



UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The Fight for Women's Rights

Large print exhibition guide

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The Fight for Women's Rights

Today's debates on women's rights are rooted in a long history of activism.

Women and their allies around the world have fought for change with passion, imagination and tenacity.

Despite these efforts, not all women enjoy the same rights, depending on their race, class, disability, sexuality or the way they express their identity. The fight for a better world is unfinished business.

Focussing on the United Kingdom, this exhibition shines a light on some of the extraordinary women and campaigns that insisted on change – and on those that continue to do so.

But what is yet to come? Who else should be celebrated? What stories are missing?

#UnfinishedBusiness

Gender equality in the UK and around the world

These statistics are taken from the United Nation's Gender Inequality Index. The measures in the Index provide a detailed picture of gender inequality in each country, and identify priority areas for improvement. The United Kingdom scores highly in many areas, and was ranked 27 of 162 countries in the latest 2018 Index. However, the fight for women's rights is unfinished business, and the Index highlights how the UK can still improve gender equality.

Source: hdr.undp.org/en/data

Placards

On loan from Bishopsgate Institute

‘Grow a Pair’. Placard used by an unknown protestor on the Women’s March on London, 21 January 2017

‘Unequal pay, discrimination, sexual abuse, domestic violence, reproductive rights, parental rights, LGBTQIA rights, everyday sexism, fascism’. Double-sided placard created and used by Caroline Hughes and her sister at the Women’s March on London, 21 January 2017

‘Privilege is when you think something is not a problem because it’s not a problem to you personally’. Placard created by Maryliis Teinfeldt-Grins for a protest against Donald Trump’s visit to London, 13 July 2018

‘For Equal Pay, Why Not Start With Equal Play?’. Placard used by the Let Toys Be Toys campaign group (Tessa Trabue and Janetta Willis) at the Women’s March on London, 21 January 2017

‘Keep Calm and Carry On? No thanks, I’d rather raise hell and change the world’. Double-sided placard designed by Corinne Harrison and carried on the Women’s March on London, 21 January 2017

‘Grab ‘Em By The Patriarchy’. Placard created by Elena Calabro for the Women’s March on London, 21 January 2017

Courtesy of United Voices of the World

‘Cleaners’ Strike’. Placard designed and printed by solidarity network members. Used by outsourced cleaners working at Kensington and Chelsea Council, Ministry of Justice and Healthcare America during a week of co-ordinated strike action, 5-7 August 2019

‘Real Living Wage’. Placard made at a UVW workshop by outsourced cleaners, security and maintenance workers at the Ministry of Justice. Used by Fatima Djalo at the Ministry of Justice picket line, 2019

BODY

Body

The body is not a neutral space.

To be fully free, we need to be able to make choices about our own bodies. Demanding the freedom to make decisions about how we look, how we are represented and what we do with our bodies has been central to the fight for women's rights.

Today, the body remains a battleground.

In this section, explore how bodies are controlled and shaped by society and culture.

Image

Does how you look matter?

How we present ourselves to the world is a form of expression. But how often do society's expectations of what is respectable, acceptable or attractive inform our choices? And how does the way we are represented create and strengthen stereotypes?

People of all genders continue to challenge expectations around image – criticising double standards, calling out stereotypes in advertising and taking control through self-representation.

Right: 'Body Shapes', 2014. © Gemma Correll.

gal-dem

We are an award-winning media company, committed to telling the stories of women and non-binary people of colour. We're addressing inequality and misrepresentation in the industry through platforming the creative and editorial work of our community across essays, opinion, news, arts, music, politics and lifestyle content.

Interrogating identity

‘Peitaw’ by Gambian-British artist Khadija Saye is one of a series of tintype self-portraits exploring the relationship between the body, trauma and spirituality. In the series, Saye photographed herself with different items of spiritual significance, reflecting her mixed-faith background and Gambian heritage. In this portrait, she holds cowrie shells in her mouth. It was displayed in the Diaspora Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017, where she was the youngest exhibitor. Saye died in the Grenfell Tower Fire in June the same year, aged 24.

Khadija Saye, ‘Peitaw’. 2017. On loan from the Estate of Khadija Saye

Subverting stereotypes

This self-portrait was part of Jo Spence's Remodelling Photo History series, taken between 1981 and 1982. Spence used photography to document her own history. Here, she depicted herself as a domestic worker, using semi-nudity to reflect on the objectification of women. Throughout the series, Spence used role-play and subversion to challenge notions of sexuality, body politics and gender and to free women from outdated stereotypes.

Jo Spence, 'Remodelling Photo History: Colonization'.
1981-82. Courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London

Beauty politics

These self-portraits by Joy Gregory question ideals of feminine beauty. The series of photographs from 1989 mimics the commercial shots of women in magazines. They highlight the absence of Black women in European narratives about female beauty. However, the images are not straightforward portraits, instead depicting the head from various angles as if she is refusing to be identified, scrutinized and evaluated.

Joy Gregory, 'Autoportrait'. 1989. On loan from Joy Gregory (artist)

‘The Suffragette Face’

This edition of ‘The Daily Mirror’ from 1914 portrays suffragettes campaigning for votes for women as ugly and ‘unwomanly’. The photographs, taken at a rally in Hyde Park, have captions such as ‘Dishevelled after fighting’ and ‘Youth looks like old age’. The newspaper notes how the suffragettes ‘have nursed a grievance for so long that they seem resentful of anyone who is happy and contented...’. The article shows that ridiculing women who speak out is nothing new.

‘The Daily Mirror’. 25 May 1914. LD4

Cover girls

Magazines have featured women on the front cover for over a hundred years. The way that women have been portrayed has changed over the decades, influenced by fashion, politics, and changing attitudes. Here you can see a selection of ways women have been portrayed, from body shaming to celebratory.

A selection of magazine front covers from the 20th and 21st century

Legs-it

The media continues to target and objectify women in the public sphere. In 2017, two of the UK's leading politicians, the then Prime Minister Theresa May and Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, met in Glasgow to discuss Brexit. 'The Daily Mail' ran this front page the next day. There was a public outcry and many politicians condemned the article.

'The Daily Mail'. 28 March 2017. NEWS.REG170

Tooth and Nail

‘Spare Rib’ was a feminist magazine, published between 1972 and 1993, which was set up to compete with traditional women’s magazines. The ‘Tooth and Nail’ feature shared examples of sexist advertising and media sent in by readers. Many of the examples dehumanised and sexualised women’s bodies. ‘Tooth and Nail’ included advice about how to complain and hold those responsible to account.

‘Spare Rib’. February 1977. Private lender

This is not a Humanising Poem

Spoken word poet Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan performs 'This is Not a Humanising Poem' at the Roundhouse poetry slam final, June 2017.

Duration: 3 minutes

Body + Swimwear = Beach Ready

In 2015, an advertising campaign for diet supplements asking ‘Are You Beach Body Ready?’ provoked complaints. It was banned by the Advertising Standards Agency, but on the basis of concerns about the health claims of the product rather than the messaging. Some people added graffiti to the advert, often using the hashtag ‘#EachBodysReady’. Navabi, an online shop, turned the message into this body positive advertising campaign for plus size clothing.

Beach Body Ready pushback campaign. 2018. Reproduced courtesy of Navabi

The crime of airbrushing

Actor and activist Jameela Jamil talks openly about how photographs of women in magazines are edited to deceive. These photographs show a before and after, exposing how images are manipulated. She revealed how her mental health was negatively affected by pictures where she was made slimmer and her skin lightened. She now refuses to allow her image to be airbrushed and continues to criticise unrealistic portrayals of women's bodies.

Original and edited photographs of Jameela Jamil as part of the I Weigh movement © Sela Shiloni

Measuring worth

By smashing these scales, Jameela Jamil forcefully rejected the idea that a woman's value hinges on the way she looks. In 2018, in response to a body-shaming meme, she posted an image of herself with words affirming her value beyond her weight. It sparked thousands of responses from around the world. The 'I Weigh' community was born, which invites people to share what they love and value about themselves beyond 'flesh and bones'.

Scales smashed by Jameela Jamil. Private lender

If this lady was a car

Women's rights activists have often harnessed humour as a tool for change. The graffiti on this advert for a Fiat car, photographed by Jill Posener in 1979, shows one reaction to the sexual objectification of women common in 1970s advertising. The Women's Liberation Movement made a direct link between the kind of public dehumanisation in the advert and women's lack of social status and vulnerability to violence and discrimination.

Black is beautiful

This edition of the 'West Indian Gazette' celebrates the life of journalist and activist Claudia Jones. She led a group that set up the Caribbean Carnival in 1959 in response to racist attacks against Black communities in the UK. Trinidadian-born Jones included beauty pageants in the carnival between 1959 and 1964 to challenge the racist beauty politics that marginalised Black women. The success of dark-skinned contestants like Fay Craig challenged beauty ideals that privileged lighter-skinned Black women.

'West Indian Gazette'. April/May 1965. P.2000/46. Image above: Contenders for Carnival Queen at the Caribbean Carnival 1959. © Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Beautiful anger

The Women's Liberation Movement fought against the objectification of women. In 1970, they took their protest to the Miss World beauty pageant at the Royal Albert Hall. This was the last time the contest was broadcast by the BBC. Protestors gathered outside holding banners reading 'Women are People too'. Inside, campaigners threw leaflets like this one, flour bombs and rotten vegetables on to the stage. 1970 was also the first time a Black woman, Jennifer Hosten, won the contest.

Leaflet created by the 1970 Miss World protest organisers.
On loan from LSE Library, 7SAA/2 folder 2

Image above: Demonstrators at the Miss World pageant,
1970 © Leonard Burt/Central Press/Getty Images

Fighting fatphobia

These photographs show a performance of ‘But is it healthy?’ by activists Charlotte Cooper and Kay Hyatt in 2016. They danced in front of a sculpture on display in the Wellcome Collection. The sculpture was created as a self-portrait, but for Cooper and Hyatt, its inclusion in the ‘Obesity’ gallery was part of a medical discourse that dehumanises fat people. In 2019, the sculpture was removed from the gallery.

Photographs of ‘But is it healthy?’, performed by Charlotte Cooper and Kay Hyatt in front of the sculpture ‘I can’t help the way I feel’ by John Isaacs. 2016. Courtesy of the Wellcome Trust

One of the boys?

Matilda Alice Powles - known as Vesta Tilley - was arguably the most popular male impersonator performing in music halls by the early 20th century. While this sheet music shows her dressed as a top-hatted dandy, Tilley emphasised her femininity off stage. Music hall theatre, with its pantomime dames and principal boys, allowed entertainers to subvert gender stereotypes. Unafraid of controversy, Tilley was an inspiration for women keen to challenge convention.

Vesta Tilley, 'Three Young Ladies'. London, 1892.
H.3981.p.(47)

Vesta Tilley © National Portrait Gallery, London

Dress for success

In the 1970s and 1980s, with more women entering workplaces that had previously been dominated by men, women's workwear fashion became popular. This book gives advice on what is and is not suitable for a woman to wear at work. It is based on research into people's perceptions of clothing. The book and its counterpart for men made the concept of 'power dressing' popular.

John T Molloy, 'Women Dress for Success'. London, 1980.
X.529/37875

Appropriate attire

At a debate on media sexism in 2013, MP Caroline Lucas was told to put her jacket on as she was violating parliamentary dress code. She had taken it off to reveal this t-shirt in support of the campaign against images of topless models on page three of 'The Sun'. The campaign objected to the routine sexualisation of women in a daily newspaper. In 2015, page three features disappeared from the print edition of 'The Sun'.

