

FEMINIST ARCHIVE NORTH

Collections Policy



1. This policy

This policy covers:

- Feminist Archive North's collecting rationale and priorities;
- how we accession and catalogue; and
- our approach to collections development.

2. The Archive

The name of the Archive is Feminist Archive North (known as FAN), and the collection is held at Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 9JT.

Although the Archive is housed in Special Collections, FAN remains an independent charity which is managed by a board of trustees and run by a team of volunteers. We acknowledge and appreciate the support, advice and professional guidance we receive from Special Collections.

3. Our aims in relation to collecting

Materials relating to feminism or the Women's Liberation Movement aren't found in many archives, for various reasons: they are too recent; they are not regarded as "important" historical documents; they are difficult to collect, being scattered across numerous private homes, attics and garages. FAN provides a home for these documents and artefacts which might otherwise be lost. Our aims are:

- to identify, collect and preserve feminist material from 1968 to the present and make it available for reference to activists, academics, students and the general public
- to promote wider knowledge and enable activism by spreading information about feminist thought and action.

4. What we already hold

FAN's collections contain materials relating to many issues raised and responded to by the feminist movement. These issues include family, health, reproductive rights, employment, women in non-traditional occupations, social policy issues, the arts, media, militarism and peace, lesbianism, women's studies, women's aid, local women's centres, criminal justice, men's violence against women and girls, and the politics of the Women's Liberation Movement.

Most of our collection is in print form, and includes organisational papers, conference papers, journals, academic dissertations, posters and a small collection of key feminist books. Our large collection of local, regional, national and international feminist magazines and newsletters contains about 1,400 titles. We also hold a large collection of pamphlets, many unique to FAN.

As well as printed materials, we also hold textiles such as banners and tee-shirts, digital media such as oral history interviews and video, and ephemera such as badges and mugs.

Our collections have been donated by individuals, women's groups and organisations, predominantly from the UK and mainly in English. The time period we collect covers 1968 (the beginning of what is termed second-wave feminism) to the present day.

FAN's holdings consist of approximately 160 collections from specific named women and organisations, plus 7 thematic general collections: periodicals, conference papers, posters, pamphlets, dissertations, ephemera, and books.

There is restricted access to some of our collections: this is usually for reasons of data protection or because it has been requested by the donor.

5. Value and how we determine it

The Women's Liberation Movement was a major factor in social change, from the groups and demonstrations of the 1970s to the activist policy work of the 1980s and 1990s, and continues to the present day.

FAN's decision on whether to collect an item will be constrained by our assessment of the item's historical value and its significance to women's liberation.

In assessing historical significance and value, FAN recognises that significant material for a feminist archive includes not only high-profile struggles, but also grass-roots organising; and not only political activism, but also personal context.

We also recognise that due to societal injustice, grass-roots activities by marginalised groups are less likely to be recognised as "historically significant" by the wider world; however, they may be significant to feminism even if they were not widely recognised at the time and/or never achieved their aims.

6. How we collect and accession

We take donations from individuals, groups and organisations. These can vary from an entire collection to a single item.

Generally we take donations which are outright gifts to FAN; in some circumstances we will take donations on loan. Ownership and copyright issues will be determined in accordance with FAN's Donation Agreement.

We do not normally buy material, although we may decide to do so in particular circumstances. However, we may cover the cost of transporting donations to the Archive.

We do not collect:

- books, unless they are determined by FAN to be key feminist texts which we do not currently hold
- duplicates of items we already hold in our thematic general collections, such as conference papers or periodicals
- materials which are pre-1968 unless they form an integral part of a post-1968 collection

Before agreeing to accept a donation, we undertake an archival appraisal in line with this collections policy, either by viewing the donation or discussing the content of the collection with the donor. As part of the appraisal process, we may decide to accession only part of a collection if the remainder does not fit our current collections policy and/or priorities, or if it

contains duplicates of items we already hold. The description of the collection in our catalogue will include a note of any items we have not accepted, as it can throw a broader light on a donor's interests or activities.

After FAN has accessioned a collection we will remove any items which will fill gaps in our thematic general collections and relocate them into the relevant thematic general collection. We will note this in our catalogue, in both the donor's collection description and in the general collection description.

Wherever possible, we will liaise with the donor about any removals or relocations.

In principle FAN will not deaccession material once it has been formally accessioned in line with this policy.

