

The life of Mary Macarthur. A TUC Library Exhibition

“TO FIGHT,
TO STRUGGLE,
TO RIGHT THE WRONG”

MARY MACARTHUR

13 AUGUST 1880 – 1 JANUARY 1921

INTRODUCTION

Mary Reid Macarthur, the Scottish founder and leader of the all-female trade union, the National Federation of Women Workers, died on 1 January 1921. This exhibition marks the centenary of her death and celebrates her pioneering work among British women workers. Since her death, there have been more improvements in women's pay and conditions but history reminds us that many of the issues and challenges faced by the women organized by Macarthur – who were some of the worst paid workers in the country – remain as relevant today as they were then.



'To Fight, To Struggle,
To Right the Wrong'
was the motto of the
National Federation
of Women Workers.

THE YOUNG WOMAN



Mary Macarthur (standing) with her sisters. She was born in Glasgow on 13 August 1880, the eldest of three daughters whose father ran a successful drapery business. After leaving Glasgow's High School for Girls, she became a book-keeper in the family business after its relocation to Ayr.



Mary's trade union career began in 1901 when she joined the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks. At the time she was writing part time for a local newspaper and said that she went to "a labour meeting in order to get material for a skit....There were six members on the platform and five in the hall, all jumping up and down and arguing organisation. I had gone there to make fun of the radicals, who held their meetings in a miserable hole above a fish shop but while there on my frivolous errand, I became converted and joined the little band".

Mary's rise within the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks was rapid. As a very young woman, she became the secretary of the Ayr branch and President of the Union's Scottish National Council. She was also the first woman to be elected to the Shop Assistants' National Executive.



Margaret Bondfield was one of many people in the British labour movement who saw early and great potential in Mary Macarthur. Bondfield was Assistant Secretary of the Shop Assistants' Union when she first met Macarthur in 1902. She recalled being struck by her "genius, allied to boundless enthusiasm and leadership of a high order, coming to build our little Union into a more effective instrument".

THE WOMEN'S TRADE UNION LEAGUE

Mary Macarthur came to London in 1903, not long before her 23rd birthday. She became Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, which promoted trade unionism among women and campaigned for legislative change to improve women's working conditions.



*Mrs. Mary R. McArthur,
London.*

"So [Margaret Bondfield] came to my little Westminster flat bringing a tall slip of a thing dressed in black, very silent, but intensely attentive, with that air of subdued excitement which made one feel the air alive all round her, and herself mentally holding out both hands to adventure, adventure which always came". Gertrude Tuckwell, of the Women's Trade Union League, describing her first encounter with Mary Macarthur in 1903.

Mary Macarthur's delegate photograph for the International Congress of Women held in Berlin in 1904. She attended with Margaret Bondfield on behalf of the Women's Trade Union League.

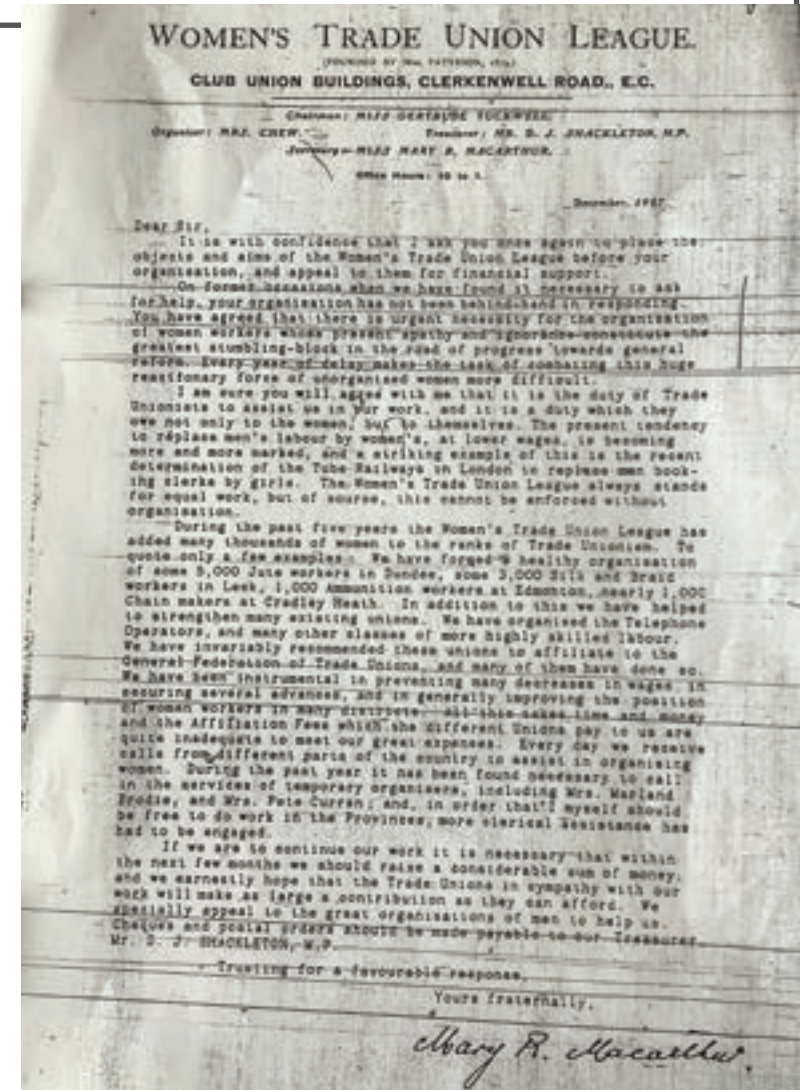


Mary Macarthur working in Club Union Buildings, Holborn, where the Women's Trade Union League was based until its move to Bloomsbury in 1909.

Below: The Women's Trade Union League was constantly in need of funds for its work. Campaigns, organising tours and calls to assist women workers around Britain were expensive and so appeals for funds, as in this letter, were very important.

