-2006'.
15, Barry Pateman 'Mat Kavanagh and the History of Anarchism' *KSL Bulletin*, no.63-64 (October 2010) https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/vdnf0f.
16, You can read it at http://katesharpleylibrary.pbworks.com/w/page/139511268/The%201945%20split%20in%20British%20anarchism.
17, Barry Pateman 'Free Commune and Billy MacQueen' *KSL Bulletin* no.70-71 (July 2012). https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/ngf357.
18, Barry Pateman 'Foreword' in Jared Davidson *Sewing Freedom: Philip Josephs, Transnationalism & Early New Zealand Anarchism* (2013). ■

Barry Pateman: An Appreciation

It's important to appreciate those who have come before us. I first met Barry through Albert Meltzer, probably at a bookfair. I'd learned to trust that if Albert thought well of someone, he was probably right. Barry was an impressive man, physically and mentally, with the sort of self-deprecating humour instantly recognisable to anyone brought up in a British working class environment. And he was able to talk to people, without the sort of academic language that can be so off-putting.

The times I saw him were few and far between but they were always memorable. Barry was brimming with ideas, whether about anarchist history, theory and practice, sport or wider culture. Like Albert he had a high regard for the autodidacts – especially those miner militants whose self-education far outstripped those who had had a university education. He was good company.

It was perhaps telling that I learned of Barry's death a few days after returning from Ron Marsden's funeral. Both had been intimately involved in the tension between organising as anarchists and remaining accessible to ordinary people. It's a tension that runs through most of the anarchist organising and groups that I have been part of in my life, and one I kept promising Barry I would write something about – the organisations that can never get above Dunbar's number[1] in membership without splitting, the affinity groups claiming to be membership organisations, the strategies designed for different times, the insights from Stuart Christie's autobiography about affinity groups. Sorry, mate, life always seemed to get in the way, I am way too easily distracted….

He was generous with his time and his thoughts. He had many strings to his bow – as you would expect from someone who admired those self-educated working class militants – as was so warmly described by the guy who knew him from the New Zealand Cricket Museum at the memorial service.

Barry would regularly talk about how militant young miners from South Yorkshire were interested in the Direct Action Movement, during the height of the 1984-5 strike. But as they weren't fully formed anarchists, DAM couldn't accept them, despite their hard won experience of class struggle. It was this discussion that led DAM to become the Solidarity Federation (alongside other struggles like the Ardbride dispute 1986-87). Unfortunately, with a fabulous sense of timing, SF's orientation towards labour movement militants happened at exactly the time the pool of labour movement militants shrank, following the catastrophic defeats of the 80s and early 90s. Barry saw the effects of these defeats first hand, as the mutual aid of the strike gave way to desperation and the destruction of former mining areas by a vengeful government. There were successes, most notably the Workmates group on the privatised part of the Tube, but that also swerved the same organisational question by staying independent – it wasn't part of SF and as far as I know no one outside the originators ever joined SF. The arguments around SF's industrial strategy, of building trust and organisation in a workplace and then tackling issues from that base are not new[2] – but the obstacles to winning over new people to an anarcho-syndicalist project through this activity remain substantial.

One of the commitments of the KSL has always

been to uncover the motivations and actions of the unknown militants, who didn't leave piles of writings for posterity. Barry was assertive that we hear the true voices of our forebears, not mediated by what we think now and what we want to bolster our own current views. We are much richer for that approach. The histories published by KSL are accessible to the general reader. The context is there. The achievements are many: Recognising the importance of Guillamon's work on the Spanish revolution and ending the myth of the spontaneous uprising in 1936, achieved without any groundwork. And his work on the early 20th century movement and Emma Goldman stands out.

He kept looking for ways to spread the ideas of anarchism, and always in an outward-facing way. Whether through solidarity with strikers and others in struggle, through engaging with younger anarchists, or through the achievements of the Kate Sharpley Library he was always ready to share his experiences and knowledge and improve our understanding. To be an anarchist is hard, there's a lot to live up to, and it's important to understand the ways in which we all contribute. Barry was a standard bearer for a rigorous approach to anarchist history and we owe him a lot for that.

