

Around the Archives

Glasgow Women's Library

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In the 25 years since its inception, Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) has faced many challenges, including four changes of location, growing from a completely unfunded organisation run solely by volunteers to what it has become today – a well-respected, award-winning institution with unique archive, library and museum collections dedicated to women's history. GWL is the only Accredited Museum of women's history in the UK and in 2015 was awarded 'Recognised Collection of National Significance' status by Museums Galleries Scotland. As well as the archive and artefact collections that have grown over its 25-year history, the library also runs an innovative seasonal programme of public events and learning opportunities. Among its Core Projects there is also an Adult Literacy and Numeracy project; a Black and Minority Ethnic Women's project; and a National Lifelong Learning project that delivers events and resources across Scotland. All of the library's projects and programmes utilise the archive and museum collections in their work, and the collections inform and underpin almost everything that the library does.

The library developed from an arts organisation called Women In Profile (WIP), which was established in 1987 with the aim of ensuring that women were represented when Glasgow became the European City of Culture in 1990. WIP consisted of artists, activists, academics and students, including the library's co-founder and current Creative Development Manager, Dr Adele Patrick. The group ran projects, events, workshops and exhibitions before and during 1990. These projects included the Castlemilk Womanhouse project which saw artists from across the UK work with women and children on Castlemilk Housing Estate in Glasgow. The project turned four flats in an empty tenement block into a living artwork, which became a meeting place and a centre for social activity. The Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive is a valuable resource for researchers interested in feminist art and public art projects.

After 1990 WIP found that they had gathered a great deal of material documenting their activities and thought it was important to have somewhere to preserve this material for the future. This was the impetus for founding Glasgow Women's Library which opened its doors in September 1991 in the Garnethill area of the city. The material that documents Women In Profile's work now makes up the Women In Profile Archive and along with the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive comprises original artwork, posters, leaflets, flyers and ephemera relating to the group's activities (see Plate 1).

