

The Fabric of Protest

PEOPLE'S
HISTORY
MUSEUM

Online



Stitch a May Day ribbon in support of key workers

A monthly textile workshop by People's History Museum (PHM) and artist Helen Mather. Learn new techniques and discuss the issues that matter to you.

This resource introduces some of the ideas and techniques that were explored during the online workshop on Saturday 30th April 2022. Use it as inspiration for your own textile projects.

Recommended for 11+ (under 18s must have an accompanying adult present during the session).



#FabricOfProtest

phm.org.uk

Inspiration

Following on from previous workshops where we have explored Migration themes, this month we explored how people who have migrated to the UK are valued, including the over representation of migrant workers in key worker positions. We took inspiration from The Workers Union – Holloway Branch banner, 1920s, in the museum's 2022 Banner Exhibition.



Front of banner



Reverse of banner

The Workers Union – Holloway Branch banner, 1920s, Image courtesy of People's History Museum

The Workers Union was formed on May Day 1898. It was one of several general workers' unions that sought to organise semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic the term essential or key worker has been used to describe the people who keep everyone safe, fed and able to continue their day to day lives.

A large proportion of key worker jobs are done by people who have migrated to the UK. As we approach May Day also known as International Workers' Day, we celebrate those who have worked through the most challenging times, acknowledging the risks that they were exposed to, and highlighting the wage inequalities and workers' rights needed for our essential workers.

Banner description

This banner has a crimson jacquard woven silk background finished with a thin yellow border and a tassel; it measures 3,074 x 2,927mm. Each side of the banner has an oil painted circular image with 'The Workers' Union' at the top. The front image has five men holding hands in a circle around the earth; one black, one brown and three white, the words Africa, Asia, America, Europe and Australia surround them. Above them is a female angel with 'Freedom' above her head. 'Solidarity of Labour' is painted across the earth.

The image on the reverse of the banner has 'Women Workers' along the top and 'The Old Order Changeth, Yielding Place to New' at the bottom. In the foreground a woman holds a flame and wears a sash with the word 'Progress'. In the middle ground children are dancing around a maypole with ribbons with the words 'Education, Health, Beauty, Fellowship, Art and Science.'

What will we be making?



The maypole, shown in the banner is the symbol of May Day from its origins as a pagan festival. In this workshop, we stitched ribbons with messages of support for key workers. The ribbons can be tied onto trees and bushes to spread those messages of support in public places for all to see.



To prepare before making your ribbons you might want to:

- Consider what message you want to stitch onto your ribbon.
- Use the links below to find out more about May Day, the experience of key workers, the stitching technique in this activity and the displays at the museum that inspired this activity.

Read about May Day

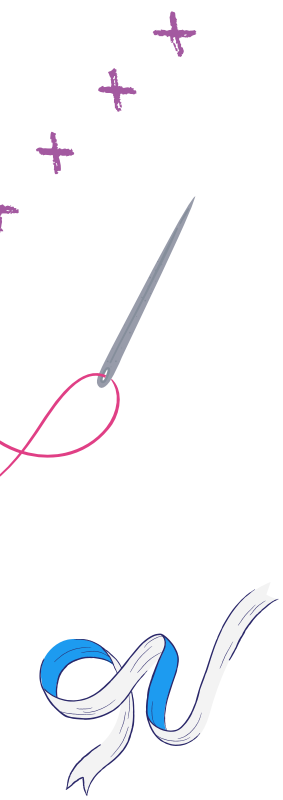
- [Read PHM's blog post by researcher Dr Shirin Hirsch May Day: A People's Holiday](#)
- Listen to Shirin discussing [May Day Rituals with BBC Radio 3 Free Thinking Presenter Matthew Sweet, on BBC Radio Sounds.](#)
- Read and watch about [May bush tradition in Ireland](#)
- Read the Guardian 2009 article, [May Day is not about maypoles the history of international workers' day](#)