I remember parroting one of the myths about Emma Goldman, that somehow her militancy declined as she grew older – Barry soon corrected me – "she was militant to the end".

And so was he.

Martin H.

Footnotes

1, Dunbar's number comes from anthropologist and evolutionary biologist Robin Dunbar and is a suggested cognitive limit to the number of people with whom one can maintain stable social relationships. It's normally taken to be about 150.

2, for example Solidarity Federation's "Fighting for Ourselves" https://files.libcom.org/files/Fighting%20For%20Ourselves.pdf Or Albert Meltzer writing about the idea of "Fives" as groups of militants in the same industry https://files.libcom.org/files/bf2-7.pdf p.20 ■

Remembering Ron Marsden (1937-2026)

We're sad to report the death of Ron Marsden on 21st August 2026. Ron was born in Preston and joined the anarchist movement after being involved with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). 'He joined the Syndicalist Workers Federation (SWF) in 1963/1964 and moved to Manchester to be active in the Manchester Anarchist Group there, attempting, along with the late Alan Barlow, to win it over completely to class struggle anarchism. […] He and his first wife Jan were active in the Anarchist Federation of Britain in the late 1960s, regularly attending its conferences. Shortly after I joined the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists (ORA) in 1972, Ron decided to join with a few other Manchester comrades, but it was to prove to be only for a short time as he soon returned to the SWF. But the SWF was going through hard times, with only the Manchester branch in existence at the end of the 1970s. Ron was also active in the Libertarian Industrial Network (LIN), in which anarchists active in their workplaces attempted to liaise.'[1]

The tributes we've read talk about his long track record as an anarcho-syndicalist in the Syndicalist Workers' Federation, Direct Action Movement and Solidarity Federation. They also emphasise how approachable he was: 'the Ron I knew was a kind militant anarchist till his late age and an inspiration for younger members that were fortunate to have known him. He really never stopped fighting for what he believed in.'[2] Mikey Dredd wrote 'I met Ron when I first joined SolFed many years ago, he was a solid comrade who could talk for hours, the joke was never ask him a question as you won't get away for the rest of the day. He was a friendly, supportive comrade who cared deeply about everyone, his campaigning on the issue of asbestos was never ending, he will be sorely missed.'[3] His comrades from the Solidarity Federation paid tribute to his wide range of interests and 'his early acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities (often going to bars in Manchester's Gay Village after meetings with younger members), awareness of racial discrimination and ability to connect with a diverse set of libertarians'.[4] He brought humour to anarchist propaganda: 'He was the author of the legendary Heinz-spoof on Lenin and authoritarian communism, "57 varieties – all unfit for human consumption" on what could have been a tin of baked beans. […] Politics and gentle satire merged in his opposition to religious fundamentalism and his cartoons depicting a rodent decrying religious intolerance ("Blasphemouse") always raised a smile and occasionally an eyebrow as the reader tried to disentangle their cryptic nature.'[5]

Dreyfus' tribute gives a snapshot – but a wide-angled one – of his what Ron was like: 'He was kind and solid. He cared about people. When Bob died, he rang me twice a week every week. He lost a son to cystic fibrosis. He had a rescue greyhound who used to break into the fridge. He was a mensch. He always turned up looking clean and smart in light shirts and a bomber jacket. He wasn't afraid to get stuck in when it was needed…I miss him.'[6]

The comrades at Nottingham's Sparrows' Nest (one of the best and busiest anarchist and radical archives) said: 'We will miss our phone chats with Ron, and our annual cups of tea, enjoyed whenever we drove up to Manchester to collect yet another load of bags, baskets, of tea chests, all filled to the brim with

amazing materials from his house. We will fondly remember him humming to himself as he helped dragging bag after bag towards the van, which always turned out to be filled with incredible treasures from all over the world (and lots of drawings of Blasphemouse, Ron's cartoon creation!). […] Ron was at all times kind, generous and supportive to us, and it was a true pleasure to have known him. His legacy will not only be the memories many of us have of him, but also his collection of materials, many of which we have the great pleasure of looking after. […] Ron's trust in us, especially in the early days of the Nest, was absolutely crucial for us to be able to develop into a serious archive, and working and hanging out with him was a true privilege.'[7]

Our condolences go out to Ron's family, friends and comrades.

