



# Feminist Archive North

## Newsletter No. 2 Winter 2007/2008

FAN has really flourished in 2007. The arrival of our archivist, Sarah Prescott, has been the catalyst for huge progress in all areas of FAN's activities. She has brought direction and coherence to FAN's holdings, support and training for the volunteers, and an expansion of outreach work. In turn this has sparked off an increase in the numbers and commitment of volunteers.

FAN's profile has been raised with the launch of the website, leaflets, and exhibitions throughout Yorkshire. Users can now access far more of the material both on-line and by

visiting the FAN Collection. A growing number of interviews has been recorded for the Oral History Project, and the Education Pack is currently being piloted, with feedback expected imminently.

As we near the end of Sarah's contract, funded by the successful Heritage Lottery bid, we are determined to make sure all these advances continue. The contents of this second Newsletter show how important this is.

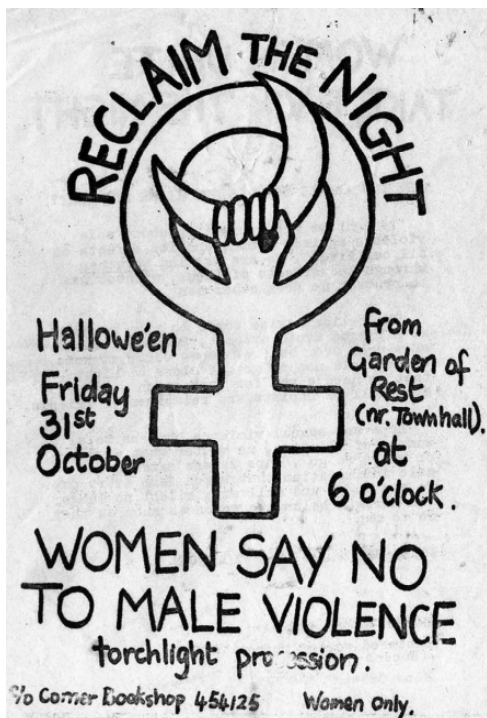


## Recent Events

FAN has had a very busy year, in terms of education and outreach.

We've hosted workshops, given talks, held exhibitions, and even run our very own (and very successful) Feminist Antiques Roadshow.

### Ongoing: FAN Exhibition



Leeds University Special Collections is currently staging an exhibition of FAN material commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Reclaim the Night marches in the UK.

The exhibition uses archival material, including posters, flyers, newsletters and badges to look at the development of the RTN movement within the context of Leeds activists' role in coordinating early marches and opposition and their importance in raising awareness.

You'll find the exhibition in the entrance to Special Collections in the Brotherton Library on Woodhouse Lane, and you are very welcome to come and visit. See our website for access information and times. We hope to add an online version of the exhibition to our website soon.

### Upcoming: International Women's Day

After three previous successful events, we will mark IWD 2008 with a meeting on Sustaining Campaigns Against Violence Against Women. It will be held on Thursday 6 March in the Leeds Social Sciences Institute Room, Beech Grove House (opposite the Students Union), University of Leeds, 6.00 pm – 8.00 pm.