No More Page Three campaign t-shirt. 2013. On loan from Dr Caroline Lucas MP

Caroline Lucas in the Houses of Parliament. 2013
© Parliamentary Recording Unit

Adaptable clothing

This dress was fitted with ties which enabled the skirt to be hitched up. The increasing popularity of bicycles in the 1890s provided women with more freedom. However the restrictive clothing of the period made cycling difficult. New cycling outfits were designed for women, but this clothing was ridiculed by the media. As an alternative, some women adapted existing outfits like this one, which allowed them to cycle and were still fashionable.

Woman's modified dress. Around 1880s. On loan from the Janie Lightfoot Textile Archive.

Image behind: A woman on a bicycle in St James' Park, around 1897 © Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Biology

What is a woman?

Have you spent years reflecting on your gender identity or never given it a moment's thought?

Women have historically been discriminated against on the basis of assumptions about biology. But ideas about gender, sex and fertility are less fixed than they might first appear. They are shaped by the scientific and cultural beliefs and technologies of the time.

Women, gender non-conforming people and trans people have long defied expectations about who they are, how they should behave, and what they can achieve.

Right: 'It's a Lesbian'. © Jo Nesbitt.

Bloody Good Period

Menstruation is a normal, healthy biological function, but people who menstruate (women, girls, non-binary people and trans men) have long been shamed for bleeding. We are a charity providing period supplies and menstrual education to refugees, asylum seekers and others who are unlikely to access these essentials. We also campaign for period equality – most definitely unfinished business.

Laura Mulvey

Born 1941

Laura Mulvey developed her ideas through her work as a film-maker and academic and her participation in the Women's Liberation Movement. She introduced new ways of looking at film and media and challenged the power relationships in cinema. Her work still informs debates around the male gaze in visual media.

‘... in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly.’

Judith Butler

Born 1956

Published in 1990, Judith Butler's 'Gender Trouble' challenged the conventional idea of fixed binary genders. Her work shows how gender is constructed and enacted, opening up new possibilities in language and everyday interaction. It helped establish queer theory as a discipline and has been used as a framework for people to understand how to struggle with deep-seated gender norms in order to achieve more livable lives.

'No matter whether one feels one's gendered and sexed reality to be firmly fixed or less so, every person should have the right to determine the legal and linguistic terms of their embodied lives.'

Beating censorship with sequins

This sparkly tampon was created by artist Sam Dawood for the charity Bloody Good Period to spark conversations about periods. She wanted to create a light-hearted piece of art that could be shared on social media without being censored as 'sensitive content'. Share your own photos of the 'glampon' on social media using #UnfinishedBusiness to join the conversation.

Sam Dawood, 'Glampon'. On loan from Bloody Good Period

A female skeleton

Printed in 1733, this was the first published illustration of a female skeleton in an English anatomy book. It is modelled on the Medici Venus, an ancient Greek sculpture, and is positioned in a similar stance. Many early studies of the female skeleton like this one emphasised the wide child-bearing hips, the smaller head (for the supposedly smaller brain) and the narrower ribs that were considered characteristics of the female sex.

William Cheselden, 'Osteographia, Or the Anatomy of the Bones'. London, 1733. 458.g.1

Fiction bleeds through

This dress and bonnet is inspired by the handmaids' outfits in Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel 'The Handmaid's Tale'. The story is set in a fictional country where an oppressive regime exploits women for their reproductive abilities, reducing them to a biological function. In the real world, the outfit has been worn by activists defending women's legal freedoms. This dress was made by an activist who took part in the women's march in London against Donald Trump's visit in July 2018.

Handmaid's costume worn in recent women's marches.
Private lender.

Photograph of the costume in use on a women's march

Sexist science

In 1882 Caroline Kennard asked famous biologist Charles Darwin for his view on women's intelligence. In this letter, he responded, 'I certainly think that women, though generally superior to men in moral qualities, are inferior intellectually.' He believed that to gain intellectual equality, women would have to become regular 'bread-winners', in which case 'the happiness of our homes would greatly suffer'.

Letter from Charles Robert Darwin to Caroline Kennard. 1882. On loan from the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, DAR 185/31

Unequal terms

Caroline Kennard, American women's rights campaigner and amateur scientist, robustly rejected Charles Darwin's assertion that women were inferior intellectually. In this reply to his letter, she argued that women lacked the educational opportunities afforded to men. Their intellect, she stated, could only be compared with men's once they shared the same environment and opportunities.

Letter from Caroline Kennard to Charles Robert Darwin. 1882. On loan from the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, DAR 185/29

Learning from lemurs

In the 1960s Dr Alison Jolly discovered that females were in charge in groups of ring-tailed lemurs. Her research overturned the assumption that males are always dominant in primate species. Part of a new generation of women primatologists, Jolly drew on Darwin's evolutionary theory. However, she emphasised social intelligence and cooperation, rather than tool-making or competition, as the key to species' survival. As this letter illustrates, Jolly successfully juggled her work with family life.

Letter from Dr Alison Jolly to her husband, 1970.
Private lender.

Dr Alison Jolly in the field in Berenty, Madagascar
© Margaretta Jolly

Viva la vulva

In 2011, a wide range of people from around the world collaborated to knit, embroider and crochet a patchwork quilt celebrating women's vulvas. Using a traditionally female craft for radical aims, the quilt counters the shame around women's bodies and aims to raise awareness about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The quilt has been used in campaigns to empower and support the rights of women and girls at risk of FGM in the UK and around the world.

Vulva quilt. This work was conceived & spearheaded by Tara Scott and made possible with the (sisterhood) of many contributors from far and wide: The Shoreditch Sisters Women's Institute of 2009/13, in sisterhood with Daughters Of Eve, Nimco Ali & Leyla Hussein, and Birdy Acton-Imoke.

Dedicated to the memories of Jo Scott & Efua Dorkenoo

The science of oppression

19th-century scientist Francis Galton was the man who defined eugenics – the idea that selective breeding could create superior human beings. His research into human difference was informed by racist science. He used this sextant to measure the proportions of a Khoikhoi woman's body in Namibia from a distance without her knowledge or consent. Galton's process of scientific measurement was influenced by his colonialist and misogynist views. Women found themselves ranked firmly below men. Women of colour were ranked even lower.

Sextant, used by Francis Galton (1822-1911). On loan from UCL, Galton collection 004, LDUCG-004

Unsexed

Dr Isaac Baker Brown was expelled from the Obstetrical Society of London following his controversial treatment of epilepsy and ‘hysteria’ in women with clitoridectomies. He had performed the procedure, which involves the removal or reduction of the clitoris, without the consent of the patient or her family. In another case described in this book, a woman protested that she had been ‘unsexed’, but Baker Brown dismissed her complaint and insisted the ‘cure’ was a success.

Dr Isaac Baker Brown, ‘On the Curability of Certain Forms of Insanity, Epilepsy, Catalepsy and Hysteria in Females’. London, 1866. 7441.aa.5

The politics of therapy

This leaflet advertises the Women's Therapy Centre set up by Susie Orbach and Luise Eichenbaum in London in 1976. Their approach brought together psychoanalysis and feminism. While psychoanalysis explores the deepest sources of emotional distress, feminists recognised that women's mental health problems were often created by social conditions and expectations. Orbach and Eichenbaum believed women needed to speak in their own way and be understood on their own terms.

Leaflet for the Women's Therapy Centre. On loan from
Susie Orbach

You make me feel like a natural woman

What is a 'natural' woman? Films, advertising and the media usually portray women with smooth, hairless legs. Society views women who let their leg hair grow as 'unnatural', despite the fact hair growth is a natural bodily function. Designed in 2009, this t-shirt enables the wearer to celebrate hairy legs as an alternative body norm for people of all genders. The creators chose t-shirts because they are closer to people's bodies – and therefore their hearts – than other forms of art.

T-shirt produced by Eva Megias and Emma Thatcher. 2009

What's normal?

Printed in 2018, this colourful zine presents essential medical information about vaginal discharge in a light-hearted, accessible way. The portrayal of women's bodies as 'dirty' and shameful can stop women seeking medical advice. Women's embarrassment around their bodies is sometimes exploited to sell commercial products such as feminine wipes. The zine was made by Soofiya, an artist and lecturer whose work examines gender and race.

Soofiya, 'Soof's Vaginal Discharge Fact Zine'. Great Britain, 2018. YD.2019.a.1532

The story of Augustine Hull

In 1931 Augustine Hull was sentenced to 18 months of hard labour under laws that criminalised sex between men. Supporters argued that Hull, who lived as a woman, wasn't homosexual but sexually 'anti-typical', so laws criminalising homosexuality shouldn't apply. Today, Hull might identify as intersex or transgender. Hull's story contributed to a growing awareness in the 1930s of different gender identities.

Wall behind, right: Articles about Augustine Hull in 'Reynolds News' and 'The Birmingham Gazette'. January 1932.
Courtesy of Reach PLC

There are no men or women in Urania

‘Urania’ was a ground-breaking feminist journal set up by Eva Gore-Booth, Esther Roper and Irene Clyde and published between 1916 and 1940. It explored the idea that biological sex was less fixed than was widely believed at the time. This article features Mark Weston, an intersex person assigned female at birth. Mary Weston, a national champion in javelin, shot put and discus, represented Britain in the 1926 Women’s World’s Games. In 1936 Weston had sex reassignment surgery and became Mark.

‘Urania’. May–August 1936. On loan from LSE Library,
R(SR)1162

‘Different Sex. Same Person’

Was Virginia Woolf’s ‘Orlando’, published in 1928, the first English-language trans novel? The central character, Orlando, changes from male to female midway through the book, merely commenting ‘Different sex. Same person’. Woolf wrote ‘Orlando’ as an extended love letter to the novelist Vita Sackville-West, who liked to wear men’s clothing. The restrictive nature of women’s clothing, and the contrasting freedom offered by male fashion, provides a humorous touch throughout the book.

Virginia Woolf, ‘Orlando’. London, 1928. 012614.i.3

Seeing gender in new ways

Travis Alabanza is a contemporary Black trans/non-binary artist whose work spans performance art, writing and theatre. Created in collaboration with Denny Kaulbach, this self-portrait poster celebrates hair that grows on gender non-conforming faces, destabilising the idea that stubble is the 'natural' property of men and masculinity. Alabanza's gaze confronts the viewer, asking them to look beyond binary concepts of 'men' and 'women'.

Wall behind, left: Travis Alabanza and Denny Kaulbach, 'My Stubble has no Gender'. 019688600

Developmental biology

Dame Anne McLaren was a biologist whose research on embryo transfers laid the scientific foundations for In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) treatment. This notebook records the raw data results from her experiments with mice. Other strands of her work contributed to stem cell research. Scientific developments like these continue to complicate the view of biology as fixed and the idea that a woman's reproductive functions define who she is.

Anne McLaren's embryo transfer notebook. 1955-59. Add MS 83844

Anne McLaren in the laboratory © PA Images



‘You don’t have to know every murmur of my soul’

In 2019 writer and artist Shon Faye was granted this Gender Recognition Certificate under the 2004 Gender Recognition Act. The Act allows people to legally change the gender they were assigned at birth. Faye, like many others in a 2018 government consultation, criticises the process as medicalised and intrusive. The government pledged to improve the process, but recently ruled out changing the law to enable people to change their legal gender without a medical diagnosis.

Gender Recognition Certificate, 2019. On loan from Shon Faye.

Quotation by Shon Faye

Harriet Martineau

1802–1876

British writer, abolitionist and feminist Harriet Martineau's work was widely read in her day but was, until recently, almost forgotten. She wrote about the impact of her deafness and a later illness on her life. Although she never held an academic post, she is now seen as a fore-mother of sociology. She believed that individuals reflecting on their own lives and experiences could provide important insights into society.

