



Feminist Archive North

Newsletter No. 7
Summer 2014

www.feministarchivenorth.org.uk/

blog - <http://fanorth.wordpress.com/>



The focus of this Newsletter is on research; the range of different FAN materials consulted by users, and the users themselves. We are pleased that both the public, and staff and students here at the University of Leeds are discovering this important resource.

Most visitors to the archive hear of us either by word of mouth or online. This year we have had visitors from Edinburgh, Durham, Italy, Israel, Northumbria, and London. Sometimes material is borrowed for display purposes – posters, badges, photographs,

banners and t-shirts may all be found in FAN's collection. Although most people visit because of their academic research, others do so because of personal interest in the period 1960s -1990s and to provide material for magazine and essay writing. Spare Rib is probably the most popular resource. (The British Library is considering digitizing the magazine so that it can be viewed on line. This can go ahead only if copyright permission is obtained from the many Spare Rib contributors - if you have contributed please do get in touch with them).



Fan is consulted about a wide range of topics including Feminism and Mental Health; Women's Aid; Women's Fertility and Reproductive Rights; Magic and Feminism; Feminist Magazines and Feminist Music. Accounts of three research projects are included in this Newsletter.

One of FAN's own projects, now nearing completion, has been to amend the inventory of holdings. Amongst the many periodicals, pamphlets and boxes of ephemera, we also hold a considerable collection of oral material, largely relating to Leeds/Bradford and Bolton. We also have newsletters, mainly from the 70s and 80s, from 27 Women's Liberation Groups in the UK - Birmingham, Lancaster, Milton Keynes and Southampton, to mention only a few. Sorting through boxes of donations remains an ongoing process and we have discovered a number of periodicals and papers, including a stash of Merseyside 'Women's Education Centre Newsletters' in a donation of papers from the Liverpool Bookshop 'News from Nowhere.'

As always, we welcome any comments or contributions to the Newsletter.

Elaine Glover

FAN and the Politics of Mental Health

The collections held by FAN are absolutely essential to my ongoing research. I'm a sociologist who specialises in the history and politics of mental health – especially the period 1970-2000. Whilst a lot is known from this period about what is called the 'psychiatric survivor' movement – the political activism of people who have experienced emotional and mental distress (see <http://studymore.org.uk/mpu.htm>) – less is known about the massive contribution of feminists to what Peter Sedgwick once called 'psychopolitics': the politics of mental health. And that contribution is fully demonstrated within the holdings of FAN. Here are two examples I'm currently working with:

1. The Bulletin of the Greater London Council's Women's Committee (GLCWC) (1982-86) – the period of Ken Livingstone's first stewardship. Amongst the many

examples of significant issues uncovered by activism stimulated by GLCWC funding were:-

The mistreatment of lesbians within the psychiatric system; the linkage between mental distress, domestic violence, sexual abuse and the inability of the psychiatric system to respond compassionately to the needs of women; the harmful effects of Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT); the harmful effects of psychiatric hospitalisation.

In fact, the term 'psychiatric survivor' itself was most probably coined by a group funded by the GLCWC: the System Survivors Writing Group (SSWG) who self-defined as 'mental health system survivors' in 1985. None of this would be known without the holdings of FAN.



2. Back issues of the journals *Spare Rib* (SR) and *Trouble & Strife* (T&S). What is fascinating about these is not just the ground-breaking articles (which often pre-date and surpass purely academic work) but the snapshots they provide into grassroots political activism. In this respect the 'Letters pages' and the 'Listings' pages of SR and T&S are historically significant. SR called these pages the 'Pulse of the Movement'. Of the countless examples I could give two must suffice: -

a. The letter from Diane Harrison in SR Jan. 1988 announcing the establishment of the path-breaking Bristol Women's Crisis Service (BWCS) a group run by survivors for survivors and the first specialist service offering help and support for women who self-harm. BCSW are particularly important historically as they link feminist mental health activism with psychiatric survivor activism due to their own experiences of mistreatment within the mental health system.



b. The critique of 'feminist therapy' by Sara Scott and Tracey Payne (T&R 3 Summer 1984) on the grounds that therapy, even feminist therapy, is not to be confused with consciousness-raising, which is political and problem-solving and not 'backward-looking' and psychological.

Archiving and remembering such activism is important precisely because it keeps alive the concept of 'working utopias' – the collective remembrance of alternative ways of thinking and doing politics which act as a corrective to the contemporary mantra that 'There is No Alternative' to patriarchal neo-liberalism. It's just because I need to be reminded that 'Another World is Possible' that I continue to visit and to celebrate FAN. And it's why I hope to be doing so for years to come.