Below: Committee Minutes of the Women's Trade Union League from the summer of 1903 discussing Mary Macarthur's appointment as Secretary. Under her, affiliations to the League increased, more women joined trade unions and new ones were formed.

Miss Fitchell stated that she had followed the instructions given by the Committee at the last meeting but without hearing of likely candidates. She had then heard from Miss Bondfield of Miss MacArthur. Miss Bondfield gave an account of Miss MacArthur's qualifications for the post.

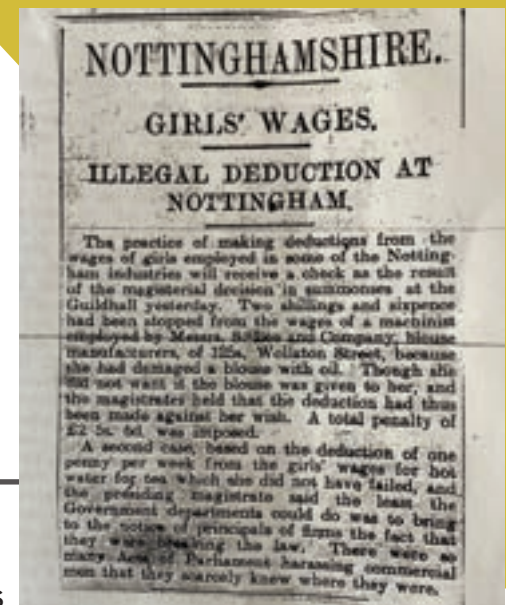


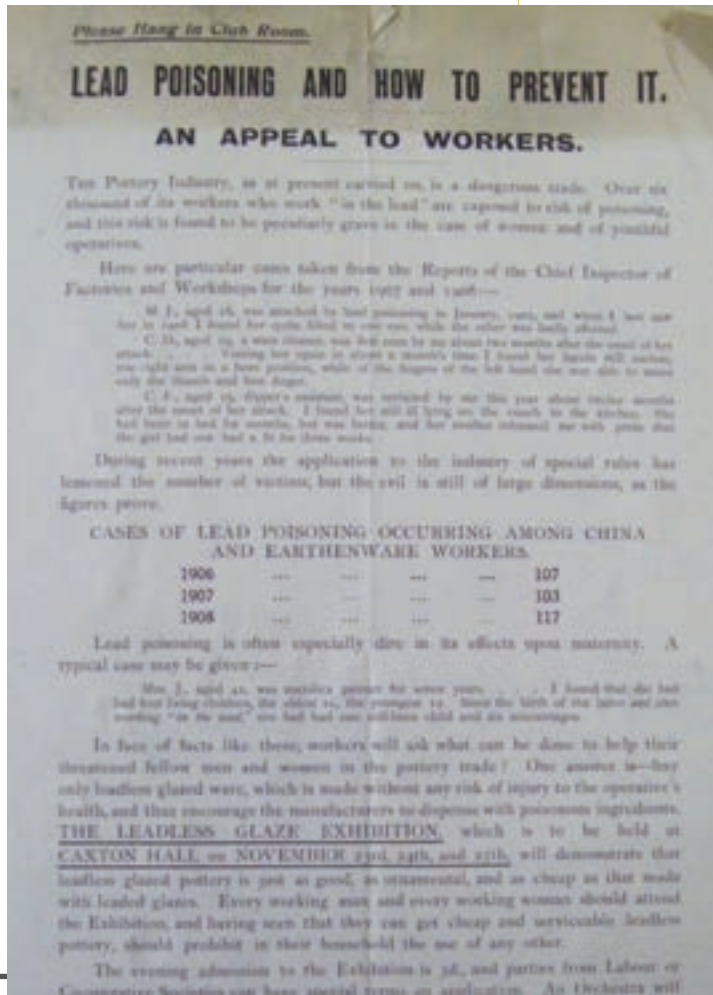
The difference between men and women's pay was considerable. Whilst men were paid a 'family wage', it was conveniently assumed that women worked only when young and single, with no dependants to support. The reality was very different. Women's wages could also be reduced by a system of fines and deductions.



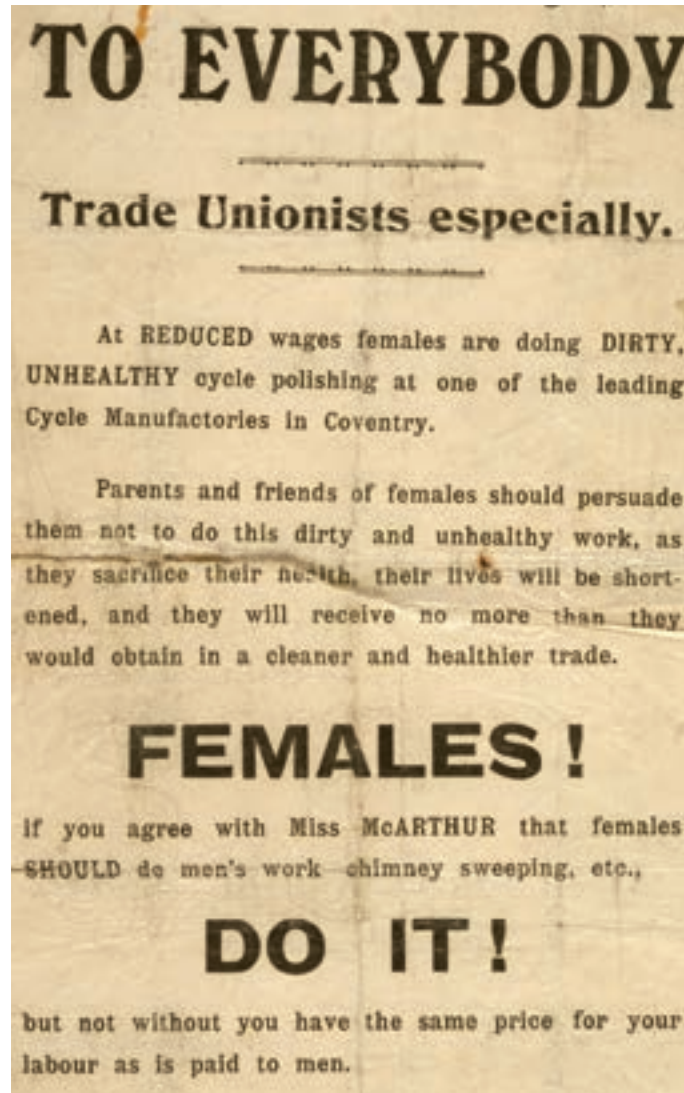
Examples of the type of deductions made by bosses to pay women workers as little as possible.

