

- Flyer for a demonstration in Trafalgar Square to stop the war in Abyssinia, 1st March (1936) [TUC: MSS.292/963/2].  
Female activists have a history of involvement with peace campaigns. When Abyssinia was the subject of unprovoked invasion by Mussolini's Italy, Sylvia Pankhurst took up the Abyssinian cause. She organised garden fetes, public film showings at the Regal Cinema, Marble Arch, and demonstrations to raise money and awareness of the Abyssinian plight.
- Panik, Sheffield (1983) [NC: MSS.489/13].  
'Panik' was a peace magazine published in Sheffield, highlighting Sheffield women's peace activities. This 1983 edition features a Greenham women's statement of action, 'borne of love for life on earth'.
- Postcard, 'Jerusalem' undated [CCND: MSS.462 File 28b].
- Postcard, 'Peace', undated [CCND: MSS.462 File 28b].  
Postcards from the correspondence of Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CCND) activist, Angela West. One is signed off 'See you at the fence'.
- Various photographs of women campaigners at Greenham Common from the papers of CND activist Mary Brennan (1981-1985) [MB: MSS.410/3].  
In the 1980s, as the Cold War reached its height, protests against the storage and transportation of U.S. nuclear missiles in the U.K were organised by anti-nuclear campaign groups. In 1981 a Women's Peace Camp was established outside the base at Greenham Common. Their physical and symbolic peace protest would become one of the most widely reported peace campaigns of the time.

### Abbreviations

ARR	Papers of Aaron Rapoport Rollin.
BEC	British Employers Confederation.
CCND	Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.
HS	Papers of Helen Haslam.
ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation.
MB	Papers of Mary Brennan.
NAS	National Association of Schoolmasters.
NATHET	National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and Technology.
NC	Papers of Nigel Clark, International Socialists and Socialist Workers Party.
NCA	National Cycle Archive.
TGW	Transport and General Workers Union.
TUC	Trade Union Congress.
UPW	Union of Post Office Workers.
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association.



## Women's History Network

19th Annual Conference 2010

University of Warwick, 10 - 12 September 2010

# Performing the self: Women's lives in historical perspective Exhibition catalogue



# Performing the self

Performing the self is an interdisciplinary conference exploring the diverse representations of women's identities in the past and how these were articulated. The conference exhibition seeks to complement this theme, illustrating the multi-textual ways that women's private and public identities have been represented, discovered and performed through work, travel and political activism respectively.

Three display cabinets located in the foyer and reading room of the Modern Records Centre (MRC) contain a variety of nineteenth and twentieth century archival sources. The exhibition includes material from major organizations such as the Trades Union Congress and the Transport and General Workers' Union, together with documents relating to individual women activists such as Sylvia Pankhurst and Margaret Bondfield. All of the documents on display are from archive collections held by the MRC.

The Modern Records Centre holds key archive collections for the study of British social, economic and political history; these have been awarded, 'Designated status,' by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in recognition of their national importance. The collections concentrate on industrial relations and labour history, and include records of trade unions, employers' organisations, left-wing and radical British political groups, pressure groups (including those concerned with penal reform, human rights, disarmament, education and health), the National Cycle Archive, and papers of individuals who worked in those fields.

More about the Centre and its archive holdings can be found at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/>. A full catalogue and online gallery of the exhibition can be found at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/images/whn>



## Cabinet 1

### Representations: Women, Work, Identities.

The representation of women's work and their ever-changing role in the labouring economy has been of central concern to feminist thinkers, women's organizations, business and the state throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The competing ideologies of women's rightful role as located in either the 'non-economic' sphere of home, or the public sphere of work, has meant that the history of women's economic identity has been articulated in multiple ways. The items on display in Cabinet 1 in the main foyer of the MRC, demonstrate how differing concepts and debates about women's identity at work have been publicly articulated and represented by different groups in newspapers, propaganda and advertising leaflets, to manipulate, to deny or to protect women's place in the fluctuating labour market. The items are displayed in three thematic sections, focusing on war work, sexual politics and the collective identity of woman workers.

