Chapter 4: Findings from women’s libraries in the British Isles

4.1 Introduction
The principal research aim was to explore the potential for establishing a women’s library in Wales. This was placed within the context of the current positions of women’s libraries in the British Isles in order to understand more fully the various options. The findings from the fieldwork element of the research are presented here, whilst the following chapter provides in-depth analysis of the findings and Chapter 6 explores the options for Wales.

As described in Chapter 3, the fieldwork consisted of undertaking a mapping exercise to explore the current situation of women’s libraries, women’s resource centres and women’s archives in Britain. The findings from the visits to libraries and the interviews with personnel at each institution will be discussed thematically in the following order:

- Origins & aims
- Current roles
- Nomenclature
- Management
- Funding
- Services & collections
- Staff
- Clientele
- Networks and relationships
- Physical space

The anonymous quotes presented in the text are from members of staff and volunteers who were interviewed in the various women’s libraries or archive organisations\(^1\).

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\(^1\) Where initials are used in the quoted dialogue, AT refers to myself and other initials e.g. AA or BB have been used to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees. Where [X] appears in the text of the quote, this indicates a personal name or place name has been removed.
4.2 Origins of women’s libraries

As established in the Chapter 1, women’s libraries exist for a variety of reasons. The organisations in the British Isles, whilst all possessing different original aims, follow a broad chronological pattern of establishment that is replicated internationally. This pattern of three main periods of the founding of women’s libraries (Kramer, 1993; Moller Jensen & Nielsen, 1995, p. 97) also matches the three ‘waves’ of feminism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The first phase was during the era of empowerment and advancement of certain rights for women that began in the 1850s and culminated in women’s suffrage. During this period the first women’s library in Britain was founded (in 1926) as the Library of the London and National Society for Women's Service and was originally a resource for women wanting to enter into the hitherto closed professions. Internationally, it is joined by other early founders such as the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand in Paris (1931) and the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement (IIAV – Internationaal Informatiecentrum en Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging in Amsterdam) in 1935 (Jensen & Nielsen, 1995, pp. 97-98).

The second phase of establishing women’s libraries occurred during the Women’s Liberation Movement (which was particularly prevalent in America and the UK) roughly from the mid 1960s to mid 1980s. In Britain the Women's Research and Resources Centre was founded in 1975 in London (and later become the Feminist Library), The Feminist Archive was founded in 1978 in south west England, and Swansea Women’s Centre was established in 1979. International examples include Frauenforschungs, Frauensbildungs Frauensinformationszentrum (FFBIZ) founded in Berlin in 1973 and Biblioteca Donna-womanfemme in Rome in 1978 (Jensen & Nielsen, 1995, p. 98).

The mid-1980s and the 1990s form the third phase of the establishing of women’s resource centres particularly in less developed countries but also within Europe e.g.

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2 In 1918 in the UK to women over the age of 30 and over 21 in 1928; 1920 for women in the USA.
Women's Research and Documentation Centre, Nigeria founded in 1987 (IIAV, 2005) and the documentation centre at the Women’s Institute in Madrid in 1984 (Jensen & Nielsen, 1995, p. 98).

In the British Isles this period saw a range of new women’s libraries being established, but not necessarily with government or strategic influences e.g. Women in Jazz founded in 1986, Glasgow Women’s Library 1991, the Women’s History Project 1997 (although its origins date from c.1988), Archif Menywod Cymru/Women’s Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW) founded in 1998, and the Women’s Resource Centre in London opening in c.2000.

Although the 1980s may be classed by some as a period of state feminism, the environment was less conducive for feminism in Britain (see section 1.11.2 in Chapter 1) and many women’s organisations founded in the 1970s closed during the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Attic Press, Sheba Feminist Press, Onlywomen publishers, SilverMoon bookshop). One woman who was interviewed felt that:

> the times are not so propitious now, to be doing what we're doing.
> But, ... as time goes by, I think it becomes even more important to do what we're doing.

Thus, whilst the impetus and propitious environment for establishing a women’s information resource or archive in Wales today may have passed, the actual need for such a resource remains. This issue will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Whilst it is possible to place the establishment of women’s libraries within a chronological framework, it is also pertinent to examine why they were founded, and by whom. Some of the libraries evolved out of the interests of key participants. This is the case for Women in Jazz, the Women’s History Project and AMC/WAW. In the case of the latter two, both arose out of regional women’s history groups that were conducting research and were interested in documenting women’s lives for posterity.

> Once you start researching women’s history, well certainly ... at that time, ..., one of the things that you're conscious of is that you’re breaking new ground all the time. That a lot of the sources for things you want to do just don’t exist. Or, at least haven’t been
collected together, have to be created through oral history, that kind of thing.

I mean, I'd worked with Ursula, on the, Women's Liberation in South Wales project, and, I mean, going back slightly further, and she'll tell you this as well, but when she actually set up this research project, she put in, to research the history and to create a women's archive. Now Glamorgan quite rightly probably, said 'we can't do an archive, that's beyond our capability so take that out', but I think that's probably where the germ of the idea came from.