Key Workers

- Find out about the [Key Worker poster designed by Craig Oldham in April 2020](#)
- Read the [Centre for Progressive Policy report on key workers](#)
- Read PHM's blog post by researcher Dr Shirin Hirsch [From 'unskilled' to 'essential' | histories of migrant workers in PHM's collection](#)

Watch the [No-knot stitching techniques](#)

Read Textile Artist Seleena Laverne Daye's blog post about [the significance of banners in the fight for change and what visitors can expect from the new 2022 Banner Exhibition](#)



Materials you will need:

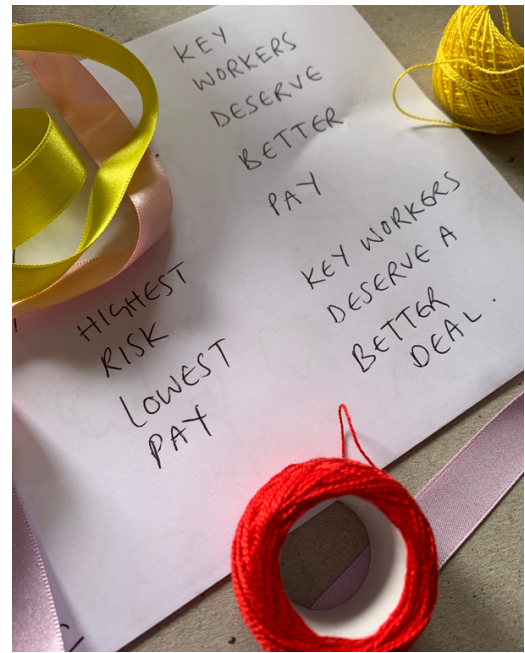
- Embroidery threads and needle
- Scissors
- Pen for marking on fabric
- Ribbons (or strips of fabric) – around 50 - 100cm in length



Draft your message

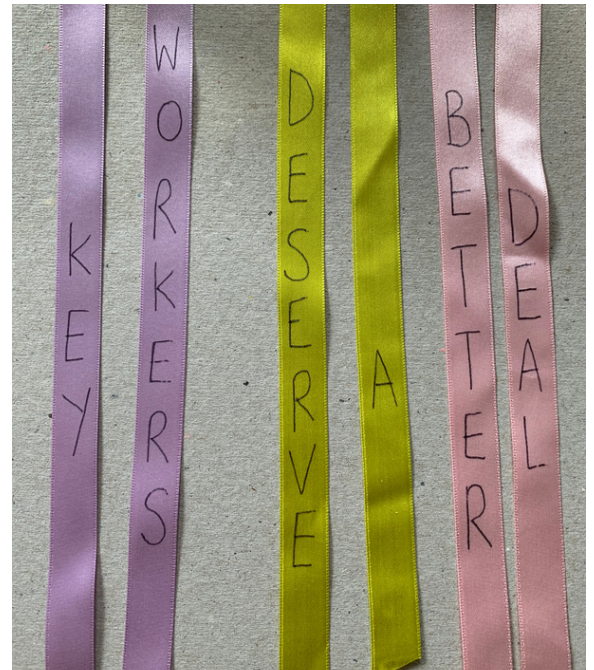
1

Decide what message you want to stitch on your ribbons for May Day. It might be a message of celebration, thanks, protest or support.



