



The National Archives

Press release

6 October, 2009

MS UNDERSTOOD:

The Women's Library celebrates Women's Liberation in 1970s Britain

To mark the 40th anniversary of the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, The Women's Library will be running an exhibition *Ms Understood: Women's Liberation in 1970s Britain* to illustrate its impact on women's lives.

As part of the Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com - an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom - the exhibition celebrates forty years of the country's first national Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford, where five hundred women came together to reinforce their demands previously adopted in Skegness in 1971:

- Equal pay for equal work.
- Equal educational and job opportunities.
- Free contraception and abortion on demand.
- Free 24-hour nurseries under community control.

The exhibition will reflect on this and later events which transformed the lives of women today. Visitors will learn about the movement from testimonies of women, who experienced it, as well as original documents and objects.

Isabelle Rucho, said:

"If you thought Women's Lib was all about burning bras and wearing dungarees then think again. This intriguing exhibition exposes the diversity, dissent and sisterhood of feminism in the 70s through first-hand accounts of the women who lived it."

Claire Henry, Curator said:

"Public understanding of the Women's Liberation Movement has often been clouded by stereotype, misrepresentation, and a simple lack of information. Revealing the complexity behind the movement, this exhibition explores the social, personal, and cultural legacies of liberation."

The event will be interactive to allow visitors to share their personal views and memories of how Women's Liberation has affected their own lives. These will be showcased in a display throughout the course of the exhibition.

The relationship between feminism and fashion will also be explored through home-made clothes worn by women active in the movement as well as those who chose to express themselves through the influence of the designers of the day, such as BIBA. A floor-to-ceiling, custom-designed map depicting the entire UK will give visitors an overview of key moments in Women's Liberation history. Other materials on display include posters, leaflets and badges.

Angela Owusu, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer said:

"Everyone has a story to tell and archives allow communities to tell stories first hand - they are an Aladdin's cave to be explored. The exhibition will help to build a picture of this important period in British history which led to changes affecting us all. It's fantastic that material about this fascinating social movement will be accessible to a new generation."

-Ends-

For further details, spokespeople or images on the Archive Awareness Campaign, please contact **Angela Owusu** on **0208 392 5237** or email

Angela.Owusu@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

The exhibition runs from **Thursday 8 October 2009 to Wednesday 31 March 2010**

Press preview: Wednesday 7 October 2009, 2pm - 4pm Contact pressinfo@thewomenslibrary.ac.uk for details.

Venue: The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT

Gallery opening times: Monday to Friday

9.30am-5.30pm (Thursday until 8pm); Saturday 10am-4pm; Closed Sunday.

- For PRESS information or images please contact Isabelle Rucho or Chandan Mahal at The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University on 020 3503 or via i.rucho@londonmet.ac.uk (Details not for publication).
- NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT CONFERENCE, Skegness. The first four demands of the WLM are passed
 1. Equal Pay
 2. Equal Educational and Job Opportunities
 3. Free Contraception and Abortion on Demand
 4. Free 24 hour Nurseries.
- The custom designed maps depicting the UK will highlight key events such as marches, national conferences across the country, the setting up of women's refuges, as well as a myriad of campaigns, such as 'YBA Wife?' (Why be a Wife?), which amusingly asked women to question aspects of their lives they had previously taken for granted, including legal and financial independence.
- There will be a chance to view *A Woman's Place*, the first film made about, by and for the women's liberation movement, as well as a second, specially commissioned film by Annis Joslin looking at contemporary opinions on the position of women today.
- The exhibition also marks the 40th anniversary of protests against the Miss World beauty contests at the Royal Albert Hall, and the publication of two key feminist books: Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*.
- Archive Awareness is spearheaded by the National Council on Archives (www.ncaonline.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk).
- Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.

Related events

Event	Date/Time	Admission
Study day Featuring leading activists, feminists and researchers will examine the cultural legacy of the liberation movement.	17 October	Free
Collaborative event with Black Cultural Archives will look at the history of British black feminism from the 70's onwards.	14 November	Free

Special fashion event “The Liberation Look”, recording fashion and Feminism, will invite visitors to bring their memories and images of the 70's and debate some of those fraught feminist concerns about the politics of appearance.	5 December	Free
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