'The progression or emancipation of any class ... takes place through the efforts of individuals of that class. All women should inform themselves of the condition of their sex, and of their own position.'

Heidi Safia Mirza

Born 1958

Heidi Mirza is a British academic known for her pioneering research on race, gender and identity in education. She has an international reputation for championing equality and human rights for Black and Muslim young people through educational reform.

‘The struggle to succeed in education and as professionals is set against well-documented evidence of systemic institutional gendered racist exclusion.’

Autonomy

Do you have control over your body?

Women have often experienced gender-based violence and been denied the freedom to decide whether and how to have children, and when and with whom to have sex.

Activists have driven legislative change and transformed social attitudes in the UK.

The rights and freedoms that have been won are unequally experienced, often under threat and can't be taken for granted.

Right: 'Get me off this freaking moor'. © Kate Beaton.

Now for Northern Ireland

We are a coalition of organisations that successfully campaigned to secure the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland. We were led by the charity bpas, who provide reproductive healthcare to 90,000 women a year. Bpas support and advocate for reproductive choice - from contraception to infant feeding - and have led successful campaigns to reduce the cost of emergency contraception and allow the home use of abortion medication.

Letters from working women

Reproductive health campaigner Marge Berer discusses the 1915 book 'Maternity: Letters From Working-Women'. Produced by The Women's Co-operative Guild, the book contains letters from their members about their experiences of pregnancy and maternity as working women.

Duration: 2 minutes

Let's talk about sex

In the early 20th century, Marie Stopes was an influential advocate of birth control and a sex educator. She wrote books, pamphlets, plays and films that frankly discussed sex and contraception. Hundreds of men and women wrote to her for advice. In this letter, a working-class woman describes her desperate need for birth control. Stopes argued for the necessity of birth control for women, but was also motivated by racist and eugenicist ideas, believing that selective breeding could remove 'unfit people' from society.

Letter to Marie Stopes from Mrs Fraser. November 1924.
Add MS 58673.

Image above: A family with five children living in poverty in the East End of London.

© Hulton-Deutsch/Corbis via Getty Images

Recommended by the clinic

These contraceptives were available in Marie Stopes' clinics. The pessary, also known as an intra-cervical device, works by preventing embryos from implanting in the uterus lining, and the rubber contraceptive sponge was designed to prevent sperm reaching the uterus. Stopes opened the first birth control clinic in the UK in 1921 with her husband, Humphrey Roe. She herself used a pessary, and it was one of the contraceptives the clinics often advised women to use.

1. Wishbone or gold spring contraceptive pessary in silver and gold. 1880-1936.
2. Rubber contraceptive sponge, in original box, "Elarco" type, British. 1901-1930.

On loan from the Science Museum Group

Different women, different sizes

Marie Stopes clinics, which opened across the UK in the 1930s and 1940s, also offered diaphragms. These are caps which sit over the cervix, creating a barrier and preventing sperm entering the womb. Invented by a Dutch doctor, they were colloquially called 'Dutch caps'. 'Clinocap' was an English brand made specifically for Marie Stopes clinics. These measuring rings were used by doctors to work out the correct size cap for individual women.

3. Carton for 'Clinocap' diaphragm. London, England, 1930-1960.

4. Set of 12 rubber measuring rings, for 'Clinocap' diaphragms, 1934.

On loan from the Science Museum Group

Copper or coil?

This intra-uterine device (IUD) is known as a 'copper Y' due to its shape. The copper is toxic to sperm and stops fertilisation and the device prevents an embryo implanting in the lining of the uterus. There are other examples of IUDs, such as the plastic one known as the 'coil'. This form of contraception has fallen in and out of popular use, despite being the cheapest long-term reversible contraceptive method available.

5. Intra-uterine device. 1970-1981.

On loan from the Science Museum Group

The pill

In 1961, the oral contraceptive pill became available on the NHS in the UK. The pill contains oestrogen which prevents the release of eggs into the uterus. It revolutionised the lives of women by giving them control of their own fertility. Despite concerns about its negative side effects, the pill is still the most prescribed form of contraception in England. The male contraceptive pill has not been approved for distribution because of similar negative side effects.

6. Norinyl-2' oral contraceptive pills. England, 1968-1970.

On loan from the Science Museum Group

Why ‘Reproductive Health Matters’

Marge Berer and TK Sundari Ravindran founded the journal ‘Reproductive Health Matters’ to publish research that focused on women’s needs, experiences and voices. The journal used in-country peer reviewers and mentored authors so that articles included regional contexts. During her 23 years as editor, Berer wrote articles on a range of issues, including abortion rights, maternal mortality, sexual reproductive health and related HIV issues, and female genital mutilation.

‘Reproductive Health Matters’. Oxford, November 1997, November 2007 and May 2013. ZC.9.a.3563

Ban the jab!

The contraceptive injection Depo-Provera has been used as a form of population control on women in Latin American and African countries since the 1960s. In the 1970s in Britain, it was disproportionately given to poor women, ethnic minority women and residents of refuges, sometimes without their knowledge or consent. This report is from the Campaign Against Depo-Provera, which fought to stop the abusive use of the injection by the medical establishment and raised awareness of its potential side effects.

‘Depo-Provera: A Report by the Campaign Against Depo-Provera’. London, 1983. X.329/18350

The Sadeian Woman

In 'The Sadeian Woman', Angela Carter questions – as the comment at the top of this draft shows – whether pornography is always hostile to women. She analysed the work of the 18th-century 'father' of sadomasochism, the Marquis de Sade. By acknowledging the 'rights of free sexuality for women, and in installing women as beings of power', Carter argued Sade gave his female characters autonomy beyond their traditional literary roles of wife, mother or virtuous love interest.

Angela Carter, typescript of 'The Sadeian Woman'. Published 1979. Add MS 88899/1/71

The right to pleasure

This modern replica of a 19th-century porcelain dildo was commissioned by the founder of ethical sex shop Coco de Mer. It hints at the long history of sex toys and challenges perceptions about repressed Victorian attitudes to sex. For some, its connection with the penis makes it a symbol of patriarchy. For others, it's a practical toy that women can use when taking pleasure into their own hands.

Replica of a 19th-century dildo. On loan from Sammy Roddick

Tipping the Velvet

Sarah Waters' debut novel, 'Tipping the Velvet', offers a joyous celebration of lesbian love and sexual diversity. The book follows the adventures of Nan King, oyster girl turned music-hall star turned political activist, as she makes her way through the hidden yet vibrant lesbian world of the 1890s. This extract from Waters' manuscript sees Nan and her friend Kitty exploring London, a city ripe with cultural – and erotic – potential.

Sarah Waters, manuscript of 'Tipping the Velvet'. Published 1998. On loan from Sarah Waters

The myth of the normal family

This document is a draft of the Lesbian Custody Charter from the 1970s. It lists ten aims which show the kind of discrimination and difficulties faced by lesbian parents. The charter comes from the papers of Elizabeth Wilson and Angela Mason, a couple who were both very active in the Women's Liberation Movement. Mason conceived their daughter through artificial insemination, and lesbian and gay parenting was among the many issues on which they campaigned.

Typescript of the 'Lesbian Custody Charter'. 1970s.
On loan from LSE Library, 7EAW/E/12

An unmarried mother

This photograph shows suffragette and socialist campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst with her son Richard, born in 1927. Sylvia lived with Italian anti-Fascist publisher Silvio Corio for 30 years but they never married. She had Richard at the age of 45. Her mother Emmeline, who was standing for Parliament, was scandalised by Sylvia's 'illegitimate' child and never spoke to her again. Sylvia, who did not believe in marriage, refused to compromise her principles.

Photograph of Sylvia Pankhurst with her son, Richard.
© The Estate of Sylvia Pankhurst

Stereotypes and stigma

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN) was a UK-wide organisation active from 1990 to 2016. It was led by women from diverse ethnic backgrounds, many living in poverty. This guide from 2006 was written to help single parents set up their own self-help groups, which would better reflect their needs and help solve the problems they faced. SPAN also worked to counter stereotypes common in the 1990s of single parents as welfare scroungers and bad parents.

Single Parent Action Network, 'How to run a self-help group'. Bristol, 2006. YK.2009.b.4019

A Taste of Honey

Shelagh Delaney's play 'A Taste of Honey' was first performed in 1958. It explores the social stigma surrounding pregnancy outside of marriage, together with the devastating emotional impact on the women involved. In this extract from Delaney's original draft, Josephine - pregnant, penniless and unmarried - laments 'what am I going to do with this baby when it comes? I can't think what I'm going to do - I hope it dies or something'.

Shelagh Delaney, typescript of 'A Taste of Honey'.
Annotated by Joan Littlewood. First performed 1958.
dd MS 89164/8/75

Theatre Workshop's production of A Taste of Honey, premiered 1958. Clockwise from left: Avis Bunnage (Helen), Murray Melvin (Geof), Frances Cuka (Jo) and John Bay (Peter). © Photograph by John Spinner

Defending abortion rights

Throughout the 1970s, abortion rights marches like this one attracted thousands of supporters. The 1967 Abortion Act legalised abortion in England and Wales under certain conditions. It saved the lives of many women who would have died without access to abortion or from unsafe, illegal or self-induced terminations. These marches were a response to attempts to restrict the conditions and shorten the period of legal termination. Abortion rights campaigners still organise a March for Choice every year to defend these rights.

Photograph of a march for abortion rights, dated 3 April. 1970s. DEP 10962 4837

On trial for abortion

This Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) publication includes this list of people prosecuted for their roles in illegal abortions in September 1946. Founded by Janet Chance, Alice Jenkins, Joan Malleson and Stella Browne in 1936, ALRA threw light on the secret reality of unwanted pregnancies and unsafe terminations. They highlighted the difficulties faced by working-class women who didn't have access to private doctors and campaigned to change the law in the UK.

Janet Chance, Maud Ryan and Margot Edgecombe, 'Back-street surgery. A Study of the illegal operation, which is performed probably about 100,000 times a year in England and Wales'. 1947. 08416.d.82

Sexual double standards

Throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries, boys and girls were subjected to a sexual double standard. In this 1981 Mother's Union magazine 'Teenager', girls were warned that sexual encounters would lead to physical, social and psychological harm. Boys were simply warned off having sex with underage girls. Today, most schools aim to teach both boys and girls about sex the same way and emphasise the importance of mutual and informed consent.

Mother's Union, 'Teenager'. 1981. 4107.eee

The women's health bible

‘Our Bodies, Ourselves’ was self-published by a group of women in Boston, USA in 1971. Selling millions of copies, it changed the women's health movement around the world, combining evidence-based information with personal stories and experiences. The book dared to address sexuality and reproductive health, including abortion. It contained resources for support and political engagement. This British edition was published in 1978 and global editions are still being produced today.

‘Our Bodies, Ourselves’. UK, 1971. Private lender

A pro-consent revolution

This short and lively zine explains in a clear and direct way how to ask for consent. It sees honest and respectful communication as a necessary part of sexual relationships. The campaigners behind the zine want to equip young people with skills to talk about sex, to counter myths about rape, and aim for a world where no one has to experience sexual violence.

Caro Berry of Pretty in Punk, 'Towards a Pro-Consent Revolution'. London, 2013. British Library

The rapist who pays the rent

This provocatively titled publication from Women Against Rape persuasively put forward the case for changing the law on rape within marriage. It helped shift public opinion, and in 1991 the law was changed to recognise marital rape as a crime in England and Wales. The organisation now works closely alongside the Black Women's Rape Action Project, which focuses on justice for women of colour and has prevented the deportation of many rape survivors.