In Wales, there was also considerable overlap between personnel – the same names were repeated with regard to several women’s organisations that were developing from the 1970s onwards. For example, Ursula Masson, a founding member of AMC/WAW and Senior Lecturer at the University of Glamorgan, was involved with Swansea Women’s History group, founded in the early 1980s, which she ran with Jen Wilson and Gail Allen. Jen Wilson is the founder of Women in Jazz, and Gail Allen is a trustee of Women in Jazz (and has also been involved with Welsh Women’s Aid). Some committee members of AMC/WAW are also on the Committee of Swansea Women’s Centre; Some early participants of AMC/WAW were experienced in the field of women’s history, archives and research and had extensive experience of using other women’s libraries for their research e.g. the Women’s Research and Resources Centre; the Fawcett Library; and the Feminist Archive, Bristol. Thus, the experience, background and interests of a few women led to several new organisations in Wales. Masson believes that the idea for AMC/WAW came out of some of the projects that the Swansea Women’s History group conducted and “out of seeing what could be done, … to gather together sources for a whole community”.

The Women in Jazz archive also arose out of personal interest and social/research connections.

*AT:* So had you, started this, [the archive], when you did your women’s studies course? ‘Cos, is it on the Internet that you started this in 1986?

*JW:* Yes, not knowing what I was doing at all. Erm, I was always interested in history, and it came out of the Swansea Women’s History group which was run by Ursula Masson, so she’s one of
the figure heads, you know, it's all, linked, ... And she taught me really, how, to do research, and how women were relevant. Because up till then, you know, and especially being a jazz pianist, nobody sort of, you know, nobody wanted to know basically. And so she started Swansea Women's History Group round about 1980, 1981, something like that. And I joined and Gail Allen joined. ... And Ursula dragged me off to courses and things...

Like AMC/WAW, the founders of the Women’s History Project in Ireland, conceived the idea of a virtual archive during their own research into women’s history and archives in Ireland. Their key concerns were the potential destruction and loss of important material, and thus the loss of information about women’s lives. As was outlined in the description of their work (see Chapter 3), they decided against establishing a physical building, believing that many women’s libraries suffer perennial problems of funding, professionalism and security. Instead, they opted for a ‘virtual’ approach by mapping resources pertaining to women in Ireland. As one of the most recently formed organisations, it is interesting to note the new directions in which women’s information and archives may be moving. The new opportunities for such resources are of course enabled by developments in technology.

In contrast to academic and research interests, Glasgow Women’s Library, the Feminist Library and Swansea Women’s Centre all arose out of grassroots organisations. Swansea Women’s Group which was formed in 1972, established the centre in 1979 with direct campaigning to be a central part of their activities. The Feminist Library was also established (under a different name) in the mid 1970s with a remit to facilitate networking, to collect and participate in research and take part in campaigning activities. Although established over a decade later, Glasgow Women’s Library was also founded out of local community initiatives, in this case arising from women’s arts projects during the year that Glasgow was European City of Culture (1990).

Thus there are various origins behind women’s libraries, ranging from supporting women in their new careers, providing resources for research and networking,
collating and preserving documents relating to women’s lives, as well as evolving
from grass-roots movements. These disparate origins can be summed up in

“the feminist adage ... that 'if you don't know where you're coming
from you don't know where you're going.'”

The underlying aim of such organisations is therefore to empower women in their
present and future lives by facilitating access to the past lives of other women and
providing them with a space for personal development.

4.2.1 Aims of the women’s libraries
Having established a chronological development of women’s libraries in the British
Isles, it is possible to see how the era of foundation affects an organisation’s aims,
direction and principles. For example the aims of the libraries founded during the
second wave of feminism often reflected the feminist ideas of that time. With regard
to the Feminist Archive South, it was:

set up to record, to archive the material of the second wave of
feminism,... . It was concerned that all this wonderful stuff that
was being poured out during the women's liberation movement
was in danger of just disappearing, so, it was in fact [to be]
collected, and to be a reference place for women to come and look
at things and discuss and so on, so it had an educational point as
well.

I think they wanted, and everybody who’s worked here, has always
wanted it to be some sort of women’s centre with it, where women
can come and talk, but it doesn’t work. [X] did have its own
women’s centre, which ran as a separate entity from this place,
and that provided what presumably was wanted in terms of the
social life and so on.

These ideas of a separate place for women and meeting various needs were very
much part of the feminist environment of the 1970s. In contrast, the Women’s
Library founded in 1926 was concerned with actively helping women in their
professional lives and provided resources and services to meet these needs.

The original aims of many of the women’s libraries were to serve a specific
community of women but, whilst they all still aim to meet women’s needs today,
their focus may have shifted. For example, the Library of the London Society for Women’s Service was created:

as a library particularly for women who were beginning to enter professional life and needed support and information to do that. ... Initially it was there as a resource for these women, who had just got educated. Middle class women who were going into the professions, to be a support for them. I’d say in the kind of middle period [when it was the Fawcett Library] it became primarily an academic resource for researchers, and it still is very much that, but, but, I suppose since we’ve moved we’ve begun to think about how we use those collections more broadly... people who can use them, people who come with different skills. Interestingly most of the people who do come and use them do want to increase or develop their learning...

Thus, the Women’s Library has gradually evolved from enabling women to enter into the professions, to being a resource used primarily for academics to now also serving the needs of individual women looking for personal development. The Feminist Library’s aims have also changed over time.

When it was set up it was called the Women’s Research and Resources Centre... [and it] was, kind of a networking place for women doing research on feminism, ... I think it became more library-like, as time went on, a focus for books. For a long time it was, ..., quite well used by women who just wanted to read books, but now it tends to be used by students... that’s why we were thinking of changing [the name back to include research].

Thus, some libraries have moved from research to social aims, others from social to research, whilst others continue to serve educational aims, albeit in a different manner from in the past.