#### i) War.

The most dramatic changes to women's work in the twentieth century were wrought by the two World Wars. To maintain the wartime economy, women were recruited as war workers. Their sense of national and social identity was both encouraged and regulated as government bodies, trade unions and women themselves wrestled with their new found role.

- B.L.Hutchins, 'Working Life of Women', Fabian Women's Group (1911) [UPW: MSS.148/UCW/6/13/41/2].  
Published by the Fabian Society's Women's Group, the booklet investigated the pre-war position of women workers. The Fabian Society was a largely middle-class, intellectual think tank.
- Photograph of female munitions workers employed to manufacture detonator plugs at the Woolwich Arsenal during WW1 [Misc: MSS.21/2164/1].
- Dorothy Barton, 'The Course of Women's Wages' Journal of the Royal Statistical Society (1919) [UPW: MSS. 148/UCW/6/13/41/4].  
Barton's book concisely demonstrates the dramatic increase in the number of women workers as a consequence of the War.
- Pamphlet 'Women in War Jobs', published by the Labour Research Dept. (1942) [UPW: MSS.148/UCW/6/13/41/23].
- Part of a four page advertisement reprinted in the magazine, 'Woman and Beauty' (1941), asking, 'Are you equal to two German women?' [TUC: MSS.292/60.21/1].  
Appealing to women's sense of pride and national identity, the advertisement encouraged British women to compete with and better their German counterparts by getting 'into the factories quickly'.
- TUC letter, 'Women war workers recreation', Jan (1944) [TUC: MSS.292/147.672/2].  
Young, often single, women munitions workers, were sent to different parts of the country for war work. Free from home constraints, they frequented local public houses causing concern about moral welfare. This 'problem', and how to regulate the new social identity of women war workers, was discussed at length by the TUC.



- Leaflet, 'Make this Club your Club' [TUC: MSS.292/147.66/3].  
Subsequently, women war workers were centrally funded to set up clubs to encourage new interests regulating their social activities.
- Leaflet, 'Women at War – Their Future in Peace' published by the Economic League [BEC: MSS.200B/3/2/c971 pt 1].
- 'The Position of Women after the War', Report of the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organizations on Labour problems after the War [Misc: MSS.21/1546].  
The experience of war work changed many women's perception of their own identity: of what they were capable of and of what they were entitled to do. When they were demobilized, debates began about what women's new role and economic identity should be as men returned to their jobs.

## ii) Sexual Politics

The legitimacy of women's role in the workplace was often portrayed in terms of gender differences. Defining male and female workers according to the prevailing cultural notions of masculinity and femininity, allowed distinctions in pay and conditions to be made between men and women in the work place. Ultimately it allowed women's right to work outside the home at all to be openly questioned. At work, women's physical appearance and reproductive function were key sites of representation. Beauty magazines suggested how the woman worker should 'look' capitalising on the rise in spending power of the new woman worker as career opportunities expanded. Legislation aimed at protecting the rights of women workers was debated in terms of their reproductive role as mothers.