Notes

1, A comrade from the Anarchist Communist Group (ACG) in their tribute https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/2026/08/25/ron-marsden-a-veteran-of-class-struggle-anarchism-in-the-uk-has-died/
2, Another ACG member in that tribute.
3, Mikey Dredd in the tribute from the AnarCom Network (ACN) at https://anarcomuk.uk/2026/08/23/anarcom-is-sad-to-hear-of-the-loss-of-uk-solidarity-federation-iwa-comrade-ron-marsden-a-few-days-ago/
4, http://solfed.org.uk/ron-marsden
5, from the Solidarity Federation (SolFed) tribute.
6, Dreyfus in the tribute from the AnarCom Network (ACN)
7, Sparrows' Nest Library and Archive update, August 2026 https://thesparrowsnest.org.uk/index.php/14-news-and-events/296-nest-update-aug-2026 For material Ron donated to the Sparrows' Nest see https://thesparrowsnest.org.uk/search.php?query=ron+m&logic=and&digital=0&digital=0 ■

They inspired the Bristol Radical History Group #5 – Ian Bone

[Our comrades at the BRHG are celebrating their 20th anniversary, and their influences.]

Anarchist agitator, Ian Bone, co-founder of *Class War* in the 1980s, and the 'smiter of the high and mighty' *The Bristolian* scandal sheet around 2000, played a major part in getting **Bristol Radical History Group** off the ground in 2006.

But the story goes back a lot longer than that. I remember going to a *Class War* day-school in the 1980s where Ian spoke about British history, particularly the English revolution and the Republic of the 1640s/50s. Funny as always, he introduced us to books like the *The World Turned Upside Down*[1] and *The making of the English working class.*[2] If you had only done history at school in the 1970s, then these opened our minds to a whole new world. I was hooked and the rest is history.

In 2005, Ian was already doing radical history walks and running an anarchist book club in Bristol with his longtime partner Jane, when we first came up with the idea of of BRHG. He encouraged us, provided many contacts (several of whom are part of the group today) and gave us plenty of ideas. He also played a direct role in the early events, helping organise and compering the mass recreation in Bristol city centre of the blasphemous ride of radical Quaker James Nayler in 1656,[3] giving talks on the 1831 and 1980 riots,[4] and speaking about the forgotten 1919 revolutionaries[5] at the opening of the *Hydra* bookshop. His talks were always fascinating, funny as fuck, and opened up hidden histories to even the most well read revolutionaries.

Although suffering from Parkinson's disease over the last few years, Ian continued to be proper troublemaker, not only on the streets with Jane, but inspiring and acting in films like *Armed Love*[6] about the Russian Left Social Revolutionist (SR) leader Maria Spiridonova, and recreating the Fifth Monarchist rising[7] against the restoration of the monarchy in London in 1660.

Massive respect to Ian and Jane for their ongoing passion and inspiration.

Roger

Notes

1, https://www.brh.org.uk/site/2026/02/they-inspired-us-2-christopher-hill-and-the-world-turned-upside-down/
2, https://www.brh.org.uk/site/book-reviews/the-making-of-the-english-working-class/
3, https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/bristol-radical-history-week-2006-james-nayler-commemoration/
4, https://www.brh.org.uk/site/events/insurrectionary-bristol-1831/
5, https://www.brh.org.uk/site/events/hydra-bookshop-opening/
6, https://www.brh.org.uk/site/events/film-showing-spiridonova-armed-love/
7, https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/unfinished-business/

From 'They inspired us #5 – Ian Bone' https://www.brh.org.uk/site/2026/09/they-inspired-us-5-ian-bone/

[Apparently Ian is 'well chuffed' with this. We send best wishes to him, Jane and to the Bristol Radical History Group.]■

The Pet Voter : An Incident of the Recent Elections

His votes were failing fast; his foes began to wink:
I heard his voice; it said: 'Think, gentle voter, think!'
And, looking up the street, before me I espied
A well appointed man with a voter at his side.