## Sister News Feminist Archive South

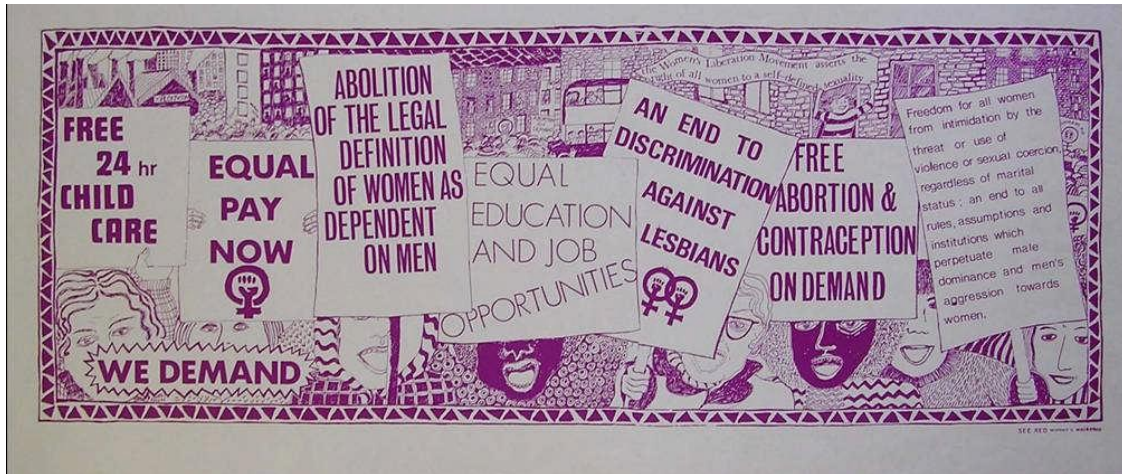
The good news is that Bristol University has offered to house the collection of FAS in its new library building. The not so good news is that this may take five years before completion.

In the meantime, FAS will be moving out of the City Library on 31 January 2008, and the holdings held in storage. The collection will still be accessible on application to either FAS trustees or the University's archivists. Contact details can be found on the FAS website, where queries can be emailed.

Jane Hargreaves, the volunteer who has done so much for FAS over the years will continue to respond to the emails for the time being. Jane has been an invaluable contact and very helpful when we were first planning the FAN Newsletter. Thank you, Jane.



## Special Projects – an update



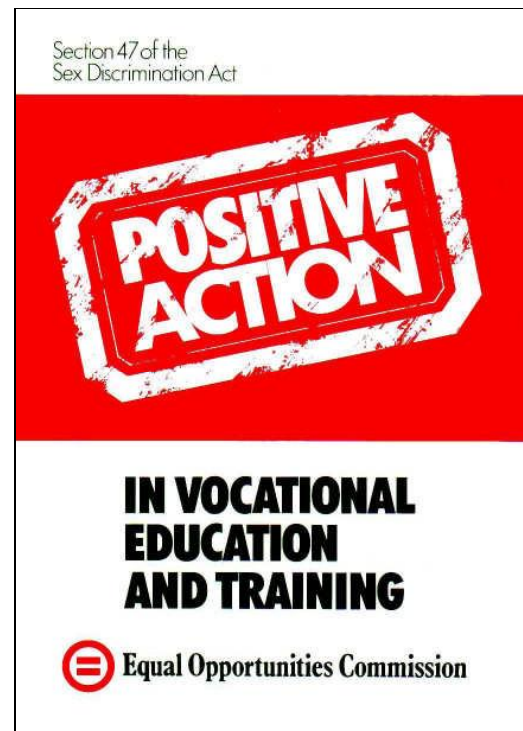
### 1. The Education Pack: What Did Feminism Ever Do For Us?

To the relief of the Education Sub-Group volunteers Jean Horsman, Maggie Warwick and Ailsa Swarbrick, who have worked with Sarah, progress of the on-line Education Pack is on schedule – so far. The first module is currently being piloted in the Leicester area.

The whole pack will eventually cover the full seven demands of the first national Women's Liberation Conference in 1971 (see banner above). Although the struggle is far from over, there *have* been changes in many areas of women's lives since then. We want to reach out to those who might not be aware of how these changes were achieved, of how progress has to be fought for, comes only after persistent collective action and struggle, and must be determinedly defended.

This first module focuses on **demand number 4: Equality of Opportunity in Education and Training**. It has an interactive format, with questions

starting from the students' own lives and family experience, designed to take them into the bigger picture through links to FAN's rich holdings on women's training and employment from the 1950s and on 1970s Equality legislation.



As a case study, we use FAN's material on **East Leeds Women's Workshop** – a pioneering venture from 1981–1994, which tested the boundaries of the new legislation. ELWW raised core issues such as positive action on women-only non-traditional training; prioritising disadvantaged women; the provision of free child-care; and the use of public funding and institutions. The collection contains notes, correspondence, newspaper articles and letters, funding applications, video clips, photographs and a banner.