- Various newspaper clippings [NAS: MSS.38A/7/1].  
These highlight the sexual politics at play in the teaching profession, as elsewhere. They demonstrate the type of gendered arguments used by men to restrict women's role in the education of boys, with headlines such as, 'Men teachers for boys' and 'Can women teachers teach boys manliness?'
- Flyer 'Equal Pay is Dangerous' [NAS: MSS.38A/4/6/38/1].  
This flyer shows how gendered debates about women's work fitted neatly into men's objections over equal pay.
- Booklet, 'Is Woman's Place in the Home?' [TGW: MSS.126/TG/RES/X/749B].
- Leaflet, 'What Do You Think?' [TGW: MSS.126/TG/RES/X/749B].  
Whether women should work outside the home at all was frequently debated.
- 'Commonsense Beauty Hints' [TGW: MSS.126/TG/RES/X/749B].
- 'Women in Offices' Labour publications dept. (1936) [TGW: MSS.126/TG/RES/X/749B].
- 'Beauty for the Home Girl: Beauty for the Business girl' in Health and Beauty: a Book for Girls, May (1939) [NATHET: MSS. 177/5/8/4].  
Discourse on women's identity as new workers was bound by advertisers to their physical appearance ushering in a new era for the beauty industry and female consumerism.
- 'Women and Babies', Labour Joint Publications dept. [UPW: MSS.148/UCW/6/13/41/7].
- Report on the Prevention of Maternal Mortality for the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations (1928) [TGW: MSS.126/TG/RES/X/749B].  
The reproductive function of the female body was used to identify and debate women's role as workers particularly in the industrial sector. The spectre of infant mortality was frequently raised in the discourse surrounding women's work, but the leaflet and booklet displayed here deal with maternal mortality and the need for greater protection of pregnant mothers.

## iii) Collective Identity – Women Workers.

Over time, women identified their common problems as workers and organised themselves to fight for equality in their working conditions, status and wages. They formed their own national unions and were increasingly welcomed into international organizations.

- Booklet, 'Women in the Trade Union Movement' published by the TUC (1955) [UPW: MSS.148/UCW/6/13/41/29].  
The front cover features two Scottish weavers, taken from a membership card of the West of Scotland Power Loom Weavers Society, 1833.
- Newspaper clipping, 'Mrs Mopp', South London Press, 8 Feb (1952) [TUC: MSS.292/54.76/8].  
Demonstrates female, domestic workers' dissatisfaction, not only with their working conditions, but with their public representation as, 'Mrs Mopp.'
- Poster, 'Call to the Third Conference of the Open Door International' July 24th-28th (1933) [TUC: MSS.292/134.1/1].
- 'Women It's Your Fight Too!' open booklet published by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (1956) [UPW: MSS.148/UCW/6/13/41/30].  
The Open Door Council, a group campaigning for the economic emancipation of women workers, and the mixed gender International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, both represented the collective rights of women workers on an international basis.
- Flyer, Over Thirty Association [TUC: MSS.292/134.6/2].
- Flyer, 'Bridging the Gap', Over Thirty Association [TUC: MSS.292/134.6/2].  
Women workers were often represented as a homogenous group through the shared identity of gender. However, discourse about women as workers was frequently intersected by factors such as age, race and class. Founded in 1935, The Over Thirty Association, was one of a number of societies that identified the problems of women workers in the labour market as dependent upon age.
- 'The Negro Worker' in Women at Work, published by the U.S Labor Dept. (1933) [UPW: MSS.148/UCW/6/13/41/20].  
In the United States, women workers were often defined in terms of race.
- Transcript, 'Help for housewives' BBC radio broadcast (1946) [TUC: MSS.292/54.76/8].  
This radio broadcast by the BBC debated the role of domestic workers. Present was a member of the National Union of Domestic Workers, middle and working class housewives, and domestic workers themselves. The class position of each woman dictated their representation of the domestic worker and their interpretation of domestic work.



## Cabinet 2

### Self Discovery: Women and Travel.

Opportunities for women's everyday travel and personal mobility increased with the technical innovations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For instance, cycling offered new, daily opportunities to women for greater personal freedom and independence. Cycling, whether alone or as part of a club, was intimately connected by women with their wider push for social and political emancipation. Meanwhile, travel abroad was often motivated by a need for self fulfilment. This could be channelled into acceptable feminine pursuits: carrying out 'good work' as missionaries for instance, in areas of conflict or of humanitarian need, facilitated by organisations like the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Need was often determined by white, western, imperialist notions of 'uncivilised' cultures. Cabinet 2 illustrates the feelings and experiences of women who sought personal freedom and self discovery through different forms of travel and how their lives were irrevocably changed by their experiences. In both the private and published writings on display, the racist language of imperialism is evident in women's articulation of their new cultural encounters.