Occasionally, when the aims of institutions change, certain elements are lost. For example, with regard to the Women’s Library:

The library was attached to the Fawcett Society which is a campaigning society for women’s equality and when it moved here [in 2002], the library bit lost its campaigning emphasis...but I think we do see ourselves as a resource and a library and a place for debate and ideas, rather than a campaigning organisation, which doesn’t mean we won’t work with campaigning organisations but that’s not what we are any more.

The Women’s Library however, is used as a venue for feminist debate e.g. for a live debate on feminism broadcast on Women’s Hour on BBC Radio 4 (7/10/2003), and
on its first day after re-opening it hosted a Women’s Hour special broadcast on the suffrage movement (Purvis, 2002, p. 165). Its prime role is as a resource for education and research, rather than active campaigning.

A list of the aims of one of the women’s libraries provides a useful example of the objectives these organisations encompass. Glasgow Women’s Library’s website provides a detailed list of six core aims. These are:

- To provide an information resource, run on feminist principles, relevant to all areas of women's lives, history, culture and achievements for use by women and groups from all areas of the community.
- To meet both the needs of women looking for information, and those of others seeking information on a range of women's issues.
- To collect and archive such information and materials so that they are accessible.
- To encourage the involvement of as many women as possible in developing the Library and its related resources and services and in contributing to the documentation, collection, creation and use of materials.
- To provide and promote lifelong learning, training, education, skill-sharing, volunteering, and employment opportunities for women.
- To provide a high quality service for users, enquirers and members.

(Glasgow Women’s Library, 2005, Aims.)

These aims are essentially concerned with empowering women from the local community and helping them develop, whilst acting as an important resource repository.

*It's about developing women and developing their own confidence and their own, more importantly, ownership of things, so ownership of their own learning, ownership of the materials.*

This social and community spirit is also evident at Swansea Women’s Centre. Early aims for the Centre were for it to be a meeting place, a social space for women, and to have a direct role in campaigning on women’s issues, providing information and a variety of resources. The current Annual Report states that the centre is
Thus like Glasgow Women’s Library, the women users are as important as the documents themselves. Indeed, Healy notes that women’s centres are concerned with providing education to a feminist community, to empower women, to meet community needs, to promote a sense of community and to facilitate networks (Healy, 1996, pp. 35-36). This would confirm the importance of local women and their education or development as displayed by Glasgow Women’s Library and Swansea Women’s Centre.

Whilst many of the libraries do have social aims, they also are very concerned about preserving documents from women’s lives, as can be seen in the quote regarding the Feminist Archive (South) at the beginning of this section. Likewise, AMC/WAW is concerned with preserving women’s archives and documents, although its aims have changed somewhat since its foundation. Initially there was a desire to create their own space, in a specific building. It was hoped that this women’s library would have an academic (archive) role as well as including social elements e.g. a café and meeting rooms for women’s organisations to use. But, personal experience by the founding members, and advice from professional archivists in the group, encouraged them to change direction towards cataloguing existing resources, and rescuing undiscovered but valuable material about women’s lives in Wales rather than looking to establish a women’s archive in situ. For various reasons, their plans to conduct a research mapping project similar to the Women’s History Project have not been successful, and instead they have concentrated on rescuing documents to place in local record offices and the National Library of Wales, alongside raising the profile of women’s history.

AT: And the idea then at that time was to, have a physical place, or was the idea right from the beginning to,
AA: That was the dream I think. I think at a fairly early stage of meetings, it was [X] and I, who knew of the problems of collecting, holding, a collection,
(BB in background: realised it wasn't feasible)
AA: erm, said well you know, this isn't possible, and the costs. And [X] said it needs to be a virtual archive.
BB: Yeah, I think she did. I mean I knew Bristol well. And [X] knew Bristol well, and I mean, if you think of Bristol, it's wonderful for the resources but it's dreadful in terms of an archive. And I think we didn't want to go down that route,
AA: We knew, we had archivists on board, you know, we had museum, library and archive professionals, and we felt that if we were going to keep a collection it must be kept professionally.

AA... I mean, it wasn't a realistic way to proceed. And I think what we've come up with in the end,
BB: It works.
AA: It works, and it's a darn sight cheaper too.

Rescue has always been in my mind, but I think one of the key things that we wanted to do when we set up, and we've lost sight of this, not through our fault actually, we wanted to know, before we went looking for new stuff really, what exists where? We wanted in a way, to sort of, catalogue what resources first of all existed in Wales and beyond Wales. In other words, we wanted to do what Maria Luddy and the Irish women had done. But we were, elbowed out of that, we weren't welcomed with open arms by the archive community in general, were we?

Thus practicalities play an important part in determining the aims of a women’s library or archive project. The aims are intricately linked to the origins of the organisation, but, are necessarily dependant upon the current social, cultural and economic climate. The aims also feed into the creation of core roles for the libraries and archive projects.

### 4.3 Current roles

The aims of the various women’s libraries support two different roles. One role is of providing resources for reference, archival, academic and research purposes, and the other is a social role, with varying degrees of involvement in the local community, to meet more social or contemporary women’s needs\(^3\). Within the first group it is possible to place AMC/WAW, The Feminist Archive, Women’s History Project,

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\(^3\) By ‘social or contemporary women’s needs’ I mean issues such as contraception, careers advice, equality of pay, local groups etc
Women in Jazz, The Women’s Library, and possibly, the Women’s Resource Centre (which is a reference only collection, but, does work with local women’s groups). Those within the second type of library are Glasgow’s Women’s Library, Swansea Women’s Resource Centre and the now-closed Feminist Library. However, there is a degree of overlap between these two categories, particularly as the ‘contemporary’ libraries do also possess valuable reference material and the ‘academic’ libraries also reach out to local women’s communities.