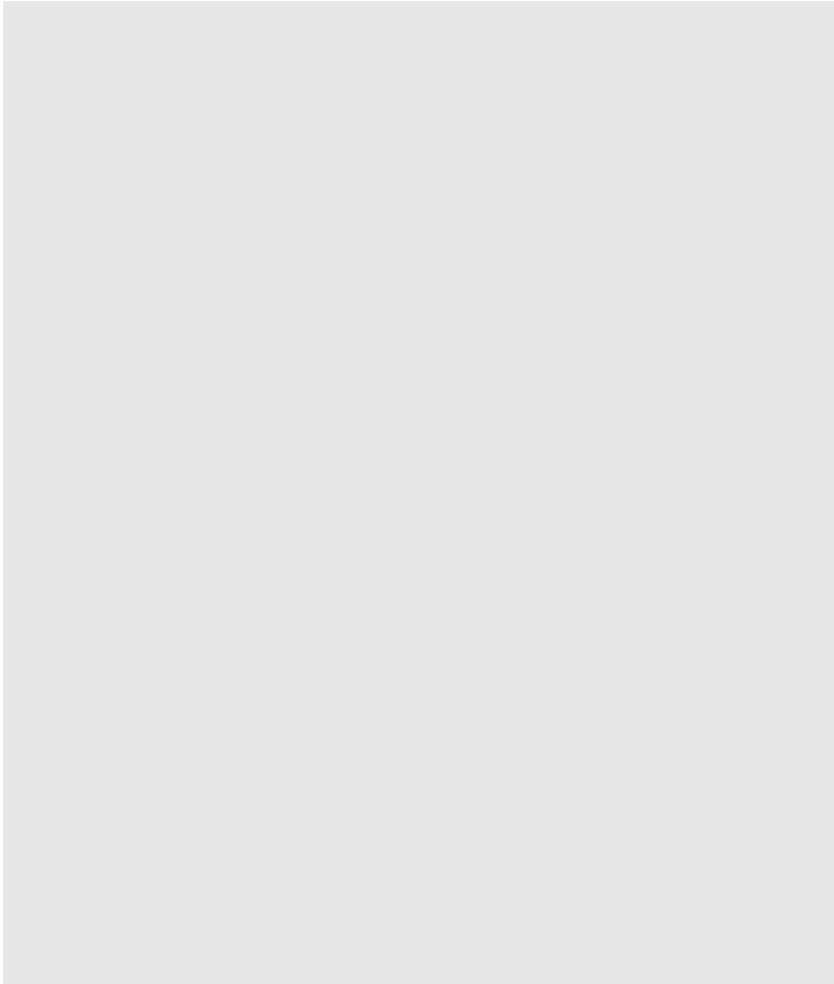


Plate 1 Castlemilk Womanhouse Poster, Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library.

From its beginnings in 1991, individuals, groups and organisations have donated material to GWL relating to women's history, their achievements, interests and activism. The library has no specific budget for acquisitions and aside from the library's own archive, the collection comprises entirely of donated material. This has resulted in a unique resource that reflects the diversity of women's lives. GWL primarily collects records and ephemera relating to women's lives, interests and campaigning. Themes and priorities

for future collection include individual women's archives, collections created during GWL projects and material related to women's political movements. The growth in material as well as a growth in users from 1991 onwards saw the library become a central point of information for and about women in Glasgow, and resulted in the need to relocate four times within the city before finding a permanent home in the former Bridgeton Public Library building in 2013. The GWL is now the sole occupant of a beautiful Grade B Listed Carnegie Library built in 1906. After substantial renovations were completed in December 2015 the library's archive is now housed in a purpose-built archive store on two levels. The collection currently consists of over 2,000 artefacts, well over 100,000 archive items and a library of over 10,000 books.

The move into a permanent home has allowed the collections finally to be brought together in one place for the first time and the collections staff are occupied in the work involved in making all of the collections accessible, which may take some years. It is interesting to note that the archive stores and research space are in what was originally the Gentleman's Reading Room, where women and children weren't allowed, and it seems fitting that this space now houses a women's archive as well as being a space where events and exhibitions are held.

Overall the library's collections can be divided into three strands. First, there is the organisation's own archive, which contains an assortment of self-produced material including newsletters, programmes, photographs, publicity material and press coverage. This collection is not currently catalogued but this is something that will start to happen in the near future.

Within this collection are GWL's self-published books, which are based on material from the collections and projects from the public engagement programme. One such publication is *She Settles in the Shields: Untold Stories of Migrant Women in Pollokshields*¹ based on work done by the GWL's Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Development Worker together with women in the Pollokshields area of Glasgow where there is a large South Asian community. The project used oral histories to tell the women's stories and the publication provides a valuable insight into migrant women's experiences from feelings of isolation and experiences of racism to everyday family life. Oral history projects often help fill gaps in the historical record and the voices heard in *She Settles in the Shields* are documented for the first time. The archive consists of not only the publication, the oral history recordings and transcripts but also a replica of a South Asian model house that was created in group sessions with the project's Artists in Residence.

The second strand is the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (LAIC) collection. This enormous collection, comprising a large proportion of the archive holdings, was established in London in 1984. The collective lost its funding in the 1990s and the entire collection was transferred to GWL in

¹ S. Morrison, S. Ahmed and S. Nooranne, *She Settles in the Shields: Untold Stories of Migrant Women in Pollokshields* (Glasgow, 2011).