'Why don't you vote,' he said, 'as other voters do?
It would be nice for me and very good for you.
I'll black your Sunday boots, and you shall be my king,
And when you change your mind, I'll do the other thing.

'At school and college bred, but to learning disinclined,
I've only studied hard to keep an open mind.
I'm something of a shot, I've well connected friends,
And I labor twice a year at drawing dividends.

'Whilst you are working hard, I'll legislate for you:
For if I don't get in, I've not much else to do.
I'll keep the Empire safe beneath my sheltering wing.
Or, if you'd rather not, I'll do the other thing.

'What is it you would seek? What is wanting to your heart?
I'll pass a law at once, if you but play your part.
I'll pass ten thousand laws, if you to vote agree:
It would be good for you and very nice for me.

'Vote, gentle voter, vote! Have you forgot the day
I took your horny hand, and swore my soul away?
Vote, gentle voter, vote! You are my lord, my king!'
–The gentle voter turned and did the other thing.

N.
Freedom : A Journal of Anarchist Communism,
August 1892. ■

A Humble Reminder : To the Propertied Classes

(Slightly altered from Rudyard Kipling's Ode in praise of English Enterprise.)

We have fed you all for a thousand years,
And you hail us still unfed,
Though there's never a pound of all your pounds
But marks the workers' dead;
We have yielded our best to give you rest,
And you lie on a crimson wool,
For if blood be the price of England's wealth,
Good God, we ha' paid in full.

There's never a mine blown skyward now
But we're buried alive for you;
There's never a wreck drifts shoreward now
But it's we are the ghastly crew;
Go, reckon our dead by the forges red,
And the factories where we spin;
If blood be the price of England's wealth,
Good God, we ha' paid it in.

We have fed you all for a thousand years,
For that was our doom, you know,
From the days when you chained us in your fields
To the strike of a week ago;
You have eaten our lives and our babes and wives,
And we're told it's your legal share;
But if blood be the price of England's wealth,
Good God, we ha' bought it fair.

N.
Freedom : A Journal of Anarchist Communism,
September 1893. ■



We Have Fed You All for a Thousand Years : Travels of a Protest Poem

In September 1893 the London anarchist newspaper *Freedom : A Journal of Anarchist Communism* published a poem called 'A Humble Reminder : To the Propertied Classes', credited to 'N.'[1] It's an anti-capitalist protest, lamenting the 'workers' dead' whose deaths enriched those 'propertied classes'. It rails at the rich 'We have fed you all for a thousand years, / And you hail us still unfed'. I do not know who 'N.' was, though they seem to be connected to the *Freedom* milieu. *Freedom* had published another poem by them, 'The Pet Voter', in August 1892.[2] Max Nettlau used the same initial when writing in *Freedom* in June 1891; the Fabian socialist Edith Nesbit had a poem 'A Word For The Children' in *Freedom* in February 1891 ('The right to give help is your own, / The right to claim it theirs.') Neither seems a convincing candidate for the authorship of this poem.