Women brickmakers in the English Midlands. Women worked in an enormous array of industries, from those regarded as 'women's trades' such as garment making, food production and laundry to less 'ladylike' ones such as ammunition manufacture and metal working.





WOMEN WORKERS IN THE EARLY 1900s



In 1908 the Brass Workers' Union issued a leaflet, expressing concern for women engaged in 'unhealthy' work. Its primary concern, however, was that cheap, unorganised women's labour displaced men. Yet too many unions made little or no effort to recruit women because they believed they would be poor trade unionists. This Coventry leaflet was an attempt to discredit Macarthur by implying that she did not have women's true interests at heart.

The Women's Trade Union League ran campaigns to highlight dangers encountered in the workplace, including working with chemicals and noxious substances in ill-ventilated workshops and factories.



Often women's work was almost entirely hidden from public view. Some of the worst paid work was carried out in small workshops or in the home where women bore the brunt of scandalously low piece rates in industries including box making, lace finishing, garment making and chain making.



©Black Country Society

Women chain makers in the Black Country worked excessively long hours in forges attached to their homes. They were sometimes unable to earn seven shillings a week at a time when the Board of Trade estimated a British male labourer's wage at over 25 shillings.

At the end of the 19th century only about 7 per cent of British trade unionists were women. Mary Macarthur declared: **"Women are badly paid and badly treated because they are not organised and they are not organised because they are badly paid and badly treated"**.



The National Anti-Sweating League, of which Mary Macarthur was a leading member, campaigned for a minimum wage in order to eradicate the sweated trades. These were characterised by very long hours, extremely poor pay and difficult working conditions, which disproportionately affected women.

30/18 301

A WEEK'S BUDGET FOR A FACTORY GIRL, EARNING 9/- A WEEK.

Rent of unfurnished room - - - - -	£	2s	6d
Soap } Per washing her clothes, which she does on			3d
Soda } Saturday afternoon - - - - -			3d
Coal - - - - -		6s	
Light - - - - -		7s	
Food - - - - -		15s	
Clothes (2 cloths at 6d. each) - - - - -		1s	0d
Shoes (1 cloth at 6d.) - - - - -		6d	
Death Benefit Insurance - - - - -		2s	
		5s	0d
		5s	0d

TOTAL RECEIPTS

Wages	£	9s	0d
Bread (6 loaves) - - - - -		1s	4d
Tea (½ lb.) - - - - -		2s	
Sugar (1 lb.) - - - - -		3d	
1 tin cheapest milk - - - - -		2s	
Dripping - - - - -		2s	
Bacon (For Sunday Dinner) - - - - -		15s	
6 dinners, (bread and cheese 1½s, or fish and potatoes 1½s, or Cornish Sausage and bread 1½s) -		9s	
Polish for Sunday tea - - - - -		15s	
		5s	0d
		5s	0d

TOTAL EXPENDITURE - - - - -

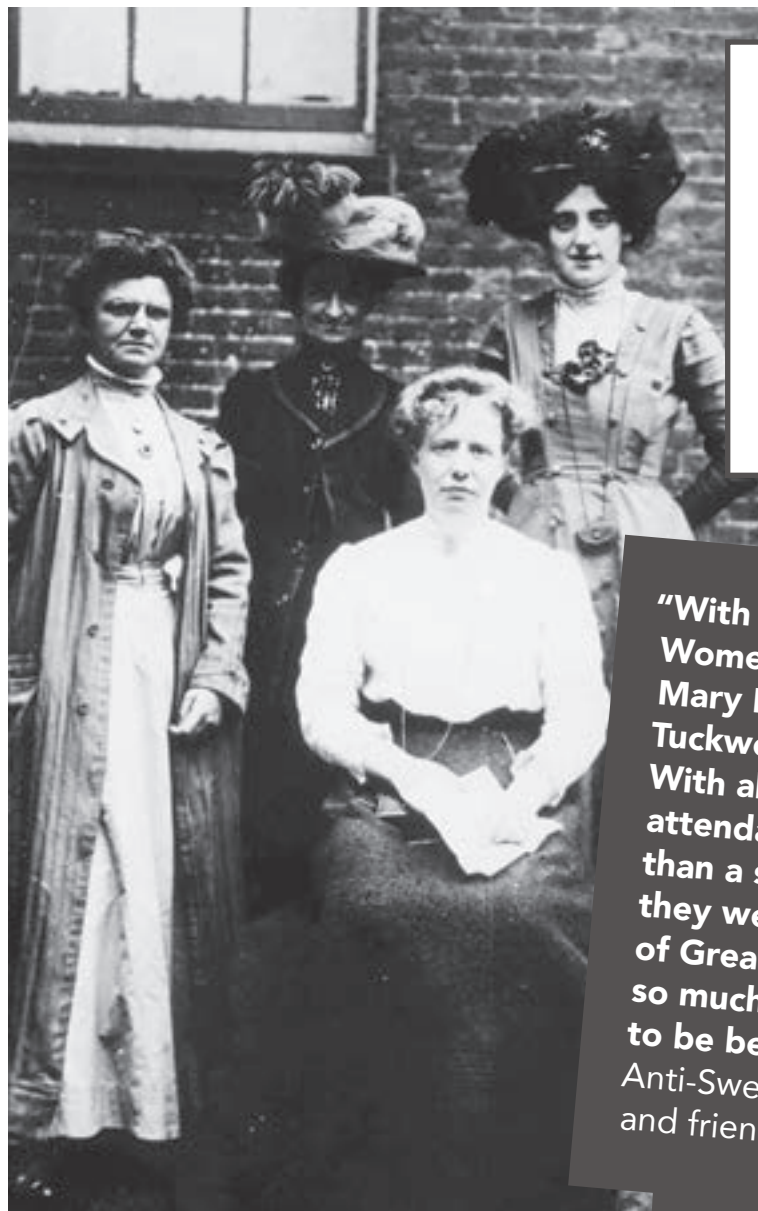
	£	8s	6d
		9s	0d

The weekly budget of a factory 'girl' in 1909, drawn up by the Women's Trade Union League. It illustrates just how hard it was to make ends meet on a low income.

THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN WORKERS 1906-21

Mary Macarthur founded the National Federation of Women Workers in 1906. Its aims were to unite and strengthen small female unions, to organise women in some of the worst paid industries in the country and to give members the confidence to become and remain strong trade unionists.

It was a bold and ambitious experiment. By the end of its first year, it had a handful of branches across Britain from Edinburgh to London. By 1918 it had over 60,000 members. Never big, it nevertheless punched above its weight, taking on bosses, co-ordinating strike action and gaining important concessions for women workers. It became a force to be reckoned with, particularly during the First World War when Government could not afford to ignore its representation of women munitions workers.



Mary Macarthur, seated, in about 1908 with co-workers. Identified with certainty on the left is Julia Varley, who in 1912 became the first Women's Organiser of the mixed gender Workers' Union.

"With the Federation and the Women's Trade Union League, Mary Macarthur and Gertrude Tuckwell wrought miracles. With all their camp followers in attendance they were no more than a stage army, but they said they were the women workers of Great Britain, and they made so much noise that they came to be believed". JJ Mallon of the Anti-Sweating League, colleague and friend of Mary Macarthur.

National Federation of Women Workers' organisers travelled around the country responding to calls for assistance with disputes, helping to form branches and encouraging grassroots activism. In the years before the First World War its membership grew steadily.

Members could read about branch progress and activities in *The Woman Worker*, the Federation's newspaper established by Mary Macarthur in 1907.

Clerkenwell.—The sturdy little band of dress-makers who fought so well to keep together the Dressmakers' Union is now a branch of the Federation. From its members an organising committee has been formed, with Miss Hillary as hon. secretary. The committee has done good work during the last winter amongst the working girls' clubs, and is preparing for another campaign during the coming winter.

Derby.—A branch was formed in Derby by Mrs. Marland Brodie during May. A recent visit from Mrs. Pete Curran has done much to stimulate the movement, and great hopes are entertained for the future.

Derry.—The Derry Textile Operatives' Society has recently formed a branch of the Federation, with a good membership. This is our latest branch, and we hope to give a fuller account in our next issue.



Above: in the hot summer of 1911 thousands of women workers in food preparation factories in Bermondsey, London struck for better pay. The National Federation of Women Workers supported and enrolled women and forced some employers to increase wages. The image shows women on strike from Pinks' Jam Factory.



One of hundreds of press cuttings collected by the Women's Trade Union League's Gertrude Tuckwell, highlighting women's trade union organisation.

Examples of disputes in which the Federation was involved. Above: the Kilbirnie Net Workers who went on strike in 1913. Bottom: strikers from Morton's jam and pickles factory in East London in 1914.





In the summer of 1908, women workers at the Corruganza Box Making factory in London's Summerstown struck against imposed reductions. A procession and demonstration were captured on a series of postcards produced by the National Federation of Women Workers to raise strike funds. Four of these are reproduced here showing Mary Macarthur with the strikers and addressing crowds from the plinth in Trafalgar Square.



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Chairman: MISS GERTRUDE TUCKWELL.
Treasurer: MR. D. J. SHACKLETON, M.P.
Organiser: MISS ESTHER DYCK.
Occasional Organisers: MRS. CHEV. MRS. CHESHIRE, MISS JULIA VARLEY.
Secretary: Miss Mary R. Macarthur.

27th August, 1910.

LOCK-OUT AT CRADLEY HEATH.

Dear Sir,

We earnestly appeal to Trade Unionists throughout the country, on behalf of the Women Chain Makers at Cradley Heath, now locked out or refusing to sign an agreement to work for six months at lower rates than the minimum (2½d. an hour) fixed by the Trade Board.

In another six months contracting-out will be illegal, but in the meantime huge stocks can be accumulated in anticipation of the compulsory rate.

Despite the low earnings of these women (4/- to 5/- weekly), a number of them are members of the National Federation of Women Workers (affiliated to the General Federation of Trade Unions) and will be entitled to strike benefit. It is, however, absolutely necessary that some measure of support should be extended to those who up to now are not members of any organisation. Some 200 of these women have up to now stood by their fellow workers in resisting the agreement, but their condition is pitiable in the extreme.

A fund has been opened, to which we trust your Society will contribute as generously as it can afford. Cheques should be made payable to Mr. D. J. Shackleton, M.P. and sent to Miss Mary R. Macarthur, 34, Mecklenburgh Square, London, W.C.

We are,
 Yours faithfully,
 On behalf of the Women's Trade Union League,

Gertrude Tuckwell
 Chairman.
D. J. Shackleton
 Treasurer.
Mary R. Macarthur

The National Federation of Women Workers.

Central Office: WOMEN'S TRADE UNION LEAGUE, CLUB UNION BUILDINGS,
(next door to Holloway Town Hall) CLERKENWELL ROAD, LONDON, E.C.

Affiliated to the General Federation of Trade Unions.
 (RESERVE FUND OVER £100,000. MEMBERSHIP 800,000.)

Telephone No. 1942 CENTRAL.