September 1995. This archive is one of the most significant collections of materials documenting the lesbian and gay liberation movement in the UK. Like the library's collection, the material in the archive is comprised of donations ranging from organisational records to personal papers, oral histories and journals. Some of the notable collections within the archive include the organisational records of the Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian Group, thought to be the first Black Lesbian organisation in the UK. The group, which was established as a support group, began life as the Camden Lesbian Centre in 1982 and was funded by Camden Council. Soon after opening they changed their name to the Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian Group (CLCBLG) to reflect the whole committee. When Camden Council announced the opening of the centre in 1987, it was met with a large degree of hostility and homophobia, some of the concern being due to the centre's proximity to a local school. This was happening within a political landscape where the government was preparing to enact Section 28 of the Local Government Act making it illegal to 'promote homosexuality in schools'.² Much of the protests against the centre quietened down, however, once the local authority reaffirmed its support. The centre worked hard to improve the situation of its users through group activity, learning programmes and social events, and did so until 1993 when its funding was drastically cut, forcing the centre to close. The collection comprises posters, minutes, reports and photographs as well as the group's own newsletter, which demonstrates their varied activities.

Also notable within the Lesbian Archive is the extensive collection of LGBTQ journals and magazines. This includes rare lesbian journals such as *The Ladder*, produced by the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian rights organisation in the USA. Another important journal within this collection is *Sappho*, published by the lesbian rights organisation of the same name, a UK group set up in 1972 by BBC news presenter and lesbian rights activist Jackie Forster, whose personal archive is also housed at GWL. *Sappho* ran a programme of social activities, including support groups for lesbian teachers and paid for the legal defence of service women accused of lesbianism. The journal, as well as becoming a means for lesbians to meet and form groups was also intended as a point of communication between the heterosexual and the lesbian community. The Lesbian Archive is supplemented by the library's own collection of LGBTQ material which has been collected throughout its history and includes a wide variety of pamphlets and newsletters by LGBTQ groups and organisations in Scotland; material documenting the campaign against Section 28; and ephemera such as T-shirts, placards, posters and banners.

The third strand of the GWL collection is comprised exclusively of donated material which charts and contextualises the lives of women and their contribution to society across different spheres. Individual women's stories are

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted>.

told through personal papers collections such as those of Ingrid McClements, a lifelong activist who challenged male violence against women. Other personal papers collections include those of feminist campaigners and activists as well as those of seemingly ordinary women who worked as ambulance drivers and nurses in the Second World War. The collection is particularly strong in its charting of second-wave feminism. The campaigning and activism that characterised that period is represented through an extensive journal collection and campaign archives such as the Scottish Abortion Campaign Archive, which documents the struggle to defend the Abortion Act of 1967 and any proposed amendments to it. The collections date from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. The earliest items in the collections to date are bound copybooks of Eliza Rennie, a twelve-year-old girl from Kilsyth, a relative of the poet Eliza Rennie (1813–39). The books were donated by a local historian and contain meticulously handwritten verses of prayer and poetry. More recent acquisitions include contemporary collections such as the Women of the Commonwealth Games Legacy Collection amassed when Glasgow hosted the event in 2014 and comprising artefacts and memorabilia celebrating the achievements of the women involved in the games.

The library houses two important collections that pre-date the second wave of feminism. The first is the Josephine Butler Society Archive. The society was established in 1869 by Josephine Butler (1828–1906) as the Ladies National Association (LNA) to campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869. The acts, which disproportionately blamed women for venereal disease, meant that women suspected of being prostitutes could be forcibly examined and held against their will in a lock hospital. The Association also campaigned against child prostitution and the trafficking of women to brothels in Europe. The acts, a prime example of the sexual double standard prevalent in nineteenth-century society, were not to be repealed for another 16 years but in that period they helped change the political landscape by radicalising many women and creating an infrastructure for future protest.³

The LNA merged with the British branch of the International Abolitionist Federation in 1915, which was also founded by Josephine Butler. The society eventually adopted its founder's name in 1962 and is still active today, working to protect those forced into sex work by poverty and abuse. The collection held by GWL comprises reports relating to the Contagious Diseases Acts and the various commissions set up to investigate them; pamphlets; correspondence; press cuttings including some interesting examples relating to early policewomen in Scotland and memorial notices for Josephine Butler. The collection also contains a run of the society's monthly publication *The Shield* dating from 1897 to 1970.