7. Our collecting priorities

Our collecting priorities as of 2021 are:

- Early material. We particularly welcome material from the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement in the UK, 1968 to 1975, including papers, journals, newsletters, conferences, campaigns – anything from within the WLM. We are prioritising this material because we are conscious that it represents the lives and activism of an ageing generation of feminists. In line with our belief that it is important for communities to own and catalogue their own histories, we want to collect older feminists' material while they are still around to help contextualise it and provide relevant metadata.
- Materials that record recent and current debates within and around feminism and gender issues. We also note that, when collecting more recent feminist material, it may relate to and be contextualised by older material we hold. We will give consideration to how we might catalogue it so as to demonstrate these connections with older activism, in line with our aim to 'enable activism by spreading information about feminist thought and action'.
- The records of feminist groups and organisations.
- The records of FAN as an organisation.
- Material that adds to areas where we have identified gaps in our current collections. These include, but are not restricted to:
 - gaps in our general collections, e.g. periodicals, conference papers
 - materials from groups and individuals who are under-represented in our current collections: Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women, disabled women, working-class women
 - materials from groups and campaigns which would expand and enhance our current holdings on: women and the miners' strike, Reclaim The Night, feminist activism in the environmental movement, and papers from local government women's committees in the North of England.

We note that the collecting priorities listed above are not permanent; we will re-evaluate them whenever this policy is reviewed (approximately every two years).

8. Our collecting in relation to our resources

FAN's decision on whether to collect a particular item will be constrained by our resources. Key resources that affect our collecting are:

- Available storage space.
- Our capacity to catalogue and process items.

- Conservation/preservation resources.
- The knowledge and lived experience of FAN members, which represents a resource that helps us assess an item's value and significance to feminists. If necessary, FAN will consult with outside groups or individuals to assess the meaning or value of items. As a corollary to this, we additionally note FAN's commitment to do everything we can to ensure that lesbians, bi women, working-class women, Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women, disabled women, and women from other marginalised groups, are part of FAN, so that their knowledge is represented in this decision-making.
- The personal collecting undertaken by individual FAN members. Many FAN members, as individuals, collect material relating to their own current activism. This material represents a resource in that it might one day be formally accessioned by FAN, but also in that it will inform FAN's thinking about our future collecting priorities. FAN as an organisation will always aim to be aware of what individual members are collecting, and where any gaps might be. FAN will also record for posterity, in each iteration of this policy, what issues FAN members are collecting at the time of writing. As of April 2021, the key issues in members' collections are MeToo, femicide-counting, male violence against women and girls, Woman's Place UK activism, and debates around transgender issues.

In applying the factors outlined above, the following will be taken into consideration:

- We recognise that our capacity to catalogue material has limits; and that our ability to do so will depend on knowing enough about an item's context and provenance. We will therefore, where possible, seek to accession items for which the donor can give background information which illuminates the meaning of the item (metadata). In some circumstances, however, we will consider accessioning items for which this information is not available.
- We recognise that within feminism, "provenance" may have a different meaning: for example, things were often made collectively, and authorship and ownership may not be definable in traditional ways. FAN will not interpret this as a lack of metadata, or view it as a barrier to collecting an item.
- The value of an item will be balanced against any problems with its condition or any difficulty with conserving or preserving it. We will seek advice from Special Collections about any specific worries about how conservable an item is.
- Value assessments should consider our own existing collections. An item might hold particular value for FAN because it covers an area that is under-represented in our existing collections; conversely, it might have special value if it adds depth in an area in which our collection is already particularly strong, or if it gains additional meaning when placed in the context of our existing collections.
- Value assessments should also consider the holdings of other UK collections, especially feminist collections. But the fact that similar artefacts are held in other collections does not necessarily mean FAN should not acquire an object.
- Access restrictions: the value of an item will not be considered in the context of how its donor wants it to be shared. FAN recognises that some feminist items were created for women only, for lesbians only, for working-class women only, for Black women only, etc, and we respect such restrictions in how the item is processed and made available within the Archive. This will never be part of the decision on whether to accession an item.

9. Collections development

FAN recognises the need to keep developing our collections, to ensure they serve our organisational aims and meet the needs of our audiences.

However, we also recognise that our resources and capacity are not unlimited; so when deciding on our collections development activities, we need to prioritise.

Our current collections development priorities are (in this order):

- Cataloguing the material we already hold, and improving our online catalogue. This will help our audiences make full use of our collections; it will also widen access, particularly for people who are based far away from us, and people who might find our physical location in a University building offputting. When cataloguing, we will prioritise working on material that fits our current collection priorities as outlined in section 7 above.
- Skills development and training. Particularly, we will focus on developing our cataloguing skills and formalising our cataloguing process; and also aim to develop our expertise with regard to digital materials, both storage of born-digital materials and the digitisation of physical materials.
- Building our audience digitally – for example, using social media to share our collections and make links with other organisations; using digital platforms such as Zoom to run or contribute to events and discussions. We will prioritise this digital work over face-to-face and physical outreach. When engaging digitally, we will pay attention to the copyright and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) needs of any Archive items we highlight.

With regard to collecting new material, we recognise that we do not currently have the capacity to actively search for new material. However, we will accept material that fits our collecting priorities if people approach us with it.

10. Revising this policy

This policy will be reviewed in October 2022.

11. Sharing this policy

This policy will be published on FAN's website.