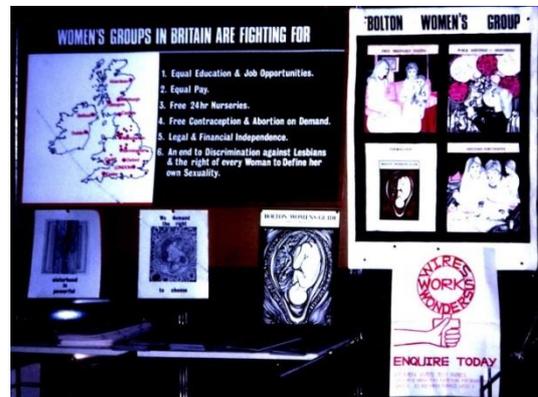
Mark Cresswell

Appreciation from users

I first came across the FAN as an undergraduate studying History in Sheffield. I'd always been interested in women's and gender history and studied modules that concentrated on periods from early modern England to the lives of twentieth century women. It was the latter module that led me to concentrate on the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) for my BA dissertation. Through this research I quickly realised that there was a dearth of historical research on the WLM in Britain. FAN provided an opportunity to research the women's movement outside of the major metropolitan centres as it held collections on local groups from across the North of England. Eventually, I decided to focus on Bolton WLM and its tireless effort for greater abortion provision in the area.

The Bolton WLM collection was full of interesting writings from the collective including newsletters, pamphlets and leaflets. This material provided a fascinating insight into the importance of grass roots activism in the development of 1970s feminism and their importance in attracting support for the movement's demands. The Bolton collection also included many newspaper clippings and articles on the group's activism and the challenge it faced from Catholic anti-abortion

groups during the period. The research I conducted on the Bolton WLM collection was the first archive-based research I had done but the hordes of material available at the archive encouraged me to pursue historical research further, first with an MSc in Gender History and currently research on the WLM for a PhD at the university of Glasgow.



My experience at FAN was invaluable to me in terms of meeting some of the dedicated feminists committed to preserving the history of the WLM and learning of the network of feminist archives across the country. Since my time at FAN I have conducted research at the Women's Library Glasgow and the Women's Library in London. All of these archives hold huge collections on the vibrant activism of the WLM, which is invaluable to better understanding British feminism. The research I conducted as an undergraduate at FAN undoubtedly influenced my passion for historical research on the WLM. I am sure that as my PhD research progresses I will be back at the FAN.

Emily Flaherty

During my time as a post-doctoral fellow at the Leeds Humanities Research Institute in June I began research on a new article-length project, 'Anti-Imperialist Feminism in the United States' Women's Liberation Movement'. Exploring US and UK based feminist periodicals of the Feminist Archive North confirmed that these were significant years for anti-imperialist feminists on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite the fact that it is one the UK's richest sources of information on feminist movements FAN is an under-utilised resource for scholars of the US



women's liberation movement. I studied several collections of periodicals, including the UK based newspapers *Spare Rib* and *Outwrite*, both of which frequently carried interviews with important feminist figures like Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich as well as news of US feminist efforts to oppose US intervention in Central America. Particularly significant among US periodicals was *Sojourner*, a long-standing feminist paper started in 1975 in Boston.

Resulting from my engagement with these materials I planned a 'field trip' to FAN with students from the School of History's MA in Race and Resistance. Examining and discussing *Outwrite*, *Spare Rib*, and *Trouble & Strife* we talked about the role of archives in the construction of knowledge about race, gender and resistance. Jalna Hammer, along with Richard High from Special Collections, came along to tell us about the history of both archives, how they acquire and sort collections and what political and scholarly concerns guide them. Students were intrigued by the idea of a volunteer-run archive and posed questions about what *kinds* of materials such an archive attracted: written, visual, digital; from grassroots or national organisations; local, national, international materials; movement memorabilia, organizational records, newspapers?

In the end, both the archivists and the FAN periodicals provided fantastic food for thought for our discussion on knowledge construction, archives and anti-racist feminisms. The nine students will be writing short essays on these subjects later this month, and many of them are interested in thinking about FAN in particular. Several are also planning to engage FAN materials for their dissertation research. Hopefully this is the beginning of even more productive and exciting relationship between Leeds' School of History and FAN.

Say Burgin

Celebrating over 100 years of Women in Technology

When the government funding for the Bradford-based UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Construction came to an end in 2012 and the organisation became WISE (taking on the old 'Women into Science and Engineering' label from 1984) they donated all their archives to FAN. Someone had the bright idea that this would be a great basis for our annual International Women's Day event and suggested having an exhibition. FAN already had holdings from local positive action programmes – and volunteers who were experienced activists from the 1970s! Three of these – Ailsa Swarbrick (the OU's Women in Technology 1979–1994), Rita Hudson (Women and Manual Trades) and myself put together an initial exhibition in the ten display cabinets in the Brotherton Room of the Brotherton Library. This was so successful that we then collaborated with Special Collections in mounting a more detailed exhibition in the Brotherton Library during October and November 2013.

