

LSE Library Annual Report to the Friends of the Women's Library

Reporting period: August 2023 – July 2024

Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Collections	3
3	Supporting research	5
4	Supporting education	6
5	Public engagement	8
6	Looking ahead	10

Authors:

Maria Bell, Learning and Engagement Manager;

Chelsea Collison, Learning and Engagement Officer;

Dr. Gillian Murphy, Curator, Equality, Rights and Citizenship;

Anna Towlson, Archives and Special Collections Manager.

Photographs: Library Late: [Boot Creative](#); Other: LSE Library

1. INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the activities of LSE Library relating to the Women's Library collections across several areas of the Library's work – new acquisitions, digitising collections, schools and public programmes and supporting teaching, learning and research.

Collection acquisitions, cataloguing and digitisation have continued to add breadth and depth to the collections, improve discovery and access for researchers.

The Library delivered 35 public events, drawing on the breadth of the LSE collections (including The Women's Library collections). Over 2000 people attended events, making this year one of our fullest public events programmes. This included an incredible evening to celebrate 10 years since The Women's Library Reading Room was officially opened at LSE with a display from the collections and programme of talks and activities, with generous support from the Friends of the Women's Library.



Image: The Women's Library Reading Room pop-up exhibition and research talks at Library Late, 7 March 2024.
Photo: Boot Creative

There has been increasing engagement with the collections within LSE courses some of which were a direct result of the connections made during the Autumn 2023 exhibition, *'Resistance, Rights and Refuge: Britain and Chile 50 years on'*.

Our schools programme saw new schools make their first visits and returning schools make repeated visits for archive workshops, covering suffrage, women's rights, women's liberation, LGBTQ+ rights.

In early 2024, we were excited and pleased to learn of our successful funding application from Research England for five years to develop our support for the wider research community. This will enable us to enhance and extend our work with widening research and engagement with The Women's Library collections. This additional funding will ensure we can embed the many initiatives and programmes that we have been building over the last ten years.

2. COLLECTIONS

Purchases

We purchased three items from the suffrage collection of Lesley Mees, auctioned by Bonhams in Sep/Oct 2023.

1. Programme & Souvenir of the Great Meeting in Favor [sic] of Women's Suffrages, on 19 May 1906. The deputation proceeding to the Foreign Office, with a procession to Cleopatra's Needle, followed by a great meeting at Trafalgar Square to hear speakers including Keir Hardie, Mrs Pankhurst, Annie Kenney and Mrs Martel of New South Wales.
2. Souvenir of the Women's Suffrage March & Mass Meeting at the Albert Hall, Saturday June 13, Embankment 2.30pm, Albert Hall 4pm, speakers Lady Henry Somerset, Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs Fawcett, Mrs Anna Shaw, Mrs Despard. 1908
3. A heart-shaped Women's Social and Political Union brooch designed and made by metalworker and enameller Ernestine Mills, depicting a stylised tree and the legend 'Votes for Women', possibly made to be sold at the WSPU Prince's Skating Rink Exhibition of May 1909 or for a private commission.



New acquisitions

In addition to items generously donated by the Friends, new acquisitions this year have included: additions to Women's Environmental Network, Broken Rites, Movement for the Ordination of Women, Sally Alexander and National Women's Register collections.

- **Audrey Slaughter (1929-2020)**, pioneering magazine editor. Complete set of all the magazines she created, including Honey, Petticoat and Over 21, three of the most successful titles of the new age of magazines in the 1960s and 70s.
- **Ruth Christmas (1904-2001)**, pioneering woman runner and the first-ever British national women's 800-metres champion. Scrapbook documenting her running career, including programmes, press cuttings and photos.
- **Gladys Mitchell (1901-1983)**, novelist. Letters to Muriel Gunn, 1923-1927 and 1977-1981, donated by Muriel's son Jolyon. Gladys and Muriel were students together at Goldsmiths' college just after the end of the First World War. They became close friends and the letters suggest there was something of a relationship between them.
- **Mothers Apart from Their Children (MATCH)**, a support group for mothers apart from their children in a wide variety of circumstances.
- **IFUW reports from the Sybil Campbell Library**