## 2. Oral History Project

Two of our volunteers, Lee Comer and Lou Lavender, are particularly passionate about recording women's contributions to feminism, and particularly about hearing from the women themselves. Other volunteers are interested too, and we are only held back by our lack of recording devices; we have just the one Marantz,, a splendid machine, which we use with a

desktop mic. Lee and Lou have both been interviewed several times about their own activism; the HLF bid gives us the opportunity to record 12 interviews on a variety of themes, recording local and national feminist actions. From early discussions, a long list of possibilities was constructed, whittled down by what was possible within the time frame. We will, of course, be interviewing for years! Interview summaries and the interviews themselves will be available through our website.

## Treasures

### 1. Spare Rib

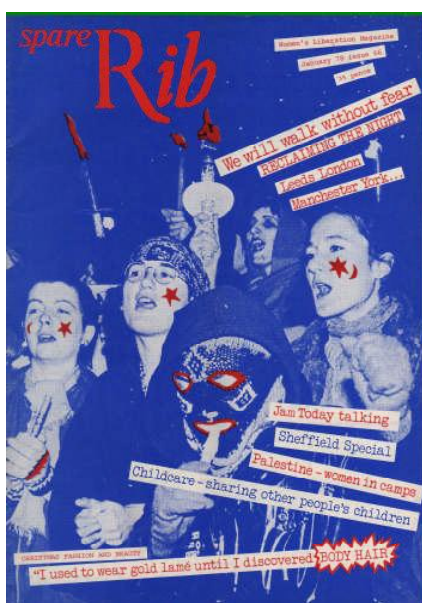
It's hard to over-estimate the impact of Spare Rib. Launched in 1972 it caused an immediate sensation. Newsagents across the country, including WH Smith, refused to stock it. Spare Rib was seen as subversive, as indeed it was – a means of spreading feminist ideas to a wider population of women confined in domesticity, restricted by contemporary social expectations, and cut off from activism for women's rights.

Instead of an innocuous content of romance, domestic tips and beauty advice, unthreatening to the prevailing status quo, Spare Rib was a protest against typical glossy 'feminine' women's magazines like Cosmopolitan, Elle, and Woman's Own. *"It was startling to realize that we could not buy any publications which discussed what we felt to be vital issues and so Spare Rib is a beginning"*. It sprang not only from the underground press of the 1960s, but from a much older tradition of radical progressive journalism, and was unafraid to provide a platform for discussion of taboo issues like women's



sexuality or the reality of domestic violence.

In the first issue, the editorial proclaimed its purpose – to investigate alternatives to traditional gender roles and “to reflect questions, ideas and hope that is growing out of our awareness of ourselves, not as ‘a bunch of women’ but as individuals in our own right.”



Yet in spite of hostile retailers and discomfited husbands, the first issue sold out immediately, and it maintained a steady though relatively small circulation of 20,000 a month. It's estimated that the actual readership was much wider. It was passed around informally and by 'floating libraries', so reaching many women unable or wary of buying it themselves. Readers' letters over the years confirm it as a life-line where they could validate their experience and expectations. This extract from the first anniversary editorial points up its effect on the popular press.

## June 1973 Number 12

*'Why is a woman's point of view important? The press has begun to take up some of the issues previously dismissed as hysterical demands of Women's Liberation, and has provided coverage of events like the passage of the Anti-Discrimination Bill. However, as long as the newspapers restrict articles for women to a single Women's Page – a page usually devoted to fashion and food – it is even more important for our news to present the women's point of view, analysing the significance of events in relation to women's lives and reporting on our unseen, undiscussed problems.'*

*We are being promised equal opportunity, and equal pay in 1975 but we mustn't be lulled into complacency – real liberation of women's minds and bodies has hardly begun. We are not going to let Women's Liberation be wrapped up in an Anti-Discrimination Bill and forgotten like the vote. We want you to continue sending your advice and ideas, and sharing your experiences with us.'*

With a national circulation, Spare Rib is probably the best-known of feminist magazines from the 70s and 80s, but is by no means the only one. There were many other newsletters with a local or regional base from Aberdeen to Brighton, from Cardiff to Newcastle; and from Women's Aid centres, lesbian groups, disability support groups etc. These were often useful in organising local campaigns, underpinning networks and breaking down isolation.