- The cycling diary of Emma Coddington, (c.1850) [NCA: MSS.328/N28/8/1]. Emma records her thoughts and feelings about her cycling journeys and who she meets. The sense of the independence cycling gives emerges in the deliberate noting throughout her diary of 'by myself' next to journeys she made alone.
- 'The New Woman', The Lady Cyclist, w/e 22nd Aug (1896) [NCA: MSS.328/N10/K/L/1-12].
- 'The Vote', The Wheelwoman, 4th Dec (1897) [NCA: MSS.328/N10/K/M/7]. These are typical of numerous articles in women's cycling magazines that connected cycling to the drive for women's equality and political activity.
- Photograph of Helen Haslam, date unknown [HS: MSS.121/F/3/8/1-45].
- Letter from Helen Haslam to 'Dear Gillette', (1917) [HS: MSS.121/F/3/8/1-45]. Describing her journey with the B.E.F to France with an illustration of her 'crossing the channel'.
- Letter from Helen recording in a series of sketches, her thoughts about her stay in an army hospital as a result of stress (1918) [HS: MSS. 121/F/3/8/1-45].
- Letter from Helen Haslam describing her station in France and her perception of the French people as 'curiously primitive' undated [HS: MSS. 121/F/3/8/1-45]. Helen Haslam travelled with the British Expeditionary Force during the First World War, under the auspices of the YWCA.
- Geraldine Guinness, 'In the Far East', Our Own Gazette, vol. xi (1894) [YWCA: MSS.243/5/5]. 'Our Own Gazette' was a YWCA publication and often contained the reminiscences of female missionaries. This article records Geraldine Guinness' recent travels to China and her impressions of the, 'quite kind and friendly' Chinese, 'with their queer, awkward garments and long tails'.

## Cabinet 3

### Performance: Women and Political Activism.

The history of women's political activism has continually involved public spectacle and performance. Whether protesting or campaigning on behalf of the rights and future of their own sex, or for peace in times of conflict, women have communicated their political voices by utilizing the public realm in innovative and creative ways. Seldom granted access to masculine channels of political power and privilege, women activists have performed their politics through songs, theatre, films and radio broadcasts, at garden fetes and mass demonstrations. Cabinet 3 illuminates how women have performed politics from the women's suffrage movement to the peace campaigns at Greenham Common in the 1980s.

- Song sheet of the East London Federation of Suffragettes, (c.1913) [ARR: MSS.240/R/5/5/4].
- Women's Social and Political Union circular (1914) [Misc: MSS.21/1815]. WSPU circular from Emmeline Pankhurst, encouraging women to continue with hunger strikes and other forms of protest.
- Letter, Equal Rights Campaign Committee, undated [TUC: MSS.292/822/1].
- Flyer for demonstration, Equal Rights Campaign Committee [TUC: MSS.292/822/1]. In the 1920s, the Equal Rights Campaign Committee continued to demand equality for women. In this letter and flyer their Open-Air Sub-Committee call on all 'keen feminists' to take part in a demonstration in Trafalgar Square.
- Labour Party leaflet aimed at women voters (1922) [ISTC: MSS.36/L41/i].
- Transcript of BBC Radio broadcast on behalf of the Labour Party by Margaret Bondfield [TUC: MSS. 292/786.3/5]. Women political activists in the 1920s and 1930s used various methods to get their message across. Margaret Bondfield addressed women voters on behalf of the Labour Party in a night time radio broadcast with the BBC. She appealed to women's, 'deep and abiding interest in peace' for votes.
- Letter signed Sylvia Pankhurst, 'film showings', undated [TUC: MSS.292/963/2].
- Letter signed Sylvia Pankhurst, 'garden fete' dated 24th May (1937) [TUC: MSS.292/963/2].