The Kipling connection

'N.' introduced their poem by saying it was 'slightly altered from Rudyard Kipling's Ode in praise of English Enterprise.' That's a reference to Kipling's 'Song of the Dead' published four months earlier in *The English Illustrated Magazine* (May 1893). 'N.'s address to the propertied classes 'For if blood be the price of England's wealth, / Good God, we ha' paid in full' rewrites Kipling's address to the sea 'If blood be the price of admiralty, / Lord God, we ha' paid in full!'.[3] The 'Humble Reminder' changes Kipling's poem – but leans heavily upon it. Mark Leier said 'strictly speaking the poem is not a parody of Kipling's poem but a re-working of the words based on the original verse and meter.'[4] It reminds me of Utah Philips' comment on IWW songmaking: 'The Wobblies liked to steal the hymn tunes 'cos they were pretty and change the words so they made more sense.'[5]

The connection to Kipling persisted. He was credited in many of the reprints (inevitable, perhaps, given that the author remained unknown and their debt to Kipling was clear). There were even articles discussing what it would mean if the poem were by Kipling.[6]

Reprinted and recited

Once printed, it was always possible for the poem to reappear, and this one spread beyond the anarchist press, becoming a standard of labour movement papers. The title often changed, varying from 'The Cry of Toil' to 'The Capitalist'. Just as the connection to Kipling is sometimes there and sometimes not, the text varies between the poetic 'ha'' to the everyday 'have'.

Apparently a version was published in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in 1895.[7] The Portland anarchist newspaper *The Firebrand* reprinted the poem (anonymously) as 'The Workers Outcry' in 1897.[8] Changes had been made to Americanise the text: instead of pounds the third line talks of 'there's never a dollar of all your wealth'.

Sometimes you can read about the poem's life off the printed page. In May 1897 Miss Olive Keep recited 'We have fed you all for a thousand years' at a gathering of the Socialist Labor Party. [9]. In August 1899, *The Carpenter*, a union journal for 'Carpenters, Stair Builders, Machine Wood Workers, Planing Mill Men, and Kindred Interests' reprinted the 'Firebrand version' (with credit). [10] In 1904 the poem reappeared as 'The Price of England's Wealth' in Glasgow's *The Voice of Labour*.[11] This version talks of 'sovereigns' rather than 'pounds' or 'dollars' but there are other changes: I can't tell if it's rewritten from the *Freedom* or *Firebrand* version.

The anarchist journal *Mother Earth* ('published every 15th of the month') reprinted 'The Cry of Toil' (credited to Kipling) in April 1908.[12] On April 18, 1908 it appeared in the IWW's *Industrial Union Bulletin* (also credited to Kipling).[13] Once the poem was reprinted in the IWW songbook, and was later put to music ('about 1916' by Rudolf von Liebich), it was firmly established as a classic of working class protest.

In November 1913 strikers in Auckland used a line from the poem on their banner during the 1913 Waterfront Strike: 'If blood be the price of your cursed wealth, good God we have bought it fair'.[14] It's not often we get the names of people who helped circulate the text but 'Gordon' suggested it (as 'The Workers' Answer') in the 1917 compilation *New songs for Butte Mining Camp*.[15]

As 'We Have Fed You All for a Thousand Years' this poem is possibly the most widely reprinted item from *Freedom*. In March 1969 it was reprinted (from the IWW songbook, credited to an 'unknown proletarian') on the front of the third issue of the *Bulletin of the Anarchist Black Cross*. The band Palm Ghosts released a version in August 2026. Questions remain: Who was N? How did it get into *Mother Earth*? If anyone sees any evidence, please let us know.

Notes

1, https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/qrfmk0
2, https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/31zfks
3, See https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_dead.htm
4, 'Kipling Gets a Red Card,' *Labour/Le Travail* n.31 (Spring 1993), 163-8.
5, Utah Phillips, intro to 'Dump the Bosses Off Your Back' on his album *We Have Fed You All for a Thousand Years* (1983).
6, See 'The New Kipling' in Brisbane's *Daily Standard* Saturday 2 May 1914. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/178878885
7, 'The Cry of Labor', Mar 24, 1895 in the *Sunday News*. Not seen, reference from: https://weneverforget.org/hellraisers-journal-from-the-spokane-industrial-worker-cry-of-toilwe-have-fed-you-all-for-a-thousand-years/
8, *The Firebrand : For Burning Away Of The Cobwebs of Ignorance and Superstition*, March 7 1897. https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/v41r69
9, *The times* (Washington [D.C.]), May 3, 1897 https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn85054468/1897-05-03/ed-1/
10, https://archive.org/details/carpenter19unit/mode/2up? Page 7
11, https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/nk9c3s
12, https://archive.org/details/mother-earth/Mother%20Earth%20v03n02%20%281908-04%29%20%28-covers%20Harvard%20DSR%29/
13, https://archive.org/details/v2n08-apr-18-1908-iub/mode/2up?q=%22we+have+fed+you+all+for+a+thousand+years%22