Women Against Rape, 'The Rapist Who Pays the Rent'.
Bristol, 1981. 84/11421

Hands off!

Women's self-defence classes emerged in the early 20th century when suffragettes campaigning for votes for women attended jiu-jitsu classes to learn how to defend themselves. This later book from the 1940s suggests techniques for resisting everyday physical harassment and demonstrates the growing awareness of violence against women during the 20th century. By the 1970s, self-defence classes for women were widely available.

W E Fairbairn, 'Defence for Women'. London, 1942.
7917.aa.20

Safe haven

Founded in 1974, the National Women's Aid Federation created a UK-wide network of refuges for women and children experiencing violence in the home. Women's Aid fought for domestic violence to be recognised as a crime at a time when the police, doctors and the judiciary saw it as a private affair. This information pack was distributed to show professionals how to recognise signs of domestic violence and how to respond. Today, domestic and sexual abuse refuges struggle to continue providing services due to lack of funds.

Information pack from the National Women's Aid Federation.
1978. X.0529/529

Safety and independence

This photograph shows three women in the kitchen of a women's refuge for survivors of domestic violence. Two prepare a meal for residents, while the other repairs electrical fittings. In the late 1970s, many women's refuges were opened. They offered a safe space for women experiencing violence. They had empowerment at their core and aimed to support women to gain skills and confidence so they could shape their own futures.

Photograph of women rewiring a kitchen in a refuge for battered women, South London © Maggie Murray/ Format Photographers Archive at Bishopsgate Institute

Sisterhood & solidarity

Southall Black Sisters (SBS) is a not-for-profit, secular and inclusive organisation which was established in 1979 in West London to meet the needs of Black and minority women. This annual report from 1994-1995 shows how SBS challenged gender-related violence and related issues locally and nationally, and supported women in their fight to assert their human rights to justice, equality and freedom. SBS has also led on campaigns against immigration controls, religious fundamentalism and forced marriage.

Southall Black Sisters annual report. 1994-1995. On loan from Southall Black Sisters

‘Chart of slavery’

In 1989 Kiranjit Ahluwalia was imprisoned for life for setting fire to her husband. Her conviction for murder was overturned on appeal in 1992 on the basis that her original trial didn't consider the impact of the abuse she experienced in her marriage. This letter from Ahluwalia to her husband, which she described as a 'chart of slavery', was used as evidence of the abuse. At her appeal Ahluwalia stated, 'In jail I have seen women who fought for their rights... I too must become strong to make decisions on my own, for my future'.

Letter from Kiranjit Ahluwalia to her husband. On loan from Southall Black Sisters

Collective campaigning

Southall Black Sisters campaigned tirelessly to appeal against Kiranjit Ahluwalia's conviction. They mobilised public opinion through meetings, pickets, demonstrations and media coverage. They joined forces with other women's groups, campaigning for abused women who kill and highlighting the male bias of the criminal justice system. The Ahluwalia case raised awareness of domestic violence in the legal system and changed the law on provocation.

Leaflet produced by Southall Black Sisters. 1990/1991.
Banner above: Designed by Shakila Taranum Maan of Southall Black Sisters. On loan from Southall Black Sisters

Nameless and Friendless

Emily Mary Osborn's painting 'Nameless and Friendless' highlights the vulnerability of single women in Victorian society. Possibly inspired by Anne Brontë's novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the painting shows a woman in mourning dress, attempting to make a living by selling her artwork. Caught between the aloof dealer and the leering young men, her future is uncertain. Should her paintings fail to find favour, prostitution may be her only option.

Emily Osborn, 'Nameless and Friendless. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, etc." Proverbs. x.15'. 1857. On loan from Tate: Purchased with assistance from Tate Members, the Millwood Legacy and a private donor in 2009

MIND

Mind

Women have fought hard to be recognised as intellectually equal to men.

To reach their full potential and have their contributions valued, women have had to break down barriers in education, work and politics.

Even now, low-paid, insecure and part-time jobs are disproportionately done by women.

In this section, explore how inequality has affected the way women have been educated, the work they do, and their presence in political life.

Education

Do you believe in equal education?

Children and students in the UK have had unequal access to education based on gender, race and class.

For centuries, it was common for girls and boys to be educated differently. Women were seen as less intelligent and were educated for specific roles like domestic servants, teachers and housewives.

From the Enlightenment to the present, activists have recognised education as central to achieving equality.

Right: 'I really wanted to be a mechanic, but there were no apprenticeships for women'. © Liz Mackie.

Stemettes

We're an organisation that creates vibrant learning environments with the support of the STEM industry. We encourage girls and non-binary people to explore Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths through our creative events, mentoring programmes, hackathons and our online Stemettes Society for Stemettes aged 13+. With our sister charity Stemettes Futures, we aim to raise the number of women in core STEM roles to over 30% in the UK and beyond.

Lessons in domestic economy

Until the mid-19th century, girls were far more likely to be educated at home than at a school – if they received an education at all. Even afterwards, school curriculums emphasised different gender roles. For girls, domestic subjects were prioritised, including cleaning, cooking and caring for young children. These tasks were re-branded as a new discipline: ‘domestic economy’. This course book, ‘The Marshfield Maidens’, aimed to teach girls some of these different domestic duties.

S S Wigley, ‘Domestic Economy: Or, The Marshfield Maidens and the Fairy Ordina: A consecutive narrative, embracing a complete course of domestic economy and training for home duties’. London, 1874. 012201.e.2

Life of a governess

In the 19th century, teaching became an option for unmarried, educated women who needed to earn their living. Author and former governess Charlotte Brontë wrote about the importance of financial and intellectual independence in this letter to her publisher, whose daughter was considering becoming a governess: ‘A governess’s experience is frequently indeed bitter, but its results are precious: the mind, feeling, temper are there subjected to a discipline equally painful and priceless’.

Letter from Charlotte Brontë to W S Williams. 1848.
Egerton MS 2829

Learning to read, learning to conform

By the 1960s most children attended co-educational schools, but teaching materials still stressed different roles for girls and boys. This Ladybird children's reader, first published in the 1960s, not only taught children to read their first words, but also reinforced traditional gender roles. Part of the Key Words series, the book was republished as recently as 2014 in the UK and many Commonwealth countries. The series shows a white, middle-class, heterosexual family as the norm and does not represent the diversity of families in the UK.

Writing for Black British children

Born in Guyana, the novelist Beryl Gilroy became the first Black head teacher in London in 1969. She wrote books for children learning to read with stories that Black, Asian and minority ethnic children in Britain could relate to. This example was inspired by a student in her class in the UK who was tired because he and his parents had stayed up late hosting 'A Visitor from Home'. She also wrote books for children in Guyana that reflected their everyday lives, unlike Ladybird books imported from the UK.

Beryl Gilroy, 'A Visitor from Home'. London, 1973.
British Library

Beryl Gilroy © The Estate of Beryl Gilroy

Education, protest & friendship

This banner was made by members of the British Library adult learning course Bombs to Birth Control, which explored suffrage history. Each member created a square which Jo Woodworth, a course participant, sewed together. The group took the banner on the suffrage centenary march in London in 2018. Adult education provided by local authorities and libraries supports learning outside an academic environment, often fostering life-long friendships. The Bombs to Birth Control members still meet regularly.

Bombs to Birth Control banner. 2018. On loan from the Suffrage Study Group

Fighting racism in education

In mainstream schools, children from diverse ethnic backgrounds have experienced marginalisation and prejudice, and have been disproportionately excluded or identified as disruptive pupils. Education was an important area in Black women's activism in the 1970s. These documents show plans for a supplementary school run by the Organisation for Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD). It taught English, Science and Maths, but also included Black History to show pupils positive representations of Black cultural and political achievements.

Letter and plan relating to supplementary schools organised at an OWAAD conference. 1980. On loan from the Black Cultural Archives

The fight for higher education

Sophia Jex-Blake led a long campaign to be admitted to study medicine at Edinburgh University. In this book, 'Medical Women', she chronicles her efforts and the vicious opposition she faced. In 1869, she and six other women finally became the first female students to be officially enrolled at a UK university. Known as the Edinburgh Seven, they weren't allowed to graduate and had to take exams abroad to qualify as doctors.

Sophia Jex-Blake, 'Medical Women: A Thesis and History'.
Edinburgh, 1886. 7687.aa.10.

'Sophia Jex-Blake' by Samuel Lawrence. 1865. By kind
permission of the Royal Society of Medicine, London

No place for you maids

In 1897 crowds protested against the University of Cambridge granting degrees to women. These fireworks and confetti were used in the protest, which included an effigy of a woman on a bicycle dangling from a building. Banners warned women to return to women-only colleges, stating: 'Here is no place for you maids'. The first woman to receive a Cambridge University degree was the Queen Mother, who was granted an honorary degree in 1948.

Confetti and fireworks used in the protests. 1897. On loan from the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, Ms Synd. 11.31, -h Ms Doc.812.

Image above: Protests against the full admission of female students to Cambridge University, around 1897 © Hulton Archive/Getty Images

The great divide

In the 1970s and 1980s, progressive institutions such as the Open University started to provide flexible and part-time courses that allowed many women with caring responsibilities to advance their education and careers. This textbook is from a module entitled ‘The Great Divide: The sexual division of labour, or “is it art”?’ and was shaped by feminist ideas. It was from the Open University’s pioneering ‘Art and Environment’ programme, established in 1987.

The Open University, ‘The Great Divide: The Sexual Division of Labour, or “Is it Art?”’. Milton Keynes, 1976. X.512/5218

A working-class scholar

Access to higher education has varied greatly according to class. In the interwar period, Hillcroft College aimed to give opportunities to working-class female students. Winifred Relph's memoir 'Through Rough Ways' chronicles her work as a nanny until she receives a scholarship to study at Hillcroft College. Relph's memoir records her political involvement, which was linked to her determination to study. She also attempted to organise domestic workers into a union.

Winifred Relph, transcript of 'Through Rough Ways'.
On loan from Brunel University London Library,
Burnett 2:657

Doctor of Medicine

The Indian physician and feminist Rukhmabai was one of the first practising women doctors in colonial India. The National Indian Association supported her by raising funds for her education. This photograph shows her as a student of the London School of Medicine for Women, where she received the title of Doctor of Medicine in 1894. Rukhmabai was also an activist for greater social freedom for women in India.

Photograph of Rukhmabai with other students at the London School of Medicine for Women. Courtesy of UCL Special Collections

Philanthropic imperial feminism

The National Indian Association (NIA), founded by Mary Carpenter in 1870, is an example of one of many philanthropic associations set up by British women dedicated to social reform in the Empire. This minute book from 1871 references the intention to ‘uplift’ Indian women’s social position through education. Such activism strengthened Britain’s imperial ties in India while positioning white British women as superior to the non-Western women they set out to ‘save’.

Minute Book of the National Indian Association. 1871-72.
MSS Eur F147/2

From literature to law

Cornelia Sorabji was the first female graduate of Bombay University. In 1892, she became the first woman ever to take the Bachelor of Civil Laws exam, which she sat at Somerville College, Oxford University. In this letter to her family from her time at Oxford, she writes about her decision to switch from a Literature degree to study Law. She later returned to India, where she spent decades providing legal advice to women.

Letter from Cornelia Sorabji to her family. Around 1889-92.
MSS Eur F165/2

Cornelia Sorabji © National Portrait Gallery, London

Women's studies

The Women's Research and Resources Centre, established in 1975, created resources like these pamphlets for people interested in the emerging field of women's studies. The Centre built one of the largest collections of feminist material in the UK and is now known as the Feminist Library. The first Masters Course in Women's Studies was set up at the University of Kent in 1980.