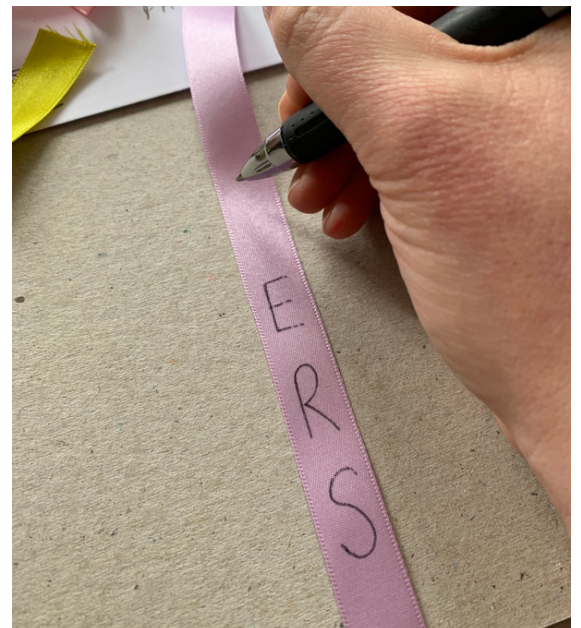
2

Choose how many ribbons you want to use and how to split your message over them. Here we wrote the letters from bottom to top so we knew we could fit the words on. You might want to think about how easy they will be to read wherever you decide to tie them.



3

Write your message onto the ribbon or strips of fabric you are using. This can be done with a pen (biros are better than fineliners), pencil, erasable marking pen or however you prefer to transfer marks onto fabric.



Stitch your message

4

We used a back stitch to stitch over the pen marks but you can use whatever stitch you would like to.

As the stitches will be seen from both sides of the ribbon, we can use a method of securing the thread without a knot at the beginning and the end.

Bring the thread up from the back and leave about an inch long tail on the end of the thread.



Bring the needle back into the ribbon a stitch length away, making the first stitch, and being careful not to pull the end of the thread through.



Secure your stitch without using a knot

5

Bring the needle up from the back, but don't pull all the way through, leaving a loop at the back of the ribbon.

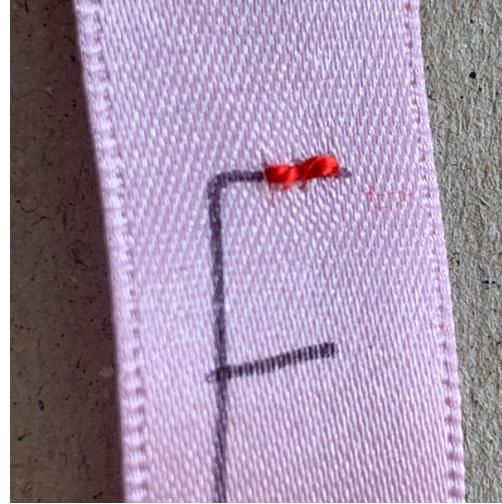


On the back of the ribbon, push the tail end of the thread through the loop and pull the needle to close the loop, securing the end through the loop.



6

Turning back to the front of the ribbon, close the stitch by bringing the needle back into the last hole made, making a back stitch.



Repeat these steps for another one or two stitches to keep the tail secured within the back stitches. Snip the tail end to neaten.



Finish off your letter

10

Continue with the back stitch. When you have finished the letter, turn to the back of the ribbon. Put your needle through two or three stitches to secure the end. Snip the thread to finish.

a



b



c



d



e



f



Display and share your ribbons

When you have finished stitching your ribbons, choose where you would like to display them – tied on a tree, plant or bush? Take a photo and share on social media or with us at Fabric of Protest by emailing learning@phm.org.uk.



Join us on Zoom to get creative!

If you would like to join artist Helen Mather and others to stitch, chat and share ideas inspired by this resource, [book onto one of The Fabric of Protest workshops](#).

Explore [The Fabric of Protest resources](#) created for other sessions.

Be inspired by the [textile creations of participants](#) who have taken part in our monthly public workshops.



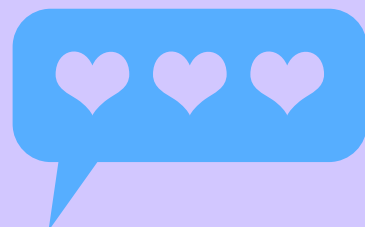
Share what you have created

We would love to see what you have created!

If you use social media, please share photos of your creations using #FabricOfProtest



Or if you prefer you can email a photo of your creation to learning@phm.org.uk.



@PHMMcr



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