FAN holds a complete run of all Spare Rib issues from 1972 to 1992. We also hold copies of a readers' survey, conducted in 1974, and files containing



correspondence addressed to the Spare Rib collective, between 1976 and 1981.

## Treasures 2.

### Leeds Women Against Apartheid

The collection was donated to FAN by members of the Leeds Women Against Apartheid group. It contains exhibition panels, posters, cards and a T-shirt, photos, notes, minutes, leaflets, conference programmes and correspondence,

### South Africa in the 1980s

The apartheid system was official SA government policy from 1948. 24 million non-whites out of a total population of 28 million had no vote, no land rights, no freedom of movement, and limited access to education, housing and employment. All opposition was banned. By the 1980s increasingly violent oppression by the South African armed forces to maintain apartheid was being met with desperate resistance in the townships.

The Leeds Anti-Apartheid group had existed and been active for some years. But by 1986 it was seen by women as restrictive, male-dominated, and unwelcoming. Yet the interest was still there. An open meeting called by women members was well attended, and it was decided to set up a specific women's group, to be called Leeds Women Against Apartheid. LWAA became affiliated to the national Anti-Apartheid campaign.



Its aims were to encourage more women to get involved in campaigning against apartheid, especially by reaching out to women in other organisations; to publicise the position of women in South Africa and Namibia; to organise practical support and to collect material aid for women in South Africa.

LWAA rapidly became a very effective campaigning force, fund-raising, holding public day-schools, organising boycotts, making links with other women's groups in Leeds and West Yorkshire, and also a direct link with a women's group in Soshungu township, a black service satellite 40 kms from Pretoria.

Characteristically, it operated in a democratic, non-hierarchical, enjoyable way. Fundraising included women's karaoke nights, women's cabaret nights, skills auctions, and stalls at public events. Collections of medical and school supplies were organised, greeting cards and T-shirts designed and produced by supporters (a mother and a son) were sold. We raised awareness by engaging shopkeepers in



boycott petitions, giving out lots of orange and lemon balloons from the mobile Boycott Bandwagon on IWD day; and with day schools, library exhibitions, and talks by invited speakers.

A change of Afrikaaner leader, world economic pressures, and the prospect of a collapse into bloody civil war finally led to the release of ANC leaders including Mandela, incarcerated for 27 years. Constitutional talks resulted at last in national liberation.

### **Soshunguve Women's League.**



As a political exile in the UK, Frances Bernstein returned to cast her vote in the memorable first democratic elections in April 1994. And in November 1993 on a visit to South Africa, Ailsa Swarbrick was invited to a joyous meeting of the Soshunguve Women's League – an

impossibility even a year before. With liberation achieved, LWAA wound itself up and sent the residual finances to the Soshunguve women's centre.

### **Getting Involved**

**Your participation is vital to the continuation of FAN. There are two main ways to get involved.**

FAN has always been a volunteer-led organisation – of necessity, since there has never been any consistent dependable funding. Between us, we represent a wide range of age, experience and interests. Our Lottery-funded professional archivist (for 2007 only) has made a huge difference, as outlined above. We've been able to stand back, decide how FAN could operate more smoothly, and start to develop longer-term plans.

This all depends on volunteers! Whether you have just a couple of hours a week to give, or a regular day, come and join us, training provided. Use your skills, learn more about the Women's Liberation Movement, and enjoy the company.

### **Goodbye and thank you**

**We close this last Newsletter of 2007 with heartfelt thanks to Sarah for all her hard work and creative contribution to FAN. We will miss her, we've learned a lot, and wish there was a permanent job here for her. As there isn't, we're delighted that the breaking news is her richly deserved appointment to a fully tenured job at the York City Archives. Our loss is most certainly their gain.**

**Congratulations Sarah -  
and very best wishes for the future.**