14, https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22878480
15,
https://archive.org/details/newsongsforbutte00unse/

Image: A protest march in Auckland during Waterfront Strike; Price Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library by William Archer Price, (1866-1948)
https://tiaki.natlib.govt.nz/#details=ecatalogue.125674
■

Library News (Oct. 2026)

Tyneside Anarchist Archive still have copies of *Anarchism in North East England 1882-1992*
505 pages only £10 (a lot of smaller things too)
https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/205359533823

We have posted…
'Tensions in Anarchism', a transcript of a talk by **Barry Pateman** at the Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair in San Francisco
www.katesharpleylibrary.net/h44m7w

Many pieces on **Anarchism in Cuba**
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/4mw6zq
including 'A German Anarchist in the Cuban Revolution: Augustin Souchy and the (Mis)remembering of Cooperativism in Cuba' by Mario Castillo Santana; Frank Fernández's Guángara Libertaria Memories and histories by Carlos M. Estefanía.

Ephemera:
A [Leaflet about the coal industry April 1912]
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/5mknw8
They Want Your Votes – We Want Your Action! / Anarchist Manifesto by Albert Meltzer
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/2bvs31
The Bailies of Bonnie Dundee by John Lowden Macartney https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/kh1bjv

Debate on the Spanish Civil War:
'And Now?' [Against CNT collaborationism, June 1937] https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/cfxrrw
'Where I Stand' by Emma Goldman
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/1894wj
and 'The Anarchists in Spain : A Reply To Emma Goldman' by Ethel MacDonald
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/j6q7d5

Two lives
'Remembering Bartolomé Flores Cano and Pedro Cano Garrido' by Corinne Flores
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/5x6cnf

Some **Agustín Guillamón** texts:
'Worldwide Proletariat and Concrete Utopia'
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/qz63fx
'Ease up on the death notices'
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/905shk
'The Commons and the Dangers of a Reactionary Derailment : Amorós in Rodrigo Mora's Looking Glass' https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/98sh9v

Anarchist history:
'Nestor Makhno (1889-1934), Anarcho-communist activist and fighter' by Vyatcheslav Azarov
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/34tpkj
'After the debate : Anarchism v. Socialism' [1942]
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/1c5crm
'Revolutionary Counter-Terror: The Kovalevich Outrage [The Leontiev Lane Attack]' by Alexandre Skirda https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/bvqb5g
'The Beautiful Dream : On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution' by Boris Yelensky, Edited by Malcolm Archibald.
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/z34x6b
'Glossary of Some Organizations' by Jean-Marc Rouillan https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/n8pn9f

From CIRA:
A tribute to Sebastian "Bas" Moreel (1930-2026) by Thom Holterman
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/d51f7v
An account of the Jargon Libre Collections (and biography of Hellyette Bess) by Chri
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/0001s3

Periodicals:
Voice of Labour, Vol.1, No.1, February 14, 1904
https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/nk9c3s
La Questione Sociale is now online(not by KSL):
https://archive.org/details/questionesociale/
Contains the publication from Paterson, NJ 1895-1908 and that published by Aldino Felicani in New York 1914-1916.

Noise
'Sir Robert Peel (3rd Baronet and son of the founder of modern policing and thus the old slang of "bobbies" and "peelers"), claimed that the lower orders were maliciously disturbing the peace and quiet of the idle rich as a form of blackmail.'
https://wealthofnegations.org/noise/ ■

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