I found curating all these materials from the archives particularly interesting, and a moving trip down memory lane, as I had been involved in almost all the organisations



and initiatives that we had materials from, including the Women's Engineering Society (President 1993-5) and East Leeds Women's Workshops (electronics tutor 1981-84 and which another FAN volunteer, Sandra McNeil, was instrumental in setting up). For the IWD exhibition we also decided to run tours of the exhibition and all our personal



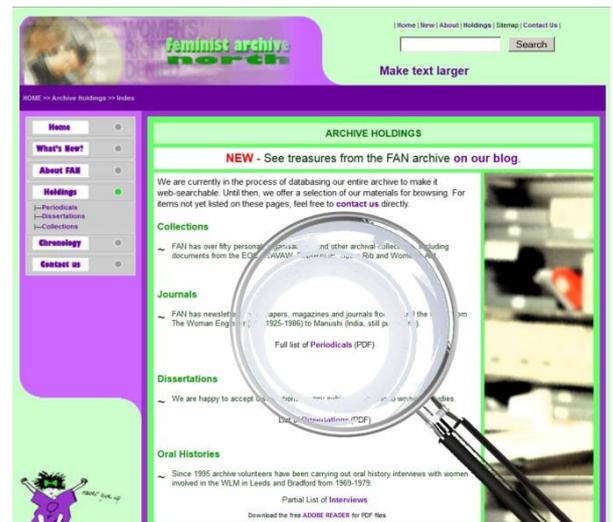
involvements meant that we could add a store of background information and amusing anecdotes to the rich materials from the FAN archives.

The exhibition included fascinating materials which looked back over initiatives and campaigns to encourage and support women wishing to study and work in various areas of technology. It ranged from the establishment of the Women's Engineering Society in 1919 and the Electrical Association for Women in 1924, through the government WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) campaign of 1984 and the Open University Women in Technology (WIT) initiative of 1979 to the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Construction set up in 2004. The exhibition included posters used to publicise successful women engineers, scientists and apprentices as role models, lively conference reports and materials from sources as diverse as the Socialist Feminist Scarlet Women collective, Ford, the Girl Guides and the Royal Navy as well as a rich variety of campaign material, memorabilia, leaflets and pamphlets. To set the scene, at the entrance we displayed an EOC (Equal Opportunities Commission) poster of Caroline Herschel, 18thC astronomer alongside a wonderful first edition of her Additions and Corrections to Flamsteed's (the Astronomer Royal) Catalogue of the Stars from the Special Collections own holdings.

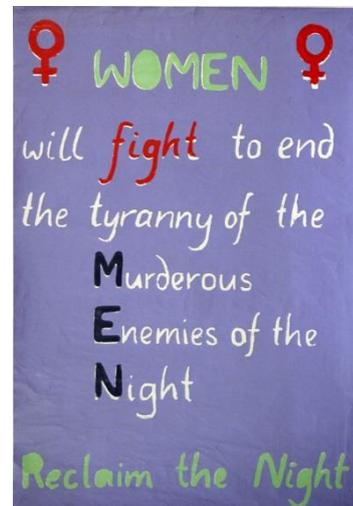
Lynette Willoughby

Recent Use of FAN

- a copy of the 1976 Working Women's Charter supplied to an enquirer
- The Pavilion women's photography and arts exhibition collections consulted by several researchers
- items from the Women's Against Apartheid collection were borrowed for a Leeds City Council exhibition, Voices Against Apartheid, in the Museum
- various publications held in the Periodical collection were requested



- written and visual material about the Leeds Reclaim the Night marches from



the 1970s onward were requested

I first discovered the Feminist Archive North while researching for my undergraduate dissertation on the impact of the 1970s women's liberation movement on local women. I was looking for primary sources on local groups and a quick internet search took me to the archive centre at the University of Leeds. There I was able to delve into a vast amount of material, from magazines such as Shrew to conference minutes, with the help of the staff who not only provided friendly and helpful guidance but also advice and suggestions to improve my search. They even put me in contact with a lady who had been part of Bolton's Women's Liberation Group, enabling me to back up my written documents with a personal account. Being



able to access such an in depth range of local material undoubtedly strengthened my work and provided an education on a key event in history on a much more real and personal level. I would like to thank FAN for their contribution not only to my dissertation but to highlighting the passion and struggle it took to get to where we are today.

Elizabeth Thorpe

Volunteering at FAN

When I started volunteering at FAN at the beginning of 2013 I was unprepared for the wealth of memories it would bring up. What I thought would be a rather dry and dusty – albeit worthwhile – exercise in cataloguing old papers has instead become a rich and inspiring journey through my own history.