This division in roles poses a key question: is it possible to combine the role of being a reference (and/or lending) collection, a resource for academics and researchers, with that of campaigning, direct community involvement and offering support services to women in need? Some see the combining of the two roles as problematic, for example, when it was still operating, the Feminist Library

*has both, a social role and an academic role, which is probably why it’s stuck, because they can’t define it.*

This potential conflict of interest will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. In practice, no library or organisation’s role is to be either exclusively academic or social – they all combine an element of both roles. However, some staff in women’s libraries question whether a library can serve both roles concurrently:

*I do think they’re different things, personally, either a kind of… archival resource, or, … providing a service to people, and you can’t, they’re very different kinds of things.*

Evidence from the literature highlights a possible tension when an institution serves several different roles. Colmer notes that

*[b]eing both a library and information service, and a feminist women’s service, the Women’s Studies Resource Centre has continually had to struggle for funding.* (Colmer, 1994 p. 227)

In Wales, AMC/WAW currently combine both academic and social roles. Whilst their focus is primarily on rescuing valuable documents relating to women’s history, they have recently developed social dimensions to their work. They were awarded a grant in order to conduct a series of Women’s History Roadshows. Styled loosely on the BBC Antiques Roadshow, the events are designed to encourage women to bring items that might be of value in documenting women’s lives in Wales. The first Roadshow was in Gorseinion, South Wales in June 2004 with subsequent
Roadshows taking place in autumn 2004 and in 2005. Outcomes from the Roadshows include the donation of potentially interesting resources and archives that could enhance the knowledge of women’s lives in Wales, and the raising of awareness of women’s history. The Roadshows have also acted as social get-togethers, with several women talking about their lives to the women running the Roadshows. This was summed up by one committee member as the public coming with “their life in a bag”. It is possible therefore to see that through the academic interest in women’s archives a social aspect was also incorporated.

There is considerable discussion and debate about the practicalities and possibilities of combining the roles. The different roles, intricately linked to origins and aims, can be seen to create two models of women’s libraries. This concept is analysed fully in the following chapter.

4.4 Nomenclature
Closely related to the origins, aims and roles of the women’s libraries is the issue of the names that they have chosen. This complex issue surfaced independently during many of the interviews. For example:

*Being called Glasgow Women’s Library [her emphasis] is quite off-putting to a lot of people you know because ... the last place I want to be if I’ve got any issues to do with literacy, is a library. And because everywhere you look there’s books as well, you know that can be quite off-putting too.*

Because one of Glasgow’s aims is to empower women, develop their learning potential and to help those who may have literacy problems, this is an important issue for them to consider. Glasgow Women’s Library has other problems with its current name.

*In a funny way the library’s been a bit put in the background at the moment because, just the way funding works ... and the need for project funding has meant that in a way, it’s kind of on the back burner, the actual physical work of a library, so it’s quite a funny name for us to have at the moment because it’s probably the least work spent on the actual physical [library].*
Thus the term ‘library’ is problematic for reasons of symbols, association and daily facilities.

Discussions on the relevance and importance of nomenclature also raise the question of what it is to be a library. Three of the nine institutions sampled use the word library in their title (and a fourth uses it under the umbrella name of the organisation to refer to the physical space of the library). However, in many elements of their work and services, they are quite dissimilar to traditional ‘libraries’ (whose emphasis is on providing information resources in a variety of media, to a range of customers, but does not tend to offer extra-curricular services outside of a reading/information framework) and may resemble to some extent resource centres or Citizens Advice Bureaux in terms of offering help and support. The remaining six institutions use either the term archive or resource centre to define themselves and these names tend to reflect more accurately the aims of the institution e.g. The Feminist Archive or Swansea Women’s Centre.

The name of an institution is important because not only might it present barriers to its target audience, but it may give out the wrong message. The Women’s Resource Centre for example, was thinking of changing its name:

> because it’s quite a misleading name. We get quite a lot of phone calls from women thinking we’re a resource centre for women, which is perfectly understandable but we’re not.

They are in fact a resource centre for women’s voluntary organisations.

Some of the other women’s libraries are considering changing their names due to changing aims, roles and services. The (now closed) Feminist Library was originally called the Women’s Research and Resources Centre, and retained its current name since 1983. However, the collective had recently thought about changing the name again, possibly removing the word ‘feminist’, and finding a name which reflected its recent change in focus towards its research role, after a period of a greater emphasis on the library aspect. But during a brainstorming session held to discuss their future and the accommodation and funding crisis, “we decided it probably didn’t need changing at the moment.”
Other libraries were also thinking about the link between their name and what they do. For example:

_Because [the name] Glasgow doesn’t reflect either the material we have, or the users we have, or the type of work that we do… we’re looking at the issue of naming ourselves as a Scottish-wide resource, but you can’t just do that, you can’t just call yourself the National Library [for women in Scotland]…_

Glasgow Women’s Library re-structured their staff profile in autumn 2003 to create a post for a worker to look at strategic development, one aspect of which would be to become the National Library for Women Scotland. The use of the word ‘national’ however, caused unease among some of the staff in other women’s libraries with regard to the renaming of the Fawcett Library. The Fawcett Library was temporarily renamed The National Library for Women (during c.1998-2002) and this new name was used on their website and in literature (Greening, 2000, p.468; Purvis, 1998, n. p.). However, after discussions, this name was changed to The Women’s Library (and adopted at the 2002 AGM, Ilett, 2003, p. 250). Comments made by staff at other women’s libraries suggest that the Fawcett Library’s decision to use the word ‘national’ in their new name was taken without consultation, and was particularly problematic for the library in Scotland, hence the subsequent removal of the word ‘national’. The idea of a ‘national’ resource has implications for any developments in Scotland and Wales.