We also catalogued the following collections:

- **Professor Mary Kaldor**, Professor Emeritus of Global Governance at LSE, founder member of European Nuclear Disarmament. Papers relating to her involvement with END, including papers relating to the founding of END; minutes of committee and special interest group meetings; END Conventions and other conferences; papers relating to the production and management of the Bulletin and Journal; and correspondence with partner organisations and activists. The collection also contains papers relating to the activities of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly (hCa), for which Mary Kaldor was the UK presidium member.
- **Out of the Doll's House oral testimony**. 260 audio recordings of interviews conducted as part of the research for 'Out of the Dolls House', an eight-part television documentary series, conceived and produced by Angela Holdsworth and broadcast in 1988. The series explored the ways women's lives changed in the 20th century through oral testimony. The interviews focus on home life, work, health, sex, marriage, motherhood, fashion, education and politics. The recordings were digitised in 2021 by Unlocking our Sound Heritage, a project funded by the National Lottery and led by the British Library. The interviews are available for consultation onsite, and users can request remote access if required. The collection also includes hard-copy transcripts and research papers.

Digitisation

We have completed work on the [Autograph Letter Collection](#), with over 5700 individual letters now openly available on the Digital Library.

We have also published:

- a [selection of papers from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom archive](#) as part of a larger collection focusing on peace and internationalism in the first part of the C20th
- copies of the rare periodical [Urania](#), 1919-1940, a privately circulated magazine which sought to undermine gender stereotypes and promote the 'abolition' of gender.



Image: Visitors to the Reading Room display on 7 March 2024, Library Late.

3. SUPPORTING RESEARCH

Services

So far in academic year 2023/4 we have issued in the reading room 1510 items from The Women's Library collection. The digitisation on demand service continues to be popular, with 61 requests for material from The Women's Library collection between Aug 2023 and June 24.

Research projects

The Library is an archives partner on several projects each year including:

- [Liberating Histories: Women's Movement Magazines, Media Activism and Periodical Pedagogies \(AHRC-funded project led by Northumbria University\)](#) We will collaborate on piloting a schools session drawing on women's liberation magazines in The Women's Library collection. The Library will also be archiving some of the reader testimonies collected by the project.
- **Midlands 4 Cities Collaborative Doctoral Award** with Nottingham Trent University on '*Feminism Between the Waves: A Political and Cultural History of the Six Point Group*'. Kelly Bosomworth has made excellent progress and her two research visits to the archive this year have revealed rich research findings.
- **Activists Go!** A pilot workshop for primary students led by Professor Erika Rackley (University of Kent) and Dr Sharon Thompson (University of Cardiff) for Cardiff City Council. Using objects from the Women's Library's handling collection, the children engaged directly with historical artefacts and used them to inspire their own creative campaigning materials.

Professional staff activity

Dr Gillian Murphy, Curator for Equality, Rights and Citizenship, gave talks on primary sources relating to women and sport to the Association of Librarians and Information Professionals in the Social Sciences (ALISS) and on the history of the Women's Library to the Feminist Libraries and Archives Network. Her

conference paper delivered in 2022 on Women for Westminster will be published as “School for Women MPs’? the work of the Women for Westminster movement’ in ‘Women, Power and Politics 1945-1997’, Oxford University Press, Spring 2025.

4. SUPPORTING EDUCATION

On site visits from external HE (Higher Education), schools and community groups have grown this year.

We welcomed 1147 (up from 935 in 2022-23) learners (primary and secondary level, university and adult learners) to archive workshops relating to The Women’s Library collections.

Supporting LSE learning and teaching

2023-24: 320 LSE students engaged with the Women’s Library through their LSE courses.