Caroline Morrell, "Black Friday" and violence against women in the suffragette movement'. London, 1981. X.529/55893

Jan Bradshaw, Wendy Davies, Patricia de Wolfe, 'Women's studies courses in the UK'. London, 1981. X.529/53408

Political presence

Who runs the world?

It took decades of campaigning, disobedience and unrest for the first women to win the right to vote in the UK.

Although the first female MP took her seat in 1919, it wasn't until 1928 that women could vote on the same terms as men.

Today, just over a third of MPs in the House of Commons are female and they disproportionately face sexist and racist abuse.

Right: 'Sexist organisation'. © Grizelda/Private Eye.

The Fawcett Society

We are the UK's leading membership charity focused on gender equality and women's rights. Named after Millicent Fawcett who led the constitutional campaign for votes for women, we're the only national organisation rooted in the suffrage movement. Our vision is a society in which women and girls in all their diversity are equal and truly free to fulfil their potential.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Mary Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', first published in 1792, is one of the founding works of feminist philosophy. The book argues that women should be educated so they can take an active role in shaping society. Although admired in liberal circles, the book met with hostility elsewhere. The politician and writer Horace Walpole notoriously described Wollstonecraft as a 'hyena in petticoats'.

Mary Wollstonecraft, 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'.
London, 1792. C.60.i.1

If women get the vote...

This political cartoon from 1853 by George Cruikshank imagines the disastrous effects of granting women the vote. The gentlemen's candidate, the dour political economist Screw Driver, stands ignored. In contrast, the ladies' candidate, the dashing Mr Darling - with his offer of weekly parliamentary balls - receives adoring doe-eyed glances from the women. Although satirical, the cartoon highlights the then widespread belief that women were too frivolous to consider weighty political matters.

George Cruikshank, "The Rights of Women", or The Effects of Female Enfranchisement', The Comic Almanack. 1853.
P.P.2496.aa

The anti-suffragist view

Not all women supported the campaign for votes for women. In this diary, Albinia Yate-Lee recorded her anti-suffrage views. On the 26th March 1909 she attended an anti-suffrage meeting that was disrupted by suffragettes and 'some men friends' she believed were 'very common street men'. She described the suffragettes as 'degrading' themselves. She wrote elsewhere: 'I am more convinced that we are not yet ready for the vote if we ever are'.

A royal activist

Sophia Duleep Singh, daughter of the deposed prince of the Punjab, was one of Queen Victoria's goddaughters. Singh used her status to support campaigns for women's suffrage in the UK. These records from 1913 show how the British State subjected her to heavy surveillance, but they could not stop her activism. She donated money to the militant Women's Social and Political Union's 'war chest' and refused to pay tax with the Women's Tax Resistance League.

Records of surveillance carried out on Sophia Duleep Singh.
IOR L/PS/11/52

Sophia Duleep Singh selling copies of *The Suffragette* ©
Historic Collection/Alamy

A political awakening

Sophia Duleep Singh and her exiled family were banned from travelling to India by the British. In late 1906, however, the government gave her permission to visit, though they kept her under surveillance. During the visit, her interest in Indian nationalism was stirred after hearing the 'self-sufficiency' movement activist Lajpat Rai speak. In this diary entry, Singh describes Rai's speech as 'beautiful' and celebrates him as a 'wonderful speaker. A noble and unselfish man.'

For King, country and empire

In 1915 'The Suffragette', the newspaper of the Women's Social and Political Union, was renamed 'Britannia'. This new name was designed to show the WSPU's support for the war effort and the fight to protect Britain and its empire. The WSPU and its postwar descendent, Christabel Pankhurst's Women's Party, took a resolutely pro-empire line and supported policies which suppressed the rights and freedoms of colonised women living under British rule.

The politics of solidarity

The All India Women's Conference (AIWC), established in 1926, was one of several women's associations in India who campaigned on issues such as suffrage, education and health. The card reproduced in this 1970s souvenir booklet was sent to the AIWC from British women's groups active in the 1920s. It shows how relations between some British women's groups and women's organisations based in India were changing in the 1920s, moving from colonial 'salvation' towards political solidarity.

Souvenir booklet from the All India Women's Conference.
1973. MSS Eur F341/12

Elected representative, radical revolutionary

This biography celebrates the achievements of Constance Markievicz, the first woman elected to Parliament. The 1918 Representation of the People Act gave the vote to women over 30 who met certain property requirements. Women over 21 could stand for Parliament. A leading member of the Irish Republican Party Sinn Féin, Markievicz was imprisoned in Holloway at the time. She refused allegiance to the King and didn't take up her seat.

Seán O'Faoláin, 'Constance Markievicz; or, The average revolutionary: a biography'. London, 1934. 010825.ee.3

A woman's place is in the House

This edition of 'The New Illustrated' celebrates wealthy American-born heiress Nancy Astor becoming the first woman to take her seat in the House of Commons in 1919. She won the former seat of her husband 2nd Viscount Waldorf Astor and served as a Conservative MP until 1945. She backed legislation on women's rights but, like many of her aristocratic friends, she held racist – particularly anti-Semitic – and anti-Catholic views.

‘Red Ellen’

Many of us have heard about the men involved in founding the post-war welfare state, but MP Ellen Wilkinson’s story is less well-known. Plan for Peace set out Wilkinson’s vision for the welfare state. She co-wrote Labour’s 1945 election manifesto and, as chair of Labour’s National Executive, oversaw its approval. Attlee appointed her Minister of Education in the new government. In Parliament, she worked with MPs from all parties to champion legislation to extend women’s rights.

Ellen Wilkinson, ‘Plan for Peace’. London, 1945. 09138.aa.34

Ellen Wilkinson leading the Jarrow March, 1936 © National Portrait Gallery, London

Sara Ahmed

Born 1969

Sara Ahmed's work focuses on how power operates and can be challenged in institutional settings like the workplace. Her theories on migration, orientation, difference, and mixed identities draw on her own experiences. She resigned from her post as a professor at Goldsmiths, University of London, in protest at their failure to tackle sexual harassment. She has published nine books and shares her work in progress through her blog 'feministkilljoy'.

'To bring feminist theory home is to make feminism work in the places we live, the places we work. ... We use our particulars to challenge the universal.'

Simone de Beauvoir

1908–1986

Simone de Beauvoir was a French feminist, novelist, philosopher, activist, and social theorist. Feminists have drawn inspiration from de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex', published in 1949, to help understand women's oppression. Her work focuses on what it means for men and women to live as equals.

'The point is not for women simply to take power out of men's hands, since that wouldn't change anything about the world. It's a question precisely of destroying that notion of power.'

Work

What is work and how is it valued?

Women have always worked, though their work has often been low status and low paid – if paid at all.

Enslaved women had to fight for their freedom. Women in the workforce have campaigned for equal opportunities, better conditions and fair pay.

Huge progress has been made, but women still face barriers in male-dominated industries. And working-class and ethnic minority women more often do low-paid, insecure work.

Right: Riana Duncan, 'That's an excellent suggestion, Miss Triggs...', published in 'Punch', 8 January 1988. Punch Cartoon Library/TopFoto.

United Voices of the World

We are a community and campaigning trade union. We are predominantly migrant women and we are unapologetic in our fight for dignity and respect at work.

We use direct action and the law to fight back. We will not stop until we have a living wage, equality and safe workplaces for everyone.

We are silent no more because when migrant women rise, we all rise.

‘The angel of Charleston’

In the early 20th century, one in ten British women worked as domestic servants. This diary kept by Grace Higgens provides a unique insight into servant life. She was cook and housekeeper for over fifty years for artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. She managed their domestic lives, enabling them to paint and write. The whole family, including Bell’s sister Virginia Woolf, praised her cooking. Higgens collected recipes like this one for lemon ice cream.

Diary of Grace Higgens. 1960–61. Add MS 83219

Grace Higgens © Howard Grey

Self-taught businesswomen

Dame Carmen Callil founded feminist publishing company Virago Press in 1973. She worked closely with Harriet Spicer, whose accountancy and business skills were central to Virago's success over the next two decades. These notes from the late 1970s detail how to 'master' the financial side of book publishing. Spicer and Callil were determined to teach themselves the skills they needed to run a successful, female-led publishing company.

Harriet Spicer's notes on how to run a publishing company.
1976. Add MS 89178/1/6

Women defending the realm

In both the First and Second World War, women did work previously done by men. This Ministry of Defence poster from the Second World War encouraged women to volunteer for the Civil Defence Service. 500,000 women served, including many from India. They undertook fire watch duties, drove ambulances, provided medical assistance and rescued civilians after bombing raids. Volunteers had to fit these tasks around their daily lives, including jobs and caring for families.

Ministry of Information, 'Indians in Civil Defence'. 1939-45.
B.S.51/29

When the war is over

This government poster shows the wide range of jobs carried out by women during the Second World War. Conscription for women was introduced in 1941. By 1945, millions of women worked to support or supply the military, often in roles traditionally done by men. However, women were not paid the same as men. Most women were forced out of their jobs when the men returned, and the childcare and flexible working available during the war disappeared.

Ministry of Information, 'The women of Britain are mobilised to win'. 1939-45. B.S.51/29

‘Proud of my uniform, proud of the way I nursed’

When the NHS needed nurses in the 1950s, thousands of Caribbean and African women answered the call. Faced with racism, they had to fight for recognition and career progression. This uniform belongs to Beverley Chapman, who migrated to London from Jamaica in 1969 aged 18 and trained as a midwife. In a 2016 BBC documentary, Chapman spoke about her pride in her uniform and the silver buckle her family gave her when she qualified.

Nurse's uniform, belt buckle and pin-badges. 1960s.
On loan from Beverley Chapman, Retired Nursing Sister

The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole

This popular autobiography by Mary Seacole, published in 1857, describes how she tended to soldiers during the Crimean War. Seacole had learned nursing skills, including hygiene and herbal remedies, from her mother who was a Jamaican doctress (a traditional physican and pharmacist), and by observing military doctors. Formal training of nurses was pioneered in the 19th century by Florence Nightingale and Eva Luckes. Seen as women's work, nursing was categorised as less skilled than other areas of healthcare.

Mary Seacole, 'The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole'.
London, 1846. 12601.h.20

Migrating for work

Many Indian women worked for British families in India as ayahs, or nannies. Ayahs were separated from their own families, and many travelled to Britain with the families they worked for. Over 100 travelling ayahs visited the UK every year. These are the passports of two ayahs who came to Britain in the 1930s. One ayah is identified as Josephine. The other passport doesn't record a name. Today, domestic service and childcare roles are still often done by immigrant women, many of whom are separated from their families.

Passports for Josephine and an unnamed woman working as an ayah. 1935-36. India Office Records. IOR/L/PJ/11/4/1486: 1935 and IOR/L/PJ/11/5/396: 1936

Finding a way home

Ayahs travelled with the families they worked for from economic necessity, working their passage from India to Britain and back. Others came because of their attachment to the children they cared for. Some sought travel and adventure, making the journey frequently. While some settled in Britain, these adverts were placed on behalf of ayahs discharged in the UK who wanted to advertise their services for a return passage.

Adverts for ayahs' services in 'The Homeward Mail'. July 1911.

Welcoming women into science

Dame Anne McLaren was committed to opening up the field of science to more women and promoting the careers of female scientists. The first woman to be Vice President of the Royal Society, she facilitated discussions like the ones recorded in these notes. She participated in seminars as a founding member of the Cambridge Association of Women in Science & Engineering, listing here issues like positive action, childcare and flexible working arrangements.