OBJECTS:

1. To unite, for their mutual protection, work-women who are engaged in congenial trades.
2. To improve the conditions of employment of working women; to watch their interests, and secure the redress of individual and collective grievances.
3. To regulate the relations between employer and employed.
4. To secure fair payment for services rendered.
5. To give legal aid to members.
6. To provide a weekly allowance for members when ill or out of employment.
7. To financially support members who may be involved in a dispute, with the sanction of the Federation.
8. To bring all members in touch with one another by means of social gatherings, and in such other ways as may promote comradeship and recreation.

APPLICATION FORM FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Membership: Class A (1d. per week) shall entitle to Trade Protection --

- (a) Assistance generally in raising wages, and improving working conditions.
- (b) Free Legal Advice.
- (c) Financial support in the case of a strike or lock-out, provided the action of the members affected has been endorsed by the Central Council of the Federation.

Class B (½d. per week) shall entitle to Benefits under Class A, and, in addition, an allowance of 5s. per week, when medically certified as ill, for 13 weeks, and 2s. 6d. for seven weeks, in any one year, and Marriage Dowry, as per Rule XII.

Class C (¼d. per week). All the Benefits of Class A and B, and in addition, an allowance of 5s. per week for eight weeks in any one year to members when unemployed through no fault of their own, and Marriage Dowry, as per Rule XII.

RULE XII—MARRIAGE PORTION OR MORTGAGE.—In the event of the marriage of a member (Class B or C), if she has been a full member for two years, and has not received Out-of-Employment or Sick Benefit during the period of her membership, the Central Council shall refund 50 per cent. of the amount of her contributions, provided she is leaving her trade and resuming her membership.

The Central Council shall have power to make a Special Grant to members of any Class in cases of difficulty or distress should the circumstances warrant such a course.

Members shall be entitled to Half Benefits after six months' membership, and Full Benefits after twelve months' membership.

ENTRANCE FEE, 6d., which must be lodged with this application.

Please send me a Member of the above Federation.

1. Name in full
2. Postal Address
3. Name of Employer
4. Address of Employer
5. Occupation
6. Weekly Wages
7. Class of Membership (Weekly Contribution) (A, 1d. weekly) (B, ½d. weekly) (C, ¼d. weekly)

Filled by:

This Application Form to be filled up and sent with Entrance Fee, 6d., to Miss LOUISA HINDS,
 Secretary, National Federation of Women Workers, Club Union Buildings, Clerkenwell Road, London, E.C.

The Cradley Heath Chainmakers' Lock Out in 1910 is one of the Federation's most well-known strikes. Despite the minimum wage promised by the 1909 Trade Board Act, employers still sought ways to carry on paying the women at the old, very low levels. Expertly led by Mary Macarthur, after ten weeks on strike the women established their right to the minimum wage, resulting in significant pay increases. Local membership of the National Federation of Women Workers increased significantly.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Women's trade unionism expanded significantly during the First World War and the National Federation of Women Workers was heavily involved in the organisation of women employed in war work, establishing many strong branches with thousands of members in centres of munitions production.

Making munitions was extremely dangerous and trade unions pushed not just for fair pay but for safer working conditions.



Mary Macarthur (centre) and key Federation workers in 1916. Macarthur expanded her team of organisers in order to keep up constant pressure on Government and employers to ensure that promises of fair pay and safe working conditions for women workers were kept.

Workers at Cleator Mills, Cumbria in 1915. Despite having a government contract for essential war work on army uniform production, the wages paid by the firm were extremely low and hours excessively long. A strike resulted in a ten per cent pay rise, a special War Bonus and full recognition of the Federation.



STOP PRESS

MARCH 29th, 11 NOON.

The Minister of Munitions is now receiving a deputation from the National Federation of Women Workers to discuss the Federation demand for 2d. an hour increase on women's work and 5s. increase on the maximum laid down in Order 49.

LATER.

All — Women's — Rates — to — be — increased — as — from — April 1st.

FEDERATION FOR EVER!

Notice from *The Woman Worker*, 1917.

An example of the Federation's expansion during the War. From *The Woman Worker*, 1918.

Victories in the North.

Away up in the North we find that, owing to the energetic efforts of our organiser, Miss Innes, the Federation is rapidly growing. Not only have we a new branch at Inverurie but also at Huntley, and Aberdeen has added another branch, for aircraft workers this time, which makes a total of four

THE POST WAR YEARS

At the end of the First World War, the National Federation of Women Workers was widely recognised for championing women's rights in the workplace. As women's essential war service was readily forgotten, new challenges lay ahead. Federation organisers worked around the clock as many women war workers were laid off. Focus shifted once again to organising amongst women who had no choice but to take low paid work including domestic service, laundry and food preparation.



A strike of laundry workers in Hull in 1920. Women here sought higher wages and objected to the firm's excessive use of overtime.



Right: On 1 January 1921 the Federation became the Women's Section of the larger and mixed gender National Union of General Workers, concluding two years of merger talks. Mary Macarthur had expressed her regret but recognised that, *"The whole tendency is towards amalgamation – fewer Unions and more unity...If in our pride of number and satisfaction with what we have accomplished, we decided to go on as a single organisation, there is no doubt that in a few years we should be left high and dry and isolated. We ought to anticipate the tendency of the times rather than allow it to overtake us"*. With justifiable pride she declared that, *"Our influence has been enormous"*.

Amalgamation.

On the paragraphs headed "Amalgamation Proposals" the President said they would take the Special Executive Resolutions on the agenda, and she called on Miss Macarthur.

Miss Macarthur, who was enthusiastically greeted, explained that the resolution which the Executive had asked her to move was No. 1. In the event of that resolution being carried, resolutions 2, 3, 4, and 5 could be moved formally, as they were consequential. The Executive wished all discussion to be taken on the first resolution.

The resolution was as follows:—
(1). That the agreement with the National Union of General Workers, under which the National Federation of Women Workers becomes a "District" of the National Union of General Workers, be and is hereby adopted, and that the Executive Council, Trustees, and other officers be and are hereby instructed to do all such things as may be required to be done in order to carry into effect such agreement.