This year has seen more engagement with the Women’s Library by academics and students from LSE International History department. This is because of holding monthly archive drop-in sessions and co-curation of the autumn exhibition on Chile with Dr Tanya Harmer (Department of International History). Archive sessions consisted of ‘What are archives?’, using visual material in research, and mini displays of material to complement certain seminars of the following courses:

- HY120 Historical Approaches to the Modern World
- HY332 Interwar worlds: the cultural consequences of the First World War
- HY334 Communication Revolutions in Latin America, c.1539 to the Present
- HY483 Land and Conflict in Latin America since 1750
- HY458 LSE-Columbia University Double Degree Dissertation

This engagement has led to The Women’s Library being integrated into the course ‘From First Wave Feminism to Me Too: Women, Rights and Justice’ for LSE’s Summer School in July.

Repeat sessions were requested for these courses:

- EH431 Women in Economic History (Dr Anne Ruderman, Department of Economic History)
- GI429 Archival Interventions: feminist, queer and decolonial approaches (Prof Clare Hemmings, Department of Gender Studies).

Dr Hakan Sandal-Wilson, Fellow in Race and Gender in the Department of Sociology, brought students along to three archive show and tell sessions as part of his Utopias and Rights in Feminist and Queer Archives research group. Students saw material on suffrage, on LGBT+ rights, and on religion. It was reported that one MA student even changed their dissertation topic because of material seen at one of these sessions.

Supporting external HE

Over 550 students have engaged with the Women’s Library collections from external HE institutions, through archive workshops and study visits as part of their courses, including from UCL, Westminster, Oxford, Royal Holloway, Goldsmiths, University of Sorbonne, Kings College London, Miami University, Florida State, Brigham Young University. This is double the figures from last year – 269 external HE students.

For the first time we hosted two study placements. In the Autumn 2023 we welcomed a ‘Writer in Residence’, Sophie Hurst, a student from the Royal Central College of Speech and Drama. During her placement, she looked at the Women’s Sport Foundation archive for inspiration for her play about women in football. She wrote a [blog about some of archive items that resonated with her](#). Sophie also gave a talk about her placement at the ALISS (Association of Librarians and Information Professionals in the Social Sciences) event in March 2024. A new collection highlight page on [women and sport](#) was also published.

We also were pleased to host our first MA placement. Ayisha Uddin is studying a MA in Public History at Queen Mary, University of London, and assisted with creating the pop-up exhibition in the Reading Room at the Library Late in March. She has since written a blog for South Asia@LSE on [‘Afia Begum, Brick Lane’s ‘Sari Squad’ and South Asia women’s rights in the UK’](#) based on sources she saw during her placement.

Supporting community

Twenty-two adult learners engaged with the Women’s Library. Groups included the Quilt Club Seven Sisters, Diplomatic Spouses Club, and a visit by three young women with learning difficulties, funded by the National Lottery, who are researching women workers with disabilities in the First World War.

Supporting schools

The updated [Learning programme for schools](#) has resulted in an increase of on-site school visits for either an archive workshop (on a selected collection theme) or an EPQ (Extended Project Qualification). Research skills workshop. This growth saw repeat school visits, a joint campus visit collaboration with LSE Student Marketing, Recruitment and Study Abroad (SMRSA) team, four sessions with Christ Church Primary (LSE Festival Project) and one session in Cardiff (with Activists Go!). We also hosted one session for the Y12 students involved in the LSE Thrive programme (Widening Participation). In addition to drawing on the themes of The Women’s Library collections, sessions also covered LGBT+, NHS, and economics themes in the LSE collections.

An example of feedback received reveals the impact these visits can have on student learning:

“This was an absolutely BRILLIANT session. Not only was [Chelsea] extremely well prepared and engaging, but she gave access to incredible primary sources which left the children so excited, curious and engaged...Extremely grateful for the opportunity provided and the inspiring outreach that was shared with the group who left with a real spark for the subject. Thank you.”