Anne McLaren's notes from a Royal Society meeting group discussion about women in science. Add MS 89202/9/18 1996-2006.

Anne McLaren's notes from a series of lectures by the Association of Women in Science and Engineering. Add MS 89202/9/19 1990-1998

Building equality

Before the rise of craft guilds and unions in the 19th century shut women out of apprenticeships, women had worked in the building trade. In the early 20th century, women only worked in construction during wartime. From the 1970s, local authorities started training schemes like this one, aimed at women, to increase the labour force available for housebuilding. Today women form 13% of the building workforce, but only 6% of manual trades like carpentry and plumbing.

W E B Builders, 'Women's Education in Building: a training scheme in the building trades for women'. DEP 10962 2382

Kicking the ban

These boots belong to Hope Powell, footballer and manager. From 1921 to 1971, the Football Association (FA) effectively banned women's football. However, women continued to play in defiance of the ban. Blocked by the FA from representing her school, Powell went on to forge a 20-year playing career, including 66 England caps. In 1998 Powell became the first woman to manage England Women.

Football boots belonging to Hope Powell. On loan from Hope Powell

Hope Powell on the pitch © PA Images

A secure footing for England women's football

The UEFA Pro Licence is the highest coaching qualification in European football. In 2003 Hope Powell became the first English woman to gain the qualification. Appointed in 1998 as England Women's first full-time manager, she developed the game for women and girls at all levels. England players were not paid under central contracts until 2009. While Mo Marley briefly acted as a caretaker manager, Powell remains the only woman to have managed the team on a permanent basis.

UEFA Pro Licence belonging to Hope Powell.
On loan from Hope Powell



Pressing for legal change

The 2004 Gender Recognition Act (GRA) was a landmark law that allowed people who met the Act's requirements to obtain a replacement birth certificate showing their acquired gender. The GRA was the outcome of a decade of activism led by Press for Change. In 1996 the organisation brought a legal case which established the first law preventing discrimination of trans people in employment. This letter from Alex Allan recognises Burns' contribution to the campaign for trans rights.

Letter from Alex Allan to Christine Burns. January 2005.
On loan from Christine Burns

bell hooks

Born 1952

The work of American academic bell hooks focuses on the intersection of race, gender and class, and the question of how to make feminism more inclusive. She exposes racism within the feminist movement and stresses that overturning racism and sexism involves men and women together.

‘I choose to re-appropriate the term “feminism,” ... to be “feminist” in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression.’

‘Workers united will never be defeated’

Women have often protested against poor working conditions and for better pay. In 1976 workers at the Grunwick film processing plant, who were mostly Asian women, took to the streets on strike to demand their rights. The strikers won widespread backing, and their protests attracted thousands of supporters. This handpainted banner pictures some of the women protesting. It was displayed at one of the protests between 1976-1978.

Workers united will never be defeated banner. 1976-78.
On loan from People's History Museum

White privilege

This letter shows how women's interests have been divided by class and race. In 1833, when slavery was abolished in the British Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape, the state agreed taxpayers would foot the bill to compensate slave owners. The final compensation bill was about £16.5 billion in today's money. Dorothy Little's letter to the compensation committee details her dependence on her income from enslaved people she owned. She valued women particularly as they 'doubled their number' by having children.

Letter from Dorothy Little to a slavery compensation committee. May 1834. On loan from The National Archives, UK. T 71/1608 – 539

Campaigning for abolition

This handout was produced between 1825 and 1833 by the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, who called for a boycott of sugar produced by enslaved labour. Abolitionists first boycotted sugar in 1791. Slavery was abolished in the British Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape in 1833. Abolitionists such as Anne Knight and Eliza Wigham later campaigned for women's suffrage.

Leaflet calling for families to boycott West Indian sugar. 1825-33. Reproduced courtesy of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain

Mary Prince's story

Mary Prince was born in Bermuda to an enslaved family of African descent. She dictated this book, 'A History of Mary Prince – related by herself', after she had been brought to London in 1828 and escaped. It was the first account of the life of a Black woman published in Britain, though it was transcribed and edited by white British abolitionists. Prince's description of her enslavement and the brutality she experienced helped turn public opinion against slavery.

Mary Prince, 'A History of Mary Prince – related by herself'.
London, 1831. 8157.bbb.30

One woman's freedom, another woman's oppression

Charlotte Brontë's novel 'Jane Eyre', first published in 1847, follows a young woman's journey from childhood to independence. Shown here, in Brontë's manuscript, is the scene where Jane discovers she is suddenly a wealthy woman, having unexpectedly inherited her uncle's property. What remains unstated, however, is that her uncle's wealth came from the Madeira wine trade and the exploitation of enslaved labour.

Charlotte Brontë, manuscript of 'Jane Eyre'. Published 1847.
Add MS 43476

Welfare reform

From the 1920s, Eleanor Rathbone had campaigned for a family allowances benefit that would pay a 'wage' to mothers in recognition of their economic contribution to society. Rathbone's ideas were championed by William Beveridge and influenced his thinking on post-war welfare reforms. In this letter from 1945, Rathbone wrote to Beveridge asking him to support her argument that this benefit should be paid directly to 'wives', enabling women some economic independence.

Letter from Eleanor Rathbone to William Beveridge. April 1945. On loan from LSE Library, BEVERIDGE/6/10

What is a housewife worth?

This magazine was published in the UK by Wages for Housework, an international movement which included working-class and migrant women, lesbians, sex workers and women of colour. They campaigned for wages from the state for 'housework'. This was the hidden labour women did in the home as mothers, wives, cleaners, cooks, carers and lovers. Active throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Wages for Housework argued capitalism would collapse without women's unpaid domestic work.

International Wages for Housework Campaign, 'Mother's Money'. 1978. ZD.9.b.2777

Wages for wives

This 1936 article in 'Woman To-day', produced by the Women's World Committee against War and Fascism, debates an enduring feminist question: should women be paid for domestic work? The issue was particularly relevant in the interwar years, when a 'marriage bar' was introduced in certain occupations. This forced many women to resign from their jobs after marriage. They were prevented from earning a wage, but worked many hours in the home.

A day in the life of a housewife

Writer and sociologist Ann Oakley argued that housework had been ignored as work by social scientists. These research notes come from a study where she interviewed 40 housewives about their lives. They show the demanding daily schedule of one woman with five children – and how little time she had to herself. Oakley published this research in ‘The Sociology of Housework’ and ‘Housewife’ in 1974. She has written books and articles on childbirth, gender, and the history and methodology of social science.

Ann Oakley’s research notes. DEP 11139

Ann Oakley © Theo Chalmers

Breaking their chains

Through hours of hard labour, the imprint of a woman's hand is etched into the handle of this chainmaker's hammer from Cradley Heath in the Midlands. In 1910, in a strike organised by trade unionist Mary Macarthur, the Cradley Heath chainmakers galvanised national opinion against women's low pay and sweated labour. Their case was a crucial test for minimum wage laws and their victory benefited women and men alike.

Chainmaker's hammer and chain. 20th century.
On Loan from BLACK COUNTRY LIVING MUSEUM TRUST

‘We are the lions, Mr Manager’

This poster celebrates the strike led by women at the Grunwick film processing works in London from 1976 to 1978. Led by Jayaben Desai, the mainly Asian female workforce struck in protest at degrading and racist treatment, and claimed their right to join a trade union. Their dispute shattered stereotypes and challenged racism in the trade union movement. Even though support was widespread, the original striking workers were not reinstated.

Dan Jones, ‘Look back at Grunwick’. 1978. On loan from Bishopsgate Institute

Fighting for equal pay today

This leaflet celebrates the strike by more than 8,000 women employed in homecare, schools and nurseries, and cleaning and catering services across Glasgow in 2018. The 48-hour strike was supported by male council workers in different jobs. It ended a 12-year dispute against discriminatory job evaluations that penalised those working less than 36 hours. Thousands of women working part-time or on split shifts won compensation.

Glasgow Equal Pay Campaign, 'A Grand Day Out'. 2019.
On loan from Unison, Glasgow City Branch

To fight, to struggle, to right the wrong

Women were excluded from many early trade unions. In 1906 union organiser Mary Macarthur founded the National Federation of Women Workers, which won higher pay for women in many disputes. An agitator and organiser, she founded the union's monthly newspaper 'The Woman Worker' to put women's campaigns and interests centre stage. Sold for a penny, it became weekly when it reached 20,000 subscribers.

'The Woman Worker'. September 1907. LOU.LON 795

Mary Macarthur © Chronicle/Alamy

Strike!

This plate commemorates the 1968 strike by sewing machinists at Ford's Dagenham factory against discriminatory pay and grading. Joined by women at Ford's Halewood factory, they halted the company's UK car production. Their strike ended after Barbara Castle, the Secretary of State for Employment, intervened. She introduced the 1970 Equal Pay Act banning gender-based pay scales. The machinists won higher pay, challenged union attitudes and changed the law, but they were only re-graded in 1984 after striking again.

Plate commemorating the Dagenham Strike. 1985.
On loan from LSE Library, TWL/2010/04

Masked protest

In 1982 members of the English Collective of Prostitutes occupied Holy Cross Church in King's Cross for 12 days. Their protest was against police harassment, which prevented them working. Their cause drew widespread support. This photograph shows Labour MP Tony Benn and education campaigner Caroline Benn supporting the protest. Campaigner Selma James spoke for the Collective, saying 'In masks we had glimpsed what could happen: we created change.'

Photograph of Tony and Caroline Benn with the English Collective of Prostitutes, 1982. Reproduced courtesy of the English Collective of Prostitutes

Exposing abuse

Throughout history, many women have turned to prostitution as a means to earn enough to survive. In 1864 laws aiming to control the spread of disease in the armed forces legalised the forced vaginal examination of suspected prostitutes. Women could be subjected to physical inspection, while men were not. 'The Shield' was the newspaper of the Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts Association, led by Josephine Butler. It campaigned against these laws, which were repealed in 1886.

'The Shield'. 1870. NEWS4484

Swarm into action

This t-shirt was produced by SWARM, a sex worker's collective supporting the rights and safety of everyone who sells sexual services. They advocate decriminalisation of consensual adult sex work. Some feminists argue that sex work is sexual violence against women. Others fear legalisation risks normalising exploitation. However, the World Health Organisation and Anti-Slavery International are convinced by evidence that criminalisation exposes sex workers to increased violence and discrimination. 85% of the 73,000 sex workers in the UK are women.

Sex work as work

Juno Mac, sex worker, activist and co-author of 'Revolting Prostitutes', discusses sex workers' rights.

Duration: 2 minutes

Women's industrial work

In 1907 suffragette and socialist campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst toured women's workplaces in industrial areas to highlight poor working conditions and low wages. Chainmakers working from home were paid a pittance and faced long hours and harsh conditions. They would also have to look after their children, who would sometimes work alongside them. Sylvia was an artist and painted the women she visited. This painting shows a chainmaker at work by the furnace in a back-yard chainshop in Cradley Heath.

Sylvia Pankhurst, 'Cradley Heath Chainmaker'. 1907.
Private lender

VOICE

Voice

Despite all attempts to silence and misrepresent them, women have found radical ways to make themselves heard.

Change doesn't happen unless we all speak up and amplify the voices that are often drowned out. The #MeToo movement has shown the power of women's collective voices, but has also revealed how far there is still to go.

In this section, discover the creative ways women and their allies have protested, remembered forgotten histories and expressed their visions for a better world.

Protest and partnership

How do you change the world?