_It’s important on a political level, and it’s important on a practical level… they got their money at a time in the run up to the Scottish parliamentary elections, so the whole notion of national identity, and what national means is very important in that context. But also on a practical level. They went to the Lottery and got money from the Lottery. Now if we were going to go to the Lottery and say… we are developing a women’s library of Scotland, they’ll say, we’ll we’ve already had a bid, we’ve funded a national library…_

However, the replacement name of the Women’s Library is also not without problems. One staff member at one of the other women’s libraries sympathised with The Feminist Library as a result of the newly renamed Women’s Library.
It is a nuisance that the two names are too close, it’s controversial but I do think the Women’s Library should have stuck to the Fawcett, as a name. I think it should have been the Fawcett Women’s Library or the Women’s Fawcett Library or something like that, because that’s how we knew it!

Thus, a name is important not only in signalling to people what the institution does, but it also needs to be thought about in terms of other similar organisations. An inappropriate name can have a negative effect, not only on potential users, but on the network of women’s libraries.

As with many of the other women’s libraries, the name of Archif Menywod Cymru/Women’s Archive of Wales (AMC\WAW) has sometimes been problematic. For example, some of the committee members of AMC/WAW felt that other archivists in Wales were wary of them when they were established:

I suppose we were seen more [as] grassroots people, even though we were academic people, respectable.

Furthermore, some of the AMC/WAW committee members felt that other archivists believed that the AMC/WAW would not only want to take relevant material out of current collections in order to create a separate women’s archive, but would also be collecting material that had formerly been their domain:

They thought we’d be collecting the stuff which they should have [...] which they would argue was their, provenance

However, as noted earlier, the group decided early on not to pursue campaigning for a separate building to specifically hold women’s archives, and, the Committee has always consisted of a number of professionally qualified archivists along with individuals heavily involved in women’s issues and academia and could not be considered amateurs.

Conversely, Dr Luddy (director of the Women’s History Project) believes that the Women’s History Project was successful in attracting grant money because:

we had a committee, and on this committee, we had very influential archivists, and of course, the thing you have to remember, I don’t know what it’s like in Wales, but Ireland is very small, and they were actually part of the Irish Society of Archivists, and that was actually very helpful.

(See section 4.8 for a discussion on professionally qualified staff.)
Women in Jazz has also experienced problems with its name, and was previously known as the Women’s Jazz Archive. The founder of the archive links the name change directly to the need to secure funding.

*The word Jazz Archive, the word Archive was causing terrible problems. We couldn’t get anywhere with funding with the Arts Council because we were an archive, ‘go and ask the Heritage’. The Heritage wouldn’t give us anything because we were an archive, we were calling ourselves an archive [but] ‘you’re not an archive because you’re not registered, you’re not with the Museums service, you’re not this and you’re not that.’ So we were stuck in the middle. And after about two or three years the Trustees said ‘look, you know, we’re not getting anywhere here, so throw out the word archive and we’ll try another tack’. So, we called ourselves, they decided on Women in Jazz, and then that wouldn’t upset anybody!*

Likewise, Swansea Women’s Centre has changed its name over time from Swansea Women’s Centre to Swansea’s Multicultural Women’s Resource and Training Centre. During a conversation with a member of staff at the centre, she explained how the name changed gradually over time, often to reflect changes in society i.e. adding ‘multicultural’; additional words were also incorporated in order to attract money e.g. adding ‘training’ to the name. The Feminist Library, in a discussion with officers from the local borough council and the Greater London Authority, were informed that their collective structure and name were not appropriate for funding (Ilett, 2003, p. 294), presumably because the name appeared to be too exclusive.

Names therefore, are important for the various women’s libraries and archives. They not only define accurately (or not, as the case may be) the organisation’s aims and roles but can also send unwitting messages to potential users and those who oversee the funding of such organisations. But there may not be an adequate alternative name:

*I don’t know what we should be called at the moment! It would probably be about twenty words long if we had a title of what we actually do!*
4.5 Management
To some extent, the varied management approaches of the women’s libraries reflect the different eras of their establishment. Thus, the institutions founded during the second wave of feminism (i.e. the 1970s) are influenced by feminist approaches, often operating as collectives, whereas earlier and later organisations tend to opt for more traditional structures such as directors or boards of management.

An example of a traditional form of management can be seen at the WRC who have a director as the head of five independent teams (Central Services, Development, Elevate Project, Information, Policy). The librarian reports to her manager (head of the Information team), but the daily running of the library is at her own discretion.

At the Women’s Library the position of director was created after the Lottery bid had been awarded, and a well-known figure in the arts world was appointed. When she joined the Women’s Library she brought “skills [which] were really to do with opening things up, doing public programmes, …, so I came to kind of give the library a bigger profile.” Before this, they had a development librarian who had done a lot of work looking, basically looking at the state it was in because it had been under-resourced for a long time, and obviously contributing to the HLF bid, which was a lot of work, but, she was a librarian, so I think they felt they needed somebody with more, I suppose, PR kind of, … broader skills across the board.