In figures,

- 24 schools plus 1 home school and 1 LSE Widening Participation programme visited.
- Students were from Years 5, 6, 8-10 and Year 12.
- 16 sessions of 39 drew on The Women’s Library’s collections.
- 838 total students attending archive workshops across LSE collections – this is over double our figures in 2022-23 and over 300 more than 2023-24.



LSE Festival - The Library's LSE Festival school project in partnership with Christ Church Primary (Croydon) introduced Year 5 students to the campaigning archives of the collection (General Election party leaflets and suffrage banners). The school's project was led by Learning and Engagement Officer, Chelsea Collison with creative artist, Becci Kenning. The project included three consecutive in-school workshops (March) and one Library visit (April) with the whole cohort (60 students). Students created artwork that advocated for campaigns close to home. The artwork created was displayed at the LSE Festival Family Day in June.

Activists Go! Pilot workshop In June, Chelsea Collison (Learning and Engagement Officer), Professor Erika Rackley (Kent University) and Dr Sharon Thompson (Cardiff University) with support from Cardiff Council's curriculum team) led an all-day workshop in Cardiff with 23 Year 5 students from St Mary the Virgin Church-in-Wales Primary School, Butetown.

The session entitled *Activists Go!* was organised as part of the Cardiff Council's ["Passport to the City" scheme](#). It was aimed at equipping the students with the skills and confidence to use their voices about issues that concerned them.

The workshop focussed on women's campaigning throughout UK history and ways of campaigning for causes today, using materials selected by curator, Gillian Murphy, on suffrage, women in law, Greenham Common, and the Six Point Group, to discuss archives and campaigning. Students learned how to look for clues about history in archival photos and documents and explored archives during an investigation exercise.

Students brainstormed about campaigns they cared about and created badges and posters and wrote postcards to the First Minister of Wales. Students were particularly interested in anti-war, anti-racism, climate change, anti-bullying, and freedom of speech. There is potential for hosting future workshops and generating teacher activity packs using these resources that could be distributed across Wales to support the curriculum.

5. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Exhibitions

"Resistance, Rights and Refuge: Britain and Chile, 50 years after the Chilean Coup", was our Autumn 2023 exhibition, curated by Dr Tanya Harmer (LSE Department of International History) and Gloria Miqueles (Chilean exile) in partnership with Gillian Murphy (Curator) and Paul Dudman (Living Refugee Archive, University of East London). It displayed material from across LSE collections which included women's liberation movement magazines, biographies and archives of the International Alliance of Women archive. This exhibition, with 9176 visitors, is an example of what can be achieved through academic collaborations with LSE departments, related archives and solidarity activists and exiles who settled in the UK. Moreover, it highlighted an unexplored theme in the Library's collection to tell a story of solidarity and resistance.

Selected visitor comments that show the impact of telling these narratives:

- “This exhibition was very insightful seeing all who stood up and fought to ensure justice is served. As a woman myself, this was beyond inspiring seeing many people before me and their accomplishments like Sheila Cassidy [British doctor kidnapped and tortured in Chile in 1975 whose TV appearances on release and subsequent memoir raised awareness - memoir was on display in the exhibition]. This whole exhibition has taught me to always keep going and never stand by when injustice is taking place.”
- “This is part of my history. I was 7 when I fled with my parents in 1974. The wounds are still there. Thank you for remembering us.”

Public event programme

An extensive programme of 35 events was delivered with 2219 people attending. It covered the breadth of the LSE Library archives and special collections.

Each term’s programme included events relating to the Women’s Library collections and included our first large-scale event format, *Library Late* to celebrate 10 years of The Women’s Library at LSE. 250 people attended an evening that included a research talk programme and pop-up exhibition curated by Gillian Murphy (Curator) in the excellent setting of the Reading Room, with Dr Anne Summers chairing and supported by the Friends of the Women’s Library. Related women’s organisations showcased their collections and research, artist Nadina Ali ran a creative poster workshop and library staff took visitors behind the scenes in the archives store and digitisation suite. Twenty library staff worked to deliver a memorable evening for all.