Mass marches, peaceful sit-ins, petitions, strikes, international conferences, Twitter storms and civil disobedience.

These are only some of the powerful ways women and their allies have channelled their anger and sense of injustice to demand social and legislative change.

But change never happens easily. Activists have to be tenacious, imaginative and collaborative to transform the world.

Right: ‘...wonderous web...’. © Kate Evans.

Women for Refugee Women

We are a London-based charity that empowers refugee and asylum-seeking women to advocate for themselves. We run activities to build their skills and confidence and partner with arts organisations and influential women to amplify their voices. Our #SetHerFree campaign against the detention of refugee women has achieved real change, including a 72-hour time limit on the detention of pregnant women. We believe that every woman who crosses borders to seek safety deserves dignity and liberty, and the chance to rebuild her life.

Writ on a cold slate

Many women's rights activists have been prepared to face prison for their actions. Suffragette and newspaper editor Sylvia Pankhurst was jailed for 'seditious activity' in 1921. In Holloway Prison, she wrote protest poems, some on prison toilet paper - such as this extract from the poem 'Unto the Birds' - and some on paper smuggled in by supporters. The poems, which explore the traumatic impact of being incarcerated, force-fed and manhandled, were later published together in this volume titled 'Writ On Cold Slate'.

Sylvia Pankhurst, 'Unto the Birds'. 1921. Add MS 88925/1/1 & 'Writ on Cold Slate'. London, 1922. 011645.df.49

‘The March of the Women’

Ethel Smyth’s ‘The March of the Women’ became the official anthem of the Women’s Social and Political Union. The song, composed in 1910 to words by Cicely Hamilton, was first performed in 1911 by the Suffrage Choir to mark the release of activists from prison. This pamphlet, published by The Woman’s Press, was easily portable and perfectly designed for distribution at rallies. The song has since been used widely on other women’s marches.

‘The March of the Women’. London, 1911. I.600.d

Ethel Smyth © National Portrait Gallery, London

Recipes for resistance

Compiled by Aubrey Dowson, a member of the Birmingham branch of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies, this recipe book was published in 1912 to raise funds for the campaign for female suffrage. The recipes were donated by suffragists from across the country. Tenacity and courage were key to the suffrage campaign, but so too was humour – as demonstrated by this recipe ‘For Cooking and Preserving a Good Suffrage Speaker.’

‘The Women’s suffrage cookery book compiled by Mrs Aubrey Dowson’. London, 1912. RB.23.a.34247

All aboard the Caravan of Peace

In May 1958, at the height of the Cold War, 12 feminist peace campaigners led by writer Dora Russell travelled in convoy to Communist countries in Eastern Europe. They collected signatures and artworks from those who embraced their gesture of friendship and solidarity and bound them together. This is the cover they created for their collection. Their journey symbolised the spirit of peaceful protest and feminist internationalism that blossomed in the 20th century.

Album cover from the peace caravan. 1958. On loan from the Feminist Archive South, held at the University of Bristol Library Special Collections. DM2123/ 7/Drawer 4

Cutting the wire

Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was a series of protest camps set up against nuclear missiles being placed at RAF Greenham Common in Berkshire. The camps began in September 1981 and remained active for 19 years. The protests included encircling the nuclear base and cutting through the fence wire, an act of vandalism which was a criminal offence. This wire was cut by friends of the writer Angela Carter and sent to her as a present.

Weaving webs of peace

This shawl consists of dozens of individual spider web patterns crocheted by the women protestors at Greenham Common and sewn together. The motif of the spider's web became a common sight at the peace camps. Webs symbolised strength and the way in which Greenham itself was often encircled by protestors. The design also highlighted the unity and perseverance of the protestors, along with the connections between all peace movements.

Shawl from Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp.
On loan from the Feminist Archive South, held at the
University of Bristol Library Special Collections.
DM2123/1/Archive Box 23

The politics of access

This is the first newsletter published by Sisters Against Disablement (SAD), a small but influential activist group set up in the early 1980s. SAD confronted the ableism of the feminist movement by picketing events held in inaccessible venues. They also developed the 'SAD Access Code' to help activists organise fully inclusive events. In 1984 SAD members established Feminist Audio Books, a project that enabled visually impaired women to access feminist books and magazines.

Sisters Against Disablement newsletter. 1980s. On loan from the Feminist Archive South, held at the University of Bristol Library Special Collections. DM2123/5/Periodical 19

Whatever we wear, wherever we go

This edition of 'Spare Rib' features the UK's first 'Reclaim the Night' march, which took place in Leeds in November 1977. Women marched to protest against the police requesting women to stay at home after dark in response to the 'Yorkshire Ripper' murders. The candlelit night-time marches demanded freedom from sexual violence and harassment and protested against victim-blaming advice. Reclaim the Night marches still take place across the country today.

'Spare Rib'. January 1978. Private lender.

‘A feminine philosopher’

The philosopher John Stuart Mill developed his ideas about women’s rights with his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill. He published ‘The Subjection of Women’ in 1869, which argued that allowing women equal opportunities in education and employment would benefit society. The author of this satirical piece disagreed. Mill’s declaration that women have ‘proved themselves capable of everything [...] that is done by men’, for example, is dismissed as ‘a hazardous assertion’.

Censored

George Bernard Shaw's play 'Mrs Warren's Profession', about a former prostitute turned brothel keeper, argues that prostitution arises from economic necessity and not from moral depravity. Shaw wrote the play in 1893 but struggled to get so controversial a subject past the theatre censors. It was not performed publicly until 1925. This proof copy includes Shaw's own amendments, highlighting his attempts to make his point while staying within the law.

George Bernard Shaw, 'Mrs Warren's Profession'. 1898.
Add MS 53654 H

‘I bailed her out’

Emmeline and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence were ardent campaigners for women's rights. In 1907 they founded the suffragette newspaper *Votes for Women*. They both served jail terms in 1912 for conspiracy to cause damage to property as part of a suffragette window-smashing campaign. Three years after Emmeline's death in 1954, Frederick remarried. In this letter to Sylvia Pankhurst, he mentions his second wife, Helen Craggs, also a former suffragette, noting 'I find that I bailed her out some 45 years ago!'

Letter from Frederick Pethwick-Lawrence to Sylvia Pankhurst. February 1957. Add MS 88925/1/13

The radical men's magazine

'Achilles Heel', which first appeared in 1978, explored the implications of feminism for men's lives and identities. It was written by a collective of mostly university-educated young men influenced by socialism and community politics. The magazine allowed men to discuss their own attitudes and behaviour as they sought to support women. It offered practical advice and provided a forum for questioning patriarchal society and challenging stereotypes about fatherhood.

Men against male violence

This t-shirt was designed to raise awareness of the White Ribbon Campaign, a movement of men and boys campaigning to end male violence towards women. The charity, founded in 1991, is active in over 60 countries and promotes a compassionate vision of masculinity through events and mentoring schemes. White Ribbon week, when men wear ribbons to show their support, starts on 25 November - the United Nations Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

T-shirt produced by the White Ribbon Campaign. 2019

Time's up

This jumpsuit was worn by a member of Sisters Uncut protesting on the red carpet at the 2018 BAFTA awards. They were protesting the government's domestic violence policies which they believed would see victims 'locked up in prison, locked out of refuges, and locked in to violent relationships'. Many female attendees wore black in support of the Time's Up movement and to highlight sexism and gender inequality in film.

Jumpsuit worn by Sisters Uncut protestors at the BAFTA awards. 2018. On loan from Sisters Uncut, designed by Niku Gupta

Sisters Uncut protesting at the UK premiere of the film Suffragette. 2015. © Tristan Fewings/Getty Images

Guerrilla poetry

On International Women's Day 2019, Sisters Uncut replaced adverts on London tube trains with posters mimicking Transport for London's Poems on the Underground series. They featured poems written by domestic violence survivors, sector workers and their allies, including this one titled 'Holloway Prison'. They gave a voice to silenced women and non-binary people. The group believed the government's Domestic Abuse Bill would further criminalise survivors of domestic violence and called for fully-funded specialist services instead.

Sisters Uncut, 'Holloway Prison', Poems on the Underground. 2019. Reproduced courtesy of Sisters Uncut

Banners

On loan from Southall Black Sisters:

‘Women march against male violence’, designed by Shakila Taranum Maan, 1986

‘Let’s put race back into equality’, designed by Shakila Taranum Maan, 2008

On loan from Bishopsgate Institute:

‘Hyde Park Gays - Sapphics’, Gay Pride, around 1995

‘Women’s Co-operative Guild - Weymouth Branch’, 1899

On loan from People’s History Museum:

National Federation of Women Workers banner, replica of 1914 original, around 1980

Dick, Kerr Preston Ladies Football quilt, around 1992

On loan from Sisters Uncut:

‘Non Una di Meno’, made by Niku Archer

From the Feminist Archive South, held at the University of Bristol Library Special Collections:

International Women’s Day Banner, Bath, 1980s (DM2123/Box 17)

Adrienne Rich

1929–2002

American poet and scholar Adrienne Rich argues that society's expectation of 'compulsory heterosexuality' sets women up in competition with each other. Her work refuses to accept this idea and focuses instead on female relationships as mothers and daughters, friends, and lovers. These relationships are fundamental in writing women back into history.

'Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.'

Audre Lorde

1934–1992

Writing as a Black ‘lesbian, mother, warrior, poet’, Audre Lorde confronted racism, sexism and homophobia and still inspires women to speak out. Her poetry burns with anger against injustice and her scholarship examines difference, identity, illness and mortality. She called out prejudice within the feminist movement as well as wider society.

‘I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.’

Recover

Where are all the women hiding?

Women have long been denied their place in history. The recovery of their stories – and the insistence on their importance – is a political act.

Feminist libraries and archives record evidence of women's lives and contributions. Artists, musicians, publishers and historians reissue forgotten works and tell new stories, shining a spotlight on women's experiences. But there are still many more histories to uncover.

Right: 'Dustbin of History'. © Jacky Fleming, from *The Trouble with Women*.

Glasgow Women's Library

We are the only Accredited Museum in the UK dedicated to women's lives, histories and achievements. Our collections represent the diversity of women's lives - from archives that document women's activism to objects charting the lives of women who did war work. Visitors come from all over the world to see our exhibitions, take part in our innovative learning and events programmes, and use our library.

Courage calls to courage everywhere

In 2017 campaigner Caroline Criado-Perez petitioned for a statue of a woman to be erected in Parliament Square. This sculpture is an artist's edition of the resulting commission, created by Gillian Wearing. It celebrates suffragist Millicent Fawcett, who campaigned for nearly 50 years for votes for women. The plinth includes 59 other suffrage supporters. It was unveiled in 2018, a century after the first women could vote. Despite her achievements, Fawcett's campaigns did not support the rights of colonised women.

Gillian Wearing, limited edition maquette of 'Courage Calls to Courage Everywhere'. 2018. Mixed Media. On Loan from The Cross Steele Family Collection

Changing the subject

This card catalogue drawer from the Feminist Library subject index is part of its innovative classification system. Unlike more conventional ways of organising information, it places women at the centre of the knowledge system rather than at the edges. Devised by feminist librarians in the early 1980s, and used by feminist libraries around the world, it is a work of feminist scholarship and activism.

Drawer from the Feminist Library's card catalogue.
On loan from the Feminist Library (London)

A living, breathing feminist space

This cartoon was printed in ‘Private Eye’ as part of the campaign to save the Feminist Library in London. The Library faced eviction after a rent increase by the local council in 2016. A crowd-funding campaign secured the Library’s future by providing funds to move to a new building. Archives like this one face considerable financial pressure and it is an ongoing struggle to keep them open to the public.