The director of the library also has a place on the senior management committee of the University which owns the library, although the Women’s Library is considered to be a separate department from the central university library and has its own building, staff and computer catalogue.

A slightly less hierarchical structure is characterised by committees, boards of management or trustees. Women in Jazz is managed by a board of trustees, with currently about 10 members (male and female), some of whom are also connected to other women’s organisations e.g. Jenny Sabine who is also involved with AMC/WAW. The jazz archive is run by two members of staff, one of whom was
unpaid at the time of interviewing. The trustees contribute their personal expertise in helping shape the future of the archive and concentrate on its strategy and development, as well as providing support, back-up and advice.

Yeah, they do all that but it’s a lead as well, as, you know, this is where we think we should be going next, and ’cos, when you’re in amongst it every day like this, you’re rushing to do gigs at night, you can’t really see where you’re going. So they’re there as a sort of direction as well.

The Feminist Archive South is also overseen by a group of trustees, three for the South and three for the North branch:

The trusteeship is fairly nominal; it’s there simply to oversee so that if anything goes wrong you know they pick the pieces up. … [T]hey will be coming to the AGM next week, and there will be a trustee’s report on what’s been going on... . They provide encouragement, they’re good like that.

The actual running of the library is left to the two voluntary part-time members of staff.

Although Glasgow Women’s Library has grassroots origins (see the description, Chapter 3), it is not run as a collective but operates under a board of directors who meet about four to six times a year. The board consists of

[F]ive women plus co-optees, and the five women include myself and [X] as paid workers, and the other three women are sort of, selected for their expertise in particular areas ... And two co-optees, from the volunteer team and one from a user group.

In addition, there are weekly staff meetings with the general running of the library left to the staff and volunteers.

One example of feminist management approaches was the (now closed) Feminist Library. The Feminist Library was run as a collective, made up of the volunteers who worked in the library, and any users should they wish to join the committee. They used to have meetings “every other week, because of the crisis, but before the crisis, it was about every month or every six weeks.” However, some consider the time for feminist styles of management e.g. collectives to belong to a previous era.

---

4 Women in Jazz were awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant in early 2005. The post of Heritage Development Officer, a two-year full-time paid position was awarded to Jen Wilson, founder and
I think there’s a problem that the Women's Movement, not that it's moved on and doesn't need them, that's patronising and wrong, but I do think that, in today's society and with funding as it is, ... It's very difficult for anybody to act as a collective any more because that kind of attitude is dying out, and volunteers and other people ...tend to be older.

AMC/WAW is run by voluntary committee members appointed each year at the AGM. There are a total of about 8-10 people on the Committee. Being voluntary:

[O]ur fundamental problem is that we've no paid workers, and we're all, it's just based on the good will, of the committee. But luckily when one is more tied up, others step into the breach. That is, that is working well.

Where much of the management and daily running of the library or archive is undertaken by women volunteers, there is the danger of these members facing ‘burn out’. Burn out refers to the “emotional exhaustion resulting from stress on the job” (Mount, 1995, p. 76). This was noted by one volunteer at the Feminist Library who felt that crisis management had taken over, leading to exhaustion, particularly of long-serving members of the collective. With more formal, structured management, crises may be lessened, or at least their impact on the daily staff may be reduced. It may be relevant to highlight that the only clearly stated collective in place was at a women’s library that has subsequently closed.

4.5.1 Ownership and independence

Often, management structures are determined by ownership, which in turn is related to independence. The most independent libraries (e.g. with no funding other than for rent and utilities) are the Feminist Library, the Feminist Archive (South) and Swansea Women’s Centre. Whilst Glasgow Women’s Library is also independent, it receives a number of longer-term grants for various projects (see description in Chapter 3, and Funding Section 4.6 below). AMC/WAW is also an independent organisation, but it has no physical library to maintain and thus is possibly less able to seek funding or association with another organisation.
Both the Feminist Library and the Feminist Archive could be considered to be the most insecure of all the women’s libraries in terms of their future. At the time of interviewing they were both contemplating their future, with the Feminist Library actually closing a year after I visited. The Feminist Archive was considering joining a higher educational institution in the area, to provide longer-term continuity for the archive. They recognised that there would be a range of issues to discuss before such a move could take place, such as access, a catalogue, storage and staffing. An important point that the Feminist Archive was considering was whether improved access and continuity was worth more than their independence and feminist stance (comments made after the tape recorder was switched off). If the archives were held within a university library, then improved access would presumably be available. However, for the Feminist Archive, part of their raison d’etre is their commitment to feminism which could be diluted if they exchanged their independence and became part of a university. This complex ideological issue is explored in more depth in Chapter 5.

4.6 Funding
Funding is central to all libraries, but could be considered to be of greater importance to women’s libraries because of their commitment to certain principles which may lead them to prefer independence to direct funding from an external source that may come with conditions attached. Each of the libraries visited were funded in slightly different ways but whilst there were elements of variation, they were all experiencing similar problems and insecurities.

[A]rchives, libraries, resources like this, are driven by passion, vision, and nobody is going to throw money at you just because you think something is a good idea. Although us as historians know that there are huge gaps in people's knowledge.