A regular archive drop-in session offers opportunities for audiences to spend time exploring a curated selection of archives materials on selected themes and each featuring materials from the Women’s Library collections.

The public events programme offered a strong literary strand, celebrating women’s writing and stories. The Autumn exhibition, *Resistance, Rights and Refuge* enabled us to incorporate performance and art and craft and drew an audience with strong links to Chile and Latin – American heritage.

- Awakening of Indian Women – 45 attendees
- LASTESIS - Feminist resistance: interdisciplinary strategies for performance - 42 attendees
- Embroidery, memory and resistance workshop - 30 attendees
- Jill Liddington on Anne Lister – 75 attendees
- Professor Caroline Derry on Agatha Christie – 54 attendees
- Wendy Moore on *Jack and Eve: two women in love and at war* – 45 attendees
- Jane Cholmeley on *A Bookshop of One’s Own* (about Silver Moon Bookshop) - 41 attendees
- Mireille Fauchon on *Illustration Narration and Suffrage* - 18 attendees
- East End Women’s Club (outreach at Tower Hamlets Archives) - 20 attendees

The Library’s [YouTube channel](#) ensures that audiences wherever they are based can discover and learn about the stories and content of our collections and their relevance to many of today’s issues and developments. Total views as of July 2024 are 48,700 up from 31,300 at the same point last year with an addition of thirteen new recordings, including:

- [Awakening of Indian Women](#) – an event which marked a new edition of this early anti-imperial feminist text by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and others first published by Everyman's Press, Madras in 1939. The copy of *Awakening of Indian Women* held in The Women's Library (part of the Myra Sadd Brown Library) was digitised for this new edition by Lurid Press with introduction by Professor Sumita Mukherjee (University of Bristol).
- [Jack and Eve: two women in love and at war](#) – talk by Wendy Moore who used the archive of Vera 'Jack' Moore extensively to write this new book published by Atlanta Press.
- [A Bookshop of One's Own](#) - Jane Cholmeley in conversation with Professor Mary Evans about her new book on the Silver Moon Bookshop published by Harper Collins.

A selection of feedback from our activities:

"Thanks so much for hosting our visit to the Women's Library this afternoon...It was lovely to meet you and for me and my team to learn more about the suffragette movement...It was moving to see some of the suffragette brooches and the clasps across the ribbons that represented the number of hunger strikes the owner of the brooch had endured...So much more to learn!" - LSE department visit

"I just wanted to drop a massive thank you your way this morning. The children were absolutely enthralled by their visit yesterday... They've all been left really inspired and it was exciting for me to hear all their plans on ways to carry on the learning after the session. Truly magical to be able to inspire this and I'm so grateful to you!" - homeschool student group visit.

"Fascinating talk/discussion last week on Anne Lister!" - event, March 2024

"Superseded my expectations. Very inspiring. And gave me an insight into the history of Chile I was unaware of. I am also motivated to use this medium to express my emotional feelings." - Chile embroidery workshop, Jan 2024

"Very friendly greetings, perfect organization. Dr. Derry was speaking so clearly and fascinating, that I could understand almost everything, though I'm not from Britain. Thanks a lot! Great topic!" - event February 2024.

6. LOOKING AHEAD

In the summer, the Library will be upgrading the online archives catalogue to provide a more modern interface with better search and browse functionality. The aim is to enhance the discovery of all our archive collections, including those in The Women's Library.

The initial version of the new catalogue will be launched in August 2024. We will be seeking feedback from users including the Friends of The Women's Library to inform further development of the interface in 2024/25.

We look forward to building on the successes of this year and deepening existing relationships and building new ones with communities and audiences.

July 2024, LSE Library