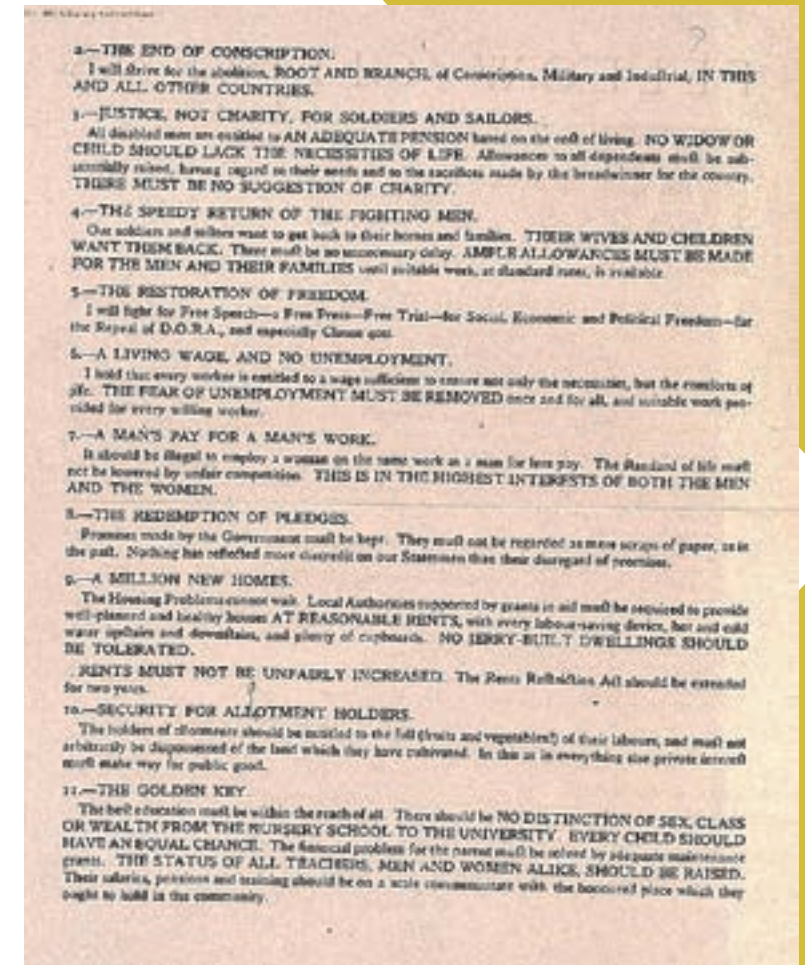
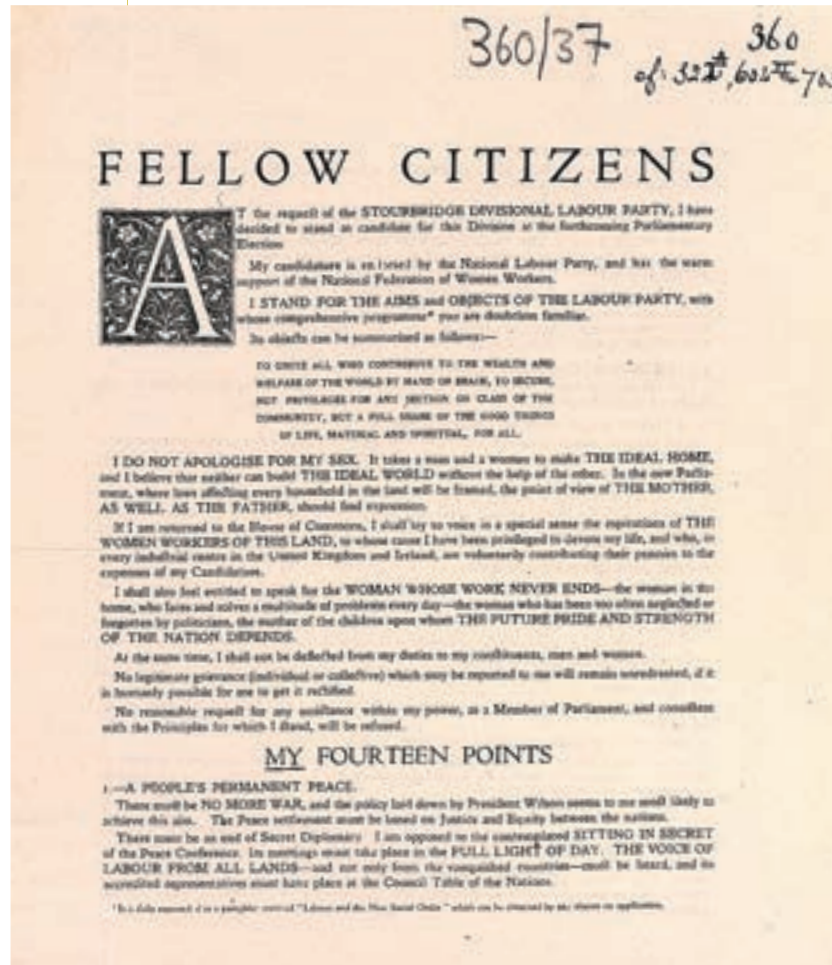
MARY MACARTHUR, LABOUR PARTY CANDIDATE

By 1918 Mary Macarthur had become a hugely respected figure in the British labour movement, with a reputation as a great leader, communicator, negotiator and socialist. She was adopted as the prospective Labour candidate for Stourbridge, Worcestershire and campaigned hard in the General Election of December 1918. Although she did not win the seat, her popularity assured her re-selection for a future election. It seemed as though a parliamentary career beckoned.

Right: a pamphlet acknowledging Mary's popularity in Stourbridge and guaranteeing support from 'all the loyal and devoted friends' there and in the adjacent Black Country where the women chain makers had not forgotten her leadership of their 1910 strike.



These are the first two pages of Mary Macarthur's Election Manifesto which highlighted her commitment to international peace, to the need for a million new homes, for nationalisation of the vital industries and her belief in the partnership of men and women at work as well as in the home.