Working at FAN has reminded me of the breadth and the strength of the Women's Liberation Movement that I was – and am still – a part of. The sense of the movement's growing identity and of women finding their power almost oozes from the shelves: here is the collection of a newsletter I had long forgotten about, there are the papers from a conference that I recall we talked about for months, in that box are banners from campaigns I proudly and angrily marched for.

Here too are the reminders of the difficulties and the differences we lived with and argued about; sometimes they made us stronger as a movement, sometimes they created fault lines that run still. The archive is a record of those times, and although it is incomplete women are generously adding to it all the time.

I'm learning, too, about the practicalities of preserving our history: how the staples we used on newsletters in the days of duplicating machines will rust and have to be removed; how plastic is the enemy of conservation; how every fold in a banner must be carefully padded with tissue paper to protect the material.

It's tempting to describe it as a trip down memory lane but of course when you are on a journey, looking back is only part of the

story; how feminism is travelling forward is the really exciting part.

Rose Reeve

Recent additions to the Archive

FAN has received a collection of papers related to the development of Women's Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University. The papers consist of policy documents, minutes of meetings, course outlines, student evaluations, etc. The material will fill about 10 archive boxes once they have been catalogued. Fan holds other collections of Women's Studies courses, administration and organisation from the University of Bradford, Bradford College, York and St John's University.

New Website: Using Archives to Teach Gender



<http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk>

Dr. Maria do Mar Pereira from the School of Sociology and Social Policy coordinated a project on Strengthening Partnerships to Enhance Student Education at Leeds. The Feminist Archive North and the Marks & Spencer archives were partners in this project. University teachers were asked about gender related topics in their modules, particular types of resources that would be useful to them and the kinds of activities that would best suit their modules. Project activities include archive study trips to FAN and, during the project, research meetings for



interested staff. A website was developed from the archive holdings.

Trustees' Report for AGM 12th October 2013

Activities

During the year we had 18 volunteers working in FAN. Our main work continues to be preserving and cataloguing donations. Many were individual donations but the major one was from Bradford College Women's Studies (Carol Moss) and completing Change, an international collection.

Archive Use

This year saw an increase in the use of material in the archive. Individual volunteers used their expert knowledge to assist researchers. 18 researchers used the archive studying such topics as - Comparison of French and UK women's movements' attitudes to sexuality; comparison of WLM north and south; study of "little magazines" produced by the WLM; Women's Studies; and men's contribution to the WLM.

We assisted a small group of researchers from Northumberland University (Gender Studies and English) in researching material for a bid to research second wave feminism.

Donations

The major donations this year were from WISE - the UK resource centre for women in science and technology, and from the former Rape Crisis Federation of England and Wales.

Exhibitions and Talks

Our International Women's Day exhibition was on Women in Science and Technology: 100 years of activism. The FAN volunteers who curated it also gave very informative guided tours situating the exhibits. It was very successful and may go next year to other venues and even be developed into an online resource if funding can be obtained.

With gender studies at Leeds University we ran a seminar for post graduate students and staff to demonstrate some of our material and how it could be used.

We spoke at another post graduate seminar for IWD and also at Ladyfest – and showed slides of our poster collection.

We spoke at Bradford Women's Aid AGM.

Ten slides of posters with relevant information formed part of an on line exhibition by Special Collections.

Leeds Women Against Apartheid material was loaned to an exhibition for Black History Month, and provided a stall with speaker at St Mary's, Menston's, Respect Week.

Call for back copies

We are trying to complete a second, and in some cases, a third set of certain periodicals. If anyone would like to donate any of the following to the Archive that would be very helpful:

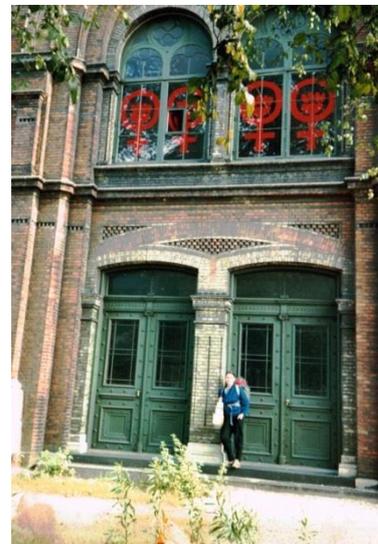
Spare Rib numbers 2, 4, and 15. Also 1/6; 8-10; and 15-18.

Wires 2, 16, 18, 45, 49, 55, 145, 151, 152, 168 and 170

Women's Voice 3, 40, 63

FAST 9, 10

Can anyone identify this photo?



It shows Copenhagen women's centre but when was it taken and who is this standing outside? Please let us know if you recognise this photo at all.

This newsletter was edited and produced by Elaine Glover, Lynette Willoughby and Ailsa Swarbrick