David Ziggy Greene, ‘Herstory in the making – scene & heard. Published in ‘Private Eye Magazine’, No.1413. March 2016.

Putting a stamp on history

These stamps from around the world commemorate women who have made a contribution to scientific research or practice. Commissioning a stamp is a deliberate act of public recognition through an everyday object. The women shown range from medical practitioners to aeronauts, physicists to botanists. There are very few stamp designs featuring women, and even fewer celebrating women of colour. Through international exchange, these stamps allow women's stories to be highlighted and gain an audience beyond their home country.

Collection of stamps celebrating female scientists.
British Library Philatelic Collection

A ‘most distinguished’ woman

Feminist campaigners have often turned to their predecessors for inspiration. This book by suffragist Millicent Fawcett celebrates Josephine Butler, a Victorian feminist well-known for campaigns to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts. It was published to mark the centenary of Butler’s birth in 1928. Fawcett admired Butler for what she saw as her moral qualities and commitment to ‘social purity’.

Millicent Garret Fawcett, ‘Josephine Butler: Her work and principles, and their meaning for the twentieth century’. London, 1928. X.808/9022

Inspiration from the past

Communist activist Claudia Jones has been an inspirational figure for generations of Black women activists. After Jones arrived in the UK in 1955, she established the Caribbean Carnival and the 'West Indian Gazette'. She believed cultural expression and community pride were vital ingredients in political struggle. In 1988 Camden Black Sisters made this booklet to revive the memory of Jones's life, connecting activists with the past and encouraging activism in the present.

Camden Black Sisters, 'Claudia Jones, 1915-1964: A Woman of our Times'. London, 1988. LD.37.a.200

Remembering Olive Morris

This photograph shows Olive Morris, an influential activist who campaigned against police brutality and for better housing and education. She co-founded the Brixton Black Women's Group and the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent. She died in 1979, aged 27. Her memory is kept alive by the Remembering Olive Morris Collective. They collected material relating to her activism, now held at Lambeth Archives, and set up a website celebrating her achievements.

Photograph of Olive Morris. On loan from the Black Cultural Archives

‘That little book’

In this letter to poet Frances Cornford, Virginia Woolf self-deprecatingly refers to ‘A Room of One’s Own’ as ‘that little book’. Published in 1929, it highlighted the way women’s writing was excluded from history. It became a landmark in feminist thinking, arguing for the recovery of women’s place in history and a new tradition of women’s writing. Since it was first published, it has never been out of print.

Letter from Virginia Woolf to Frances Cornford. December 1929. Add MS 58422

Anonymous Austen

Jane Austen's first novel, 'Sense and Sensibility', was published anonymously in 1811. This title page declares it was written 'By a Lady'. None of Austen's works published in her lifetime appeared under her name. At the time, openly pursuing a career as a professional writer was seen as unladylike. The secret of her authorship was only revealed after her death. Her work inspired later generations of women writers.

Jane Austen, 'Sense and Sensibility'. London, 1811.
C.71.bb.14

Becoming George Eliot

Mary Anne Evans took the masculine pen name George Eliot in 1857, at the age of 37, having published other works anonymously. She wanted to avoid the prejudiced reviews that came with writing under a female name. By the time she published this manuscript of 'Middlemarch', her identity was widely known, but Eliot chose to keep her pen name. She is one of the few female novelists still known by their male pseudonym.

George Eliot, manuscript of 'Middlemarch'. Published 1872.
Add MS 34037

Two become one

Under the pseudonym Michael Field, Katherine Harris Bradley and her niece and lover Edith Emma Cooper collaboratively published poetry and plays. This journal entry for July 1890 describes how they were concerned their real identity would become more widely known after the pair were introduced at a party as 'Michael Field'. They feared they would be subject to unwanted attention and disapproval. Despite early critical success, their work did lose favour after their identity became public.

Diary of Michael Field (Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper). 1890-1891. Add MS 46778

Women's voices in print

Dame Carmen Callil founded the Virago Press in 1973 with the aim of publishing both original works and out-of-print titles by neglected female writers. Along with other women's presses, Virago was instrumental in redressing the gender imbalance in British publishing. This poster from the mid-1980s highlights a selection of their titles. With their distinctive green spines and bold use of cover artwork, the books were a commercial as well as a critical success.

Virago modern classics poster. 1985. Add MS 88904/5/3

Dame Carmen Callil. Photograph © Polly Borland, 1999.

Back in print

Buchi Emecheta's draft of her first novel was burnt by her husband, but she was determined to pursue her writing. This is a draft of her first book, 'In the Ditch', which was published in 1972. It drew on her experience of racism in the UK as a British-Nigerian woman. Her books have inspired generations of readers and writers, but many fell out of print. This edition was published after her death in 2017 to bring Emecheta's work to new readers.

Buchi Emecheta, typescript of 'In the Ditch'. 1971-2. On loan from Sylvester Onwordi

Buchi Emecheta, 'In the Ditch'. London, 2018. H.2019/6432

Buchi Emecheta © Art Directors & TRIP/Alamy

A conspiracy of silence

This letter from the author Dame Rebecca West to Virago publicist Lennie Goodings expresses her delight at finding her work included in a 'Best of British' promotion. West writes 'for many years, there was a sort of conspiracy of silence about my work'. Virago brought hundreds of books by women writers back into print – including several titles by West – and helped cement the literary reputations of many previously neglected women authors.

Letter from Rebecca West to Lennie Goodings. November 1981. Add MS 88904/1/439

A literature of one's own

From revolutionary works of feminist philosophy to novels exploring the everyday lives of women, books provide a powerful means of challenging perceptions. This small selection of influential titles, many published by specialist feminist presses like Virago, highlights the work of women writers who shaped the cultural landscape. Whether a novel by Jeanette Winterson, or a cultural history by Stella Dadzie, each of these books gave women a voice.

A selection of books by influential female writers

Re-staging women's lives

In 2018 Shakespeare's Globe staged 'Emilia', an inclusive women-led play by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm. It told the life story of Emilia Bassano, a 16th-century poet who sought to make a living from her writing. The only way for Bassano to get her poetry published as a female poet was to write about religious themes. The play ended with a furious speech asking 'why have our stories been ignored?' and calling on audiences to be fearless in questioning the past and telling women's stories.

Poster for 'Emilia', written by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm.
First performed 2018. On loan from Shakespeare's Globe

Women centre stage

The Women's Theatre Group was founded in the 1970s to provide opportunities for women on and behind the stage. They sought to reclaim women's histories and commissioned women playwrights to create material for their all-female company. This play 'New Anatomies' tells the story of Isabelle Eberhardt, a 19th-century writer who dressed as an Arab man as she travelled across French-ruled Algeria. Here, Eberhardt resists a judge who objects to her 'unfeminine' lifestyle.

Timberlake Wertenbaker, typescript of *New Anatomies*.
First performed 1981. Add MS 79246

Express

What does a feminist future look like?

Through literature, music and design, women have demanded attention for their stories, opinions and hopes. Feminist activists and artists have used their creativity to reimagine the world as a better place for everyone.

Artistic expression creates a space where diverse voices can be heard and can transform the way we see the world.

Right: 'Miss Moti'. © Kripa Joshi.

LDComics

We are a women-led forum established in 2009 as Laydeez do Comics by artists Sarah Lightman and Nicola Streeten. Informed by feminist strategies, our mission is to change the world through comics. We welcome all to our free monthly London meetings with invited guests speaking about graphic works. In 2018 we launched women-only awards for graphic novels and a festival supported by Arts Council England.

A feminist vision of the future

‘Dreams’ by the South African writer Olive Schreiner is a collection of eleven feminist short stories. Schreiner dedicated her book ‘to a small girl-child, who may live to grasp somewhat of that which for us is yet sight, not touch.’ ‘Dreams’ became a bestselling title and was republished many times. The story ‘Three Dreams in a Desert’ was a favourite text of imprisoned suffragettes, including Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence.

Olive Schreiner, ‘Dreams’. London, 1891. 8610.i.27

Olive Schreiner © National Portrait Gallery, London

Demanding liberation

The seven demands on this poster from the 1970s are a snapshot of the political concerns of feminists at the time. They included equal pay, adequate childcare, access to contraception and abortion, and an end to discrimination against lesbians. This poster was printed by See Red Women's Workshop, a collective which made posters inspired by Women's Liberation Movement ideas.

'7 Demands', See Red Women's Workshop. 1974.
Reproduced courtesy of See Red Women's Workshop

An alternative life

Sylvia Townsend Warner's 'Lolly Willowes', first published in 1926, tells the story of Lolly, an unmarried woman who becomes dependent on her brother and his wife. Unwilling to spend the rest of her life as the maiden aunt, she decides to break free, moves to the small village of Great Mop, and becomes a witch. Subverting gender and traditional family roles, Warner's novel was an immediate success on both sides of the Atlantic.

Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Lolly Willowes'. London, 1966.
X.900/2367

Sylvia Townsend Warner © National Portrait Gallery, London

It's only a game...

If life is a game, are rules different for women and men? 'Womanopoly' was created by activist, historian and founding member of the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent Stella Dadzie. Players experience how luck and misfortune, opportunity and chance, are influenced by gender. Women with high IQ miss a turn for arguing, while men with high IQ progress to the finishing line. By using creativity to expose gender stereotypes, the game raises the question of what the world would look like without them.

Stella Dadzie, 'Womanopoly'. On loan from the Black Cultural Archives

Stella Dadzie. © Katrina Stevens (2018)

Strings, bows and rock 'n' roll

This 1975 edition of 'Spare Rib' shone a light on inequalities for women in music. It highlighted how few women were members of orchestras, despite high numbers of female musicians. It also published 'The Northern Women's Liberation Rock Band Manifesto'. Activists argued that in popular music, sexist lyrics and ideas about romantic love perpetuated stereotypes. The manifesto called on women to use music to take back control of their own experiences, sounds and creativity.

'Spare Rib'. April 1975.

Post-punk visionaries

The Raincoats are a post-punk band formed by Ana da Silva and Gina Birch in 1977. They were inspired by punk's 'can-do' attitude, which encouraged women to pick up instruments and form groups. Their experimental music has had a profound influence on feminist, queer and alternative sound-makers. This guitar was played by da Silva on the albums 'The Raincoats' (1979) and 'Odyshape' (1981).

Guitar. On loan from Sue Emerick

Ana da Silva © Shirley O'Loughlin

Black feminist punk power

This scrapbook celebrates Big Joanie, a Black feminist punk band. They formed in 2013 as part of a 'First Timers' initiative that encouraged people from marginalised backgrounds to form a band and play a gig. Since then they have supported riot grrrl founders Bikini Kill, released their debut album, 'Sistahs', to critical acclaim, and toured internationally. Their music and workshops have been important in claiming cultural space and power for queer women of colour.

Photograph album celebrating Big Joanie. 2019.

Hear me roar

These albums are by female artists, composers or producers. Women in popular music have claimed space, defied stereotypes and pioneered innovations in style and performance. ‘Some people say little girls should be seen and not heard. I say: “Oh Bondage, Up Yours!”’ proclaimed Poly Styrene of punk band X-Ray Spex, refusing to be silenced and contained. Across genres and history, female musicians have echoed this sentiment.

Selection of albums by female artists

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The Conversation Doesn't End Here

Khadija Saye: In this space we breathe

Entrance Hall Gallery

3 December 2020 – 2 May 2021

This profound exhibit features nine powerfully evocative photographic self-portraits by the talented Gambian–British artist Khadija Saye, who was tragically killed in the Grenfell fire of 2017.

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