"Women in industry are for all time in her debt". Violet Markham, writer and campaigner

DEATH OF A LEADER

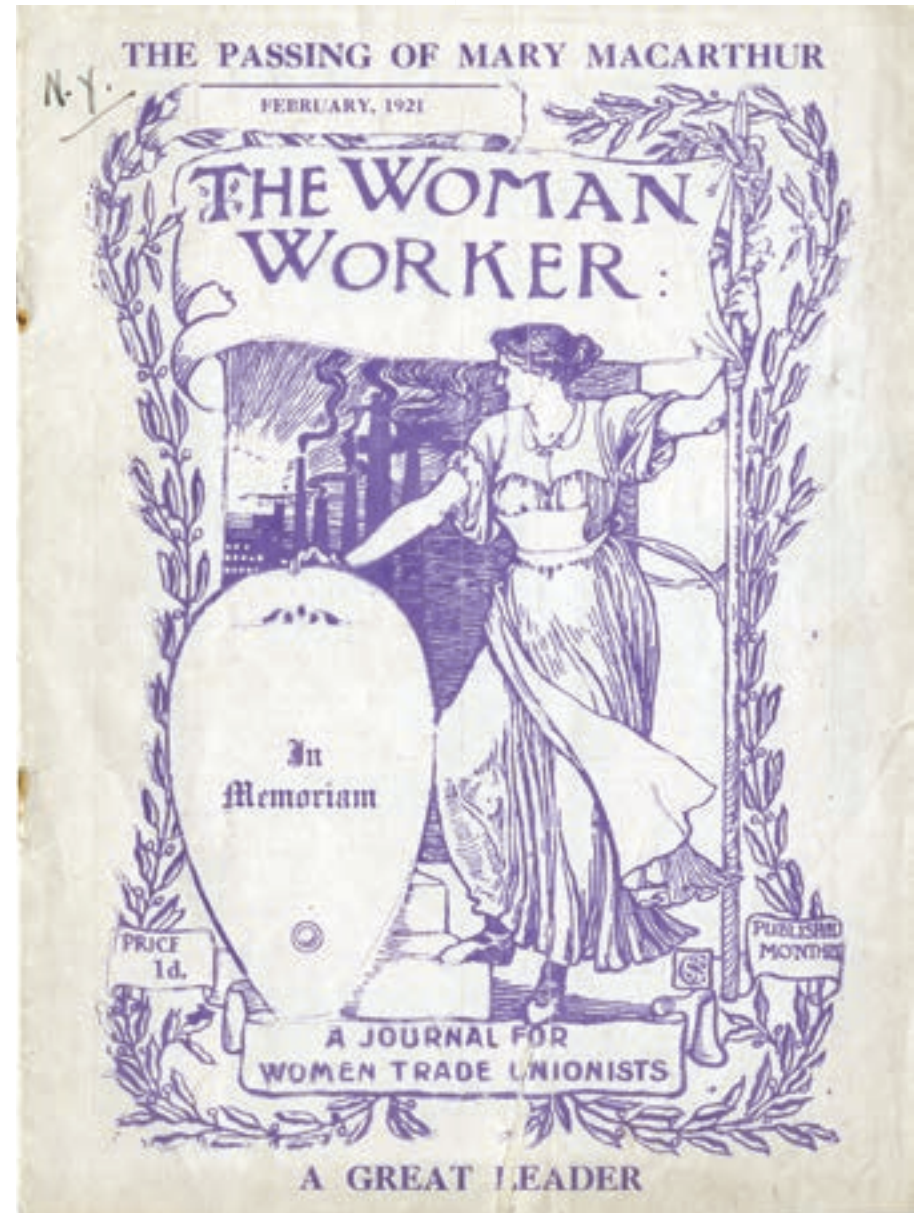
Mary Macarthur died on 1 January 1921, aged 40, the very day that the National Federation of the Women Workers merged with the National Union of General Workers. There were many tributes to a woman widely considered to have been an outstanding trade union leader. Her death from cancer came less than two years after her husband, the Labour politician William Crawford Anderson, died during the Spanish flu pandemic.

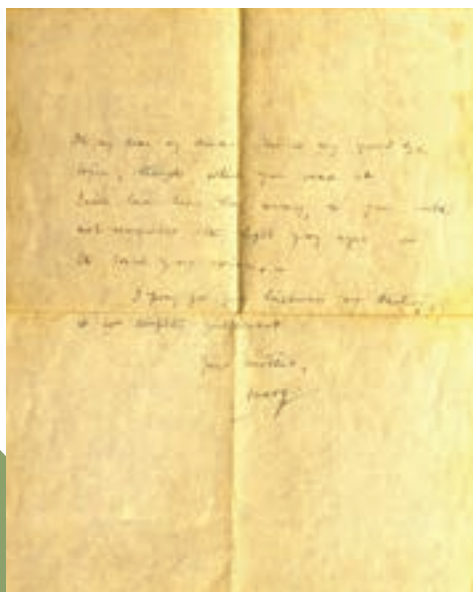
"In the passing of Mary Macarthur the world is poorer by one big soul, and many of us have lost not merely a co-worker but a dear friend'. Robert Smillie, miners' trade union leader



"A wholehearted
fighter for
economic and
political justice"
JJ Mallon, Anti-
Sweating League

'It was by the charm
of her comradeship
that she led men
and women along
the path she desired
them to take' Beatrice
Webb, social reformer





Amongst the Mary Macarthur Papers is this heartbreaking letter written by Mary in April 1920 to her four-year-old daughter, Nancy, with the instruction on the envelope for it to be opened on her fourteenth birthday. At the time Mary was recovering in the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Women's Hospital, London, after the first of two operations.

'My dear wee girl,

This is just to tell you that there is only one thing will make me sorry to leave this place and that is that I may not surround my precious little daughter with a sheltering love through the years of her childhood and girlhood.

But if love is indeed deathless, and surely it must be, mine will still surround you long after my body is dust. So dear, when you are lonely or sad or quiet think that your father and mother to whom you meant so much are near you and that you still mean much to them.