[W]e’ve always had to get our own funding, it’s meant that to survive we’ve always had to look for different sources of funding from different places, … , it means that we’re totally independent and that we run our own show, basically,… within the limits of what’s fashionable for funding.
Often the libraries started from donations and have subsequently won grants. This is the case at Glasgow Women’s Library, the Feminist Archive, the Feminist Library, Women in Jazz and the Women’s Library. With regard to Glasgow:

\[\text{in the initial period of time that the library was running ... it was self-funding, [from things] like membership, it came from services we set up like the newspaper cuttings service, ..., it came from research consultancy, and it came from donations and holding big fundraising events...}\]

Today, their funding comes from a number of different sources, primarily grants and project money:

\[\text{[I]t’s based on different projects. Our LIPS project which is a project based on peer support and education supporting young lesbian and bi-sexual women in the West of Scotland comes from Comic Relief, and that’s been funded from the year 2000 and we’ve just been successful in securing another three year period for that so that’s [until] 2006... [T]he Adult Literacy Project is funded by a partnership from money that was released by the Scottish Executive to address Scotland’s appalling literacy problem.}\]

They also receive grants from Glasgow City Council, North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council. These grants are mostly for specific projects although Glasgow City Council does provide some money for rent and wages.

Like Glasgow, the WRC also sources the majority of their money from a variety of different funds. For example, the post of information officer is funded by the Community Fund (via the National Lottery and now merged under the Big Lottery Fund), along with grants from the “Association of London Government, although I think that's just run out, from Bridge House, Lloyds TSB...”.

However, project money is often short-term (e.g. three years – see above quote from Glasgow), with no guarantee of its continuation. This can have a negative effect on services if they are curtailed or cut. Winning project money can also be time-consuming in terms of finding the most appropriate body to apply to, and in making the application: “it’s finding one that is appropriate which is the difficult business”.

One worker at one women’s library said:

\[\text{We are trying to fundraise,..., but it’s difficult because all the funding bodies want projects, and track records of things... .}\]

The WRC has found that:
It’s very hard and very rare to get funding for something like this. It has to be, for a specific area, so it’ll be funding for a position and also the expenses for that position.

Thus, the libraries find it difficult to break out of a vicious circle – they need to monitor services and spend time filling in grant application forms, yet they often don’t have the resources to do this, thus they are unlikely to win extra money to develop their services. Further, one of the key sources of recent funding, the National Lottery, is increasingly becoming less available as lottery ticket sales have declined since 1997, although they have risen since somewhat since 2004 (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2005, n. p.; FundFinder, 2005, p.1).

One further option for funding other than grants, project money or membership, is to become part of a university. At the time of interviewing, only one of the libraries visited was connected to an academic institution and the director of the Women’s Library said that “[w]e couldn’t survive if we weren’t part of the university.” The Women’s Library receives about 60% of its income from London Metropolitan University (LMU), and 40% is raised themselves and from other project grants. (The £4.2 million Heritage Lottery Fund grant was used for relocating and building a new library which cost £6.9 million. The remaining capital costs came from a variety of other statutory funders e.g. the Higher Education Funding Council for England, charitable trusts and foundations as well as from individual donations. A press information pack lists 19 donor organisations.) Although LMU currently provides a significant amount of money towards the Women’s Library, universities can change directions or priorities e.g. if courses are cut. The Women’s Library has already survived a merger of two London universities and is, to some extent, dependent upon the university seeing the library as a valuable asset. There are other issues as well that come as a result of joining a university. The director at the Women’s Library explains that whilst they are part of London Metropolitan University:

...it’s also about how does the library fit into the university, and have on one hand a slightly open separate identity, but on another benefit the university, be part of university life. ... The university gave the library a place, in its structure. I don’t think that’s quite seen through and the university would agree with that, we’ve still got work, but they did say this is not something to be hidden, so
Thus, whilst the library is more secure now in terms of its funding having been awarded a substantial National Lottery grant and been part of a university for the last 25 years, certain issues can still be problematic, particularly financial ones.

In addition, funding bodies, understandably, want to see track records and statistical data to support a grant application, but some of the libraries do not appear to keep these vital data. Many ‘traditional’ libraries are expected to maintain such statistics (e.g. public libraries supply information to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport since the implementation of the Public Library Service Standards in 2004, in addition to providing statistics to CIPFA- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy). Women’s libraries may be creating additional problems for themselves by not collecting data that could help their financial situation, professional image and development of the library and its services.

Dr Maria Luddy places the success of the grant applications by the Women’s History Association of Ireland down to a number of factors, such as being connected to the Irish Manuscripts Commission and having a very interested civil servant supporting them, but also to the availability of funding. She states that:

ML: The other thing at the time was, that there was a lot of money around at the time.
AT: In Ireland?
ML: In Ireland. [And the] Government, and they were quite keen to spend it on public things. So we really were there at the right time.