The library has an interesting collection related to the campaign for women's suffrage. It was an important period in women's history and is the subject of much attention not only from academics but also from the general public. The collection contains ephemera that represent both sides of the campaign. It

³ M. Phillips, *The Ascent of Woman* (London, 2004).

includes original jewellery in the suffragette colours of green, purple and white; a clock/paperweight with the clock face illustrated with 'Votes for Women' written backwards and a man holding two crying babies, the implication being that this would be a consequence of women's suffrage. There are also a number of both anti- and pro-suffrage postcards, some of which reflect the types of imagery and humour used to belittle the suffragette movement and the women associated with it. In some the suffragettes are represented as absent mothers or neglectful wives; others present the women campaigning for the vote as children or animals or as wanting to subvert the natural order and be men. Some recent unsettling donations to the postcard collection show women about to have their tongues either cut off or nailed to a table, and perhaps highlight how far the fight for women's rights had yet to go.

A related item in the library's journal collection is the publication *Jus Suffragii* later known as *The International Woman Suffrage News*. The journal was published by the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) formed in 1902 in Washington in the USA. A group of eleven suffragists from all over the world met and established an organisation that they envisioned would be a kind of central bureau to collect, exchange and disseminate information on suffrage work worldwide. The Alliance met regularly until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Although unable to meet during wartime, they continued to operate and by 1920 had affiliated suffrage societies in 30 countries worldwide from Japan to Cuba. The journal, which began in 1906, contains news about the progress of women's suffrage across the world as well as news of other issues affecting women such as marriage and divorce law, and working conditions and health care.

Jus Suffragii is just one of an extensive collection of feminist journals, magazines and other periodicals held at GWL. This includes a collection of Scotland-centric Women's Liberation publications such as *The Scottish Women's Liberation Journal* produced in 1977 by a collective of women in response to the growing political strength of the Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland; a copy of *The Scotswoman*, a one-off edition of *The Scotsman* newspaper produced for International Women's Day in 1995; and *Harpies and Quines*, a popular feminist magazine published in Scotland in the 1990s by a group of women including the broadcaster Lesley Riddoch. *Harpies and Quines* ran from 1992 to 1995 and was unsuccessfully sued by the American magazine *Harpers and Queen*. The collection also contains UK and worldwide journals including an almost complete run of *Spare Rib*, the iconic feminist magazine published from 1972 to 1993.

The earliest journal in the archive to date is *The Woman Worker*, the official journal of the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) which was formed in 1906 by the Scottish suffragette and trade unionist Mary Macarthur. The aim of the Federation was to organise women in the fight against the sweated and dangerous trades, and to campaign for the introduction of a legal minimum wage. Mary Macarthur achieved rather a lot in her short life including leading the women chainmakers of Cradley Heath in the Black

Country to successful strike action in 1910, forcing their employers to increase the pitifully low wages. She was also Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League where she was tasked with organising women in the lowest positions of work. She was also on the executive committee of the Anti-Sweating League and was much admired in trade union and socialist circles for being a skilful and organised orator and negotiator. Writing about trade unions in a 1907 issue of *The Woman Worker* she states:

A trade union is like a bundle of sticks. The workers are bound together and have the strength of unity. No employer can do as he likes with them. A worker who is not in a union is like a single stick. She can easily be broken or bent to the will of her employer.⁴

The GWL collection comprises of nine editions of the journal, which sought to further the Federation's work, and contains a variety of articles, anecdotes and commentaries on the plight of the working women.

Included in this periodical collection is *Women Matter*, the newsletter of Central Region Women's Aid, which was produced in the early 1980s. It contains debate on violence against women, legal issues, health and the media, and is just one example of a comprehensive collection of material related to violence against women in the archive.