Be good dear Heart and do something worth while if you can. At any rate try to. Never cease to aspire. That is the secret of happiness – a stretching out quite leads to higher things.

Oh my dear my dear. This is my goodbye to you, though when you read it I will have been long away, and you will not remember the light grey eyes or the sound of my voice.

I pray for your happiness my darling, and for complete fulfilment.

Your mother,

Mary'

LEGACY

The Mary Macarthur Memorial Committee was established in 1921. It aimed 'to equip women of [Macarthur's] own spirit to serve humanity as she served it'. Under the Mary Macarthur Educational Trust a scholarship scheme was set up to provide trade union women with the chance to study, offering grants for fees, books and travel. The Committee also sought to 'succour women who are in a condition of pain and illness' through the Mary Macarthur Holiday Trust, which offered free or subsidised holidays for working women. Although there are no longer Macarthur Holiday Homes, like the ones below, the Trust continues today to offer financial support to women in need of a break.



The Gables, Ongar in Essex was the first Mary Macarthur Holiday House to be opened in 1922. In time this was replaced by another Home in Stansted.

Women appreciated the chance to rest: **"It is blessing that there are such places for tired working women"**.

"I did feel a little scared at coming but when I arrived your welcome smile put me at my ease and I knew then I was going to have a very nice holiday".

"You are not lonely at Mary Macarthur's".



Further Homes were established in Littlehampton, Sussex and Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire.

"A Trade Union is like a bundle of sticks. The workers are bound together and have the strength of unity. No employer can do as he likes with them. They have the power of resistance. They can resist reductions in wages. They can ask for an advance without fear. A worker who is not in a Union is like a single stick. She can easily be broken or bent to the will of her employer. She has not power to resist a reduction in wages. If she is fined she must pay without complaint. She dare not ask for a rise. If she does she will be told, "If you do not like it you can leave it". She will be told, "Your place is outside the gate – there are plenty to take your place". An employer can do without one worker. He cannot do without all his workers. If all the workers united in a union – strong as the bundle of sticks – complain or ask for improved conditions, the employer is bound to listen."

Mary Macarthur, *The Woman Worker*, September 1907



WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONS TODAY



Above: Beth Farhat (front-row, third left), head of TUC Northern, with Women in Leadership course participants in Parliament 2018.



Above: Frances O'Grady speaking at TUC conference Brighton. Frances has been General Secretary of the TUC since 2013.



TUC Women's Conference 2014 (initiating a campaign on childcare support). From the 1920s the TUC has organised this annual meeting of women representatives from the affiliated unions.

"Increasingly, the union movement is led by women, shaped by women, winning for women. Today, women are more likely to belong to a union than men. A new generation of women activists, officers and leaders is emerging. Equality and inclusivity are the cornerstones of trade unionism and the workplace is a microcosm for society. The trade union movement is driving the equality agenda forward both inside and outside of the work environment; setting positive precedents through both individual representation and collective bargaining." Beth Farhat (Regional Secretary TUC Northern) – *Women need unions and unions need women*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to everyone who helped with this exhibition:

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) who funded this project

Curator **Dr Cathy Hunt**. Cathy consulted almost exclusively from the TUC Library Collections, including the **Mary Macarthur Papers, Mary Macarthur Holiday Trust, the Gertrude Tuckwell Papers, the Annual Reports of the National Federation of Women Workers, and The Woman Worker JJ Mallon/Trade Board material**

Design www.the-design-mill.co.uk

Coordinator **Jeff Howarth (TUC Library)**



Cathy Hunt is the author of *Righting the Wrong, Mary Macarthur 1880-1921. The Working Woman's Champion* a biography of Mary Macarthur published by History West Midlands in 2019 and *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921* published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2014. For more information, go to cathyhunthistorian.com

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Young workers and unions – agents for change

Low pay, zero-hour contracts, harassment and bullying in the workplace. Younger workers have often been at the sharp end of fast-changing practices and most in need of support from trade unions. This exhibition demonstrates the vulnerability of young workers through the last two hundred years and how they often took the lead to challenge these abuses and fight for change through their unions.

This exhibition is based on the contents of the TUC Library at London Metropolitan University using its printed, internet and audio resources to explore the history and role of young workers and trade unions.

"The power of many together is more than the power of one."

When James, fighting for change at New Coventry, where he works, went on strike in 2007 for asking wages increased to pay for his car and to pay for his mortgage.

Young Workers and Unions – a TUC Library exhibition

The Russian Revolution and its Impact on the Left in Britain

1917-1926

In the years following 1917, the aftermath of the Russian Revolution fundamentally reshaped the political and ideological left, a period that extended from the end of the First World War in 1918 to the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, which in Russia lasted, in the eyes of many, to offer new possibilities for political, social and economic change.

Drawing on the TUC Library's extensive collections, this new exhibition documents the attempts of British workers and trade unions to engage, understand and learn from the Russian Revolution, including the extent to which Russia's socialist experiment challenged established notions of 'democracy', 'solidarity' and their relationship to the rest of the world.

The TUC Thacker-Inglis Campaign Library was founded in 1932 and moved to London Metropolitan University from Regent House in 1996. It is part of the university's Special Collections, and is a library of international significance.

Solidarity and the 1984/85 Miners' Strike

In March 1984 and the 1984/85 coal miners' strike were a defining moment in British industrial history. The TUC Library's extensive collections, including the Thacker-Inglis Campaign Library, have been used to explore the strike's impact on the wider labour movement and the role of the TUC Library in the study of the strike and the wider industrial and social context.

A special relationship

A TUC Library exhibition on the connections between the British and American Labour Movements from the Nineteenth Century until today

The Workers United

This exhibition commemorates the 100th anniversary of the United States Congress passing the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) in 1935, a landmark moment in the history of the American labor movement. It explores the impact of the NLRA on the lives of workers and the role of the TUC Library in the study of the Act and the wider labour movement.