The library houses three important collections that together chart the beginning of a campaign to prevent and publicise violence against women in Scotland. Founded in 1976, Scottish Women's Aid is the leading organisation working towards the prevention of violence against women in Scotland. It not only provides practical support in the form of refuge but also seeks to educate the wider public about violence against women and has been instrumental in bringing about changes to policy and legislation, and the way that violence against women is viewed in society. The Scottish Women's Aid Archive, which was donated to the library in 2000, consists of newsletters, annual reports, conference papers, minutes from the Executive Committee and parliamentary briefing papers, all demonstrating the high profile and important nature of the organisation's work (see Plate 2). It contains information pamphlets and leaflets including those aimed at children staying in refuges and information on women's housing rights. There is also an extensive collection of news cuttings from a wide section of the press covering topics such as family violence, racism, abortion rights, child abuse, religion and sexism. In particular, the cuttings demonstrate how society's view of violence against women has changed over time. The collection dates from the organisation's formation in 1976 and covers local, national and international campaigning throughout its history.

To mark the organisation's 40th anniversary in 2016 the library embarked on an oral history project with Scottish Women's Aid, Glasgow University Centre

⁴ T. Barnsley, *Breaking Their Chains: Mary Macarthur and the Chainmakers' Strike of 1910* (London, 2011), 51.

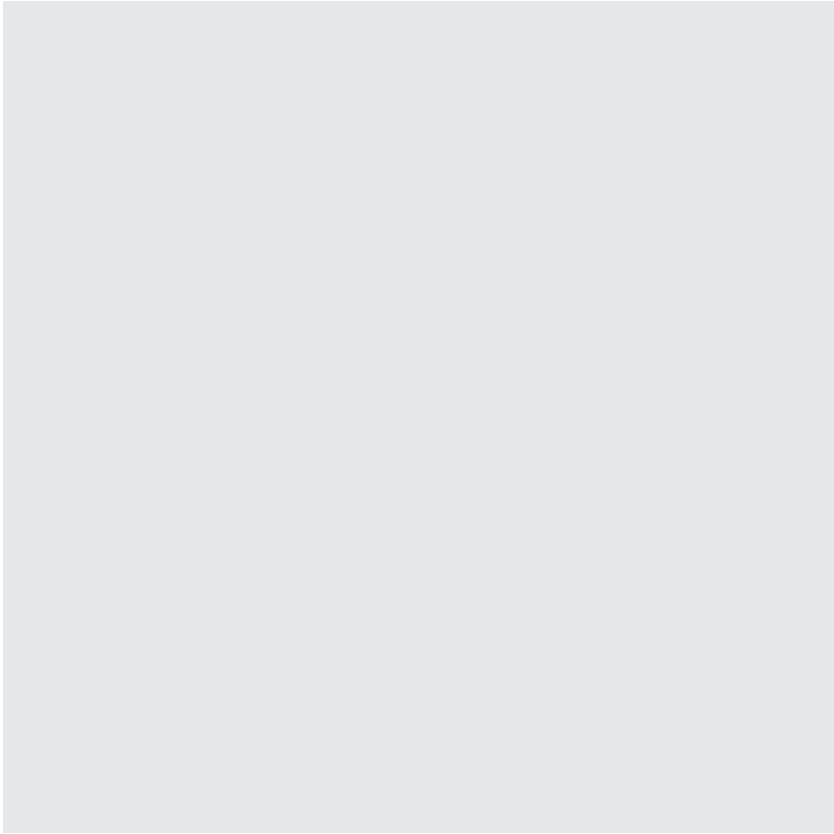


Plate 2 Material from the Scottish Women's Aid Archive, Glasgow Women's Library.

for Gender History and Women's History Scotland, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. 'Speaking Out: Recalling Women's Aid in Scotland' aims to record and celebrate the history of Women's Aid in Scotland by interviewing up to 100 people involved throughout its history. The project has catalogued the extensive archive held at GWL, digitised key pieces from the collection creating an online resource and produced a publication and learning resource for schools. The oral histories, some of which, can be heard on the 'Speaking Out' project pages on GWL's website⁵ at the time of writing, provide moving testimony to the importance of the organisation's work and will enhance and contextualise the archive (see Plate 2).

⁵ <http://womenslibrary.org.uk>.

The organisation Zero Tolerance has been working to prevent violence against women since 1992. GWL holds the archive of its very first campaign as well as material relating to subsequent initiatives. The initial campaign, which was piloted by the Women's Committee of Edinburgh District Council, was the first crime prevention campaign to deal with the issue of violence against women in Britain. It was a ground-breaking initiative that brought the issue of violence against women into the public domain and the campaign was subsequently adopted by other councils in the UK and overseas. Material in the archive dates from 1984 and comprises reports, newsletters, administrative papers, press coverage, posters and other campaign material. It contains a vast amount of information on domestic violence and is a valuable resource to those researching many different topics. The Zero Tolerance campaign was the first of its kind to directly challenge male violence against women with, for example, billboard posters along Princes Street in Edinburgh including slogans such as 'Male abuse of power is a crime'.⁶ Part of the campaign's success was due to the hard-hitting imagery of the poster artwork, which has been hugely influential although not commonly acknowledged. It was the work of the photographer Franki Raffles who died in 1994; an archive of her photographic practice can be found in Special Collections at St Andrews University.

The last major collection related to violence against women housed at GWL is the archive of the Women's Support Project, a voluntary organisation based in the Gorbals in Glasgow that works to prevent male violence against women and children. Their work is slightly different from the other two mentioned here as their focus is on education and development. The archive contains newsletters, documentation of events, resources produced and used by the project, and press coverage. Combined, these collections are key resources and are frequently accessed by students, academics and non-academic researchers working in social work, education and the media.

Women's health is another topic well represented in the Women's Library collections through primarily the Family Planning Association Archive but also through the Scottish and National Abortion Campaign archive. The Family Planning Association was formed in 1930 as the National Birth Control Council. It changed its name in 1939 and at that time only twenty clinics existed in the UK. In 1974, 1000 family planning clinics were taken over by the NHS when free family planning became mandatory for all. Legalisation of the pill in 1967 was an important landmark for family planning and this is reflected in the collection. The archive consists of a variety of printed material related to the movement and dates from the 1950s to the late 1970s. It includes sexual health pamphlets, reports on contraceptives, issues of the *Family Planning Association Journal*, and articles and publications on population control and family limitation. There is also correspondence between Elizabeth Draper, a former secretary of the Family Planning Association, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* regarding a complaint about the omission of the ovulation method

⁶ Zero Tolerance Archive, Glasgow Women's Library.

from Draper's birth control essay which featured in the fifteenth edition of the *Encyclopedia*. The pamphlets in the archive produced by the National Marriage Guidance Council include a pamphlet called *Girls' Questions Answered*, an advice booklet published in the 1970s and aimed at pre-teen and teenage girls. It answers questions on topics ranging from relationship advice to periods and even masturbation, and gives insight into the kinds of questions teenage girls had at the time.

This article is not an exhaustive list of the collections held at Glasgow Women's Library but it has hopefully provided insight into some of the material that exists in the collection, its provenance and its importance. Other material not mentioned in detail includes a large collection of Equal Opportunity Commission publications; a constantly growing fanzine collection dating back to the 1990s; a collection of programmes and ephemera related to roller derby, a sport pioneered by women; and the archive of Women Live, a group established in 1982 in Edinburgh to encourage women in the arts and media in Scotland.

The Library has grown steadily since its inception in 1991 and over the years has developed a collection that covers a very wide range of topics affecting women's lives and providing a comprehensive picture of their experiences in Scotland, the UK and internationally. Women's history is an important part of the historical record but documentation of women's lives has not always been present in major collections. The National Record of Archives for instance has 45,810 personal records for men and only 4,738 for women – a staggering difference. Institutions like GWL and its sister organisations across the world are very much necessary to actively ensure that women's papers and ephemera are preserved and women's place in history is not hidden. Glasgow Women's Library has spent the last 25 years doing this work and has no intention of stopping.