Whilst the Women’s History Project was able to attract significant public money for conducting their research, AMC/WAW in Wales have not been successful so far with large applications. However, they have been awarded some small grants, for example, a Community Fund Small Grant for a part-time development officer for 2000, and more recently, project money to conduct the aforementioned Roadshows. One committee member noted that there were sometimes problems with short term grants in that the first grant “kind of built up momentum … [but it] then dropped
again, which is a problem in a way.” However, another committee member felt that “those small grants suit us, to do projects we can, can get our hands on.” The Feminist Archive South has also received small grants over time, for example:

\[
\text{two Lottery Awards for All heritage fund, to do the oral histories.}
\]
\[
\text{That money largely goes to the young women who were doing the interviewing.}
\]

However, grants often do not cover the basics of running a library or archive project. For example, Women in Jazz receives several small grants for specific projects, but there was, at the time of interviewing, no official budget for purchasing material for the collection.

\[
\text{AT: Do you have a budget for buying books and buying records, that sort of thing?}
\]
\[
\text{JW: No, that got turned down in one of our big funding applications, it just all got thrown out. They just didn’t fund anything.}
\]
\[
\text{AT: Right. So how do you,?}
\]
\[
\text{JW: I buy it.}
\]
\[
\text{AT: if you see something you want, you buy it out of your own,}
\]
\[
\text{JW: [nods].}
\]

This is hardly a sustainable (or professional) approach to creating and running an archive collection. A similar situation is seen at Glasgow:

\[
\text{AT: And when you get materials, are you given it or do you buy materials?}
\]
\[
\text{XX: We don’t buy anything. Everything is donated, resources wise, except for the projects for lifelong learning and adult literacy. We buy in materials for that because we’ve got a budget. But we’ve never had a budget for the books.}
\]

Not surprisingly, a lack of secure financial resources has a negative impact on the effectiveness and range of services the libraries can provide. Without the financial ability to develop existing or new services, the libraries are unable to plan for future growth. Their resources may therefore continue to be underused and undervalued.

It is possible to conclude that there are links between the origins, aims, roles, management structures and funding of the various women’s libraries. Whilst being independent and adhering to core feminist principles may be considered to be
worthy and in keeping with the core aims of some of the institutions, this may not translate into the most effective services.

4.7 Services and collections

4.7.1 Collection size, type and collection development policies
As can be seen from the table in Appendix 3, the size of collections in the libraries varies quite dramatically. However, age of the libraries also varies and new libraries cannot be expected to have built up as extensive a collection as a library that has a 70 year history.

The director of the Women’s Library cites the historical importance and potential future development of the collection as a prime reason as to why the library was successful in winning Lottery money. She believes that:

> it was perceived as an, an important nationally significant historical collection, and it, it told a part, the story, a narrative that had not, you know, that isn’t always accessible or told. It was seen as nationally significant for that reason. ... [I]t was always the intention to, it wasn’t a closed collection and it was always the intention to continue building the collection.

Although many of the libraries have historically significant and large collections, what may be surprising is the lack of formal collection development policies. Whilst the libraries all have criteria with regard to obtaining material only one library (The Women’s Library) had a formal written Collection Development Policy, and it is also available online (See Appendix 7).

Several of the libraries apply feminist principles when collecting material. Both the Feminist Library and the Feminist Archive (South) only take material that meets their criteria e.g. it pertains to the women’s movement of the 1960s onwards, or it is a novel with feminist content. The Feminist Library, for example, would not take a novel that was written by a woman unless the content was considered to be feminist – a procedure that is relatively easy for a member of staff to assess. Likewise, the Women’s Library says:
we don’t buy things simply because they’re written by women. It has to be ... something which says something about women’s lives, for us to want to put it in the fiction collection.

This principle also applies to their non-fiction collection. In contrast, Glasgow Women’s Library would take fiction if it was either “by women or about women so it keeps it quite broad”.

Whilst there may (or may not) be formalised criteria for stock selection, some of the libraries have never had a budget for the books e.g. Women in Jazz, Glasgow Women’s Library. Those libraries that have a fiction collection will often obtain their material through donations. The Women’s Library:

\[\text{tend not to buy too much of fiction because we get given a lot of it, so we can usually meet the requirements for fiction through donation. Because our budget is limited of course, we tend to focus on the more academic publications, of women’s history, women’s studies, women’s biography, and so on.}\]

However, some libraries have to exercise caution over donations, if they are offering contemporary services rather than archive services. For example, at the WRC, they aim to help current women’s groups and thus need current information.

\[\text{We’ve had odds and sods donated, but the odds that you get donated are last years books, and if we want to be seen as a resource library with a bit of clout we have to get the latest editions.}\]

Donations can cause collection development problems for other libraries, as well as for women’s libraries. For example, the material may be in poor condition, or have special restrictions placed on its use, or may not be relevant to the library’s main areas of focus. If donations are a prime driver of collection building, as has sometimes been the case in women’s libraries and archives, they can also lead to problems of over emphasis in some areas, and gaps in coverage in others (see Pankhurst, 1987).

Where there are fiction collections, there is also debate over whether they should be lending or reference only. Two of the women’s libraries lend their fiction collection (the now-closed Feminist Library and Glasgow Women’s Library) because
there’s just no point to having fiction that’s reference only unless they’re rare books, because it just doesn’t make sense.

However, this causes problems for Glasgow Women’s Library as they also house the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (LAIC). The LAIC is a reference-only collection whereas Glasgow Women’s Library is a lending library. There is a separate room for the LAIC collection, and when Glasgow Women’s Library moves and raises its profile, it hopes to promote the LAIC resources more. It also now has a separate lesbian resources and services development worker who has responsibility for the collection. But, if the LAIC collection remains as reference-only, the fiction particularly might be underutilised.

Where a library is aiming to meet not only research needs but also provide contemporary material, there are further collection management issues to consider. For example, increasingly, “a lot of campaigning these days takes place in a web environment. It’s not necessarily in a printed environment”. How therefore, does a library collect this material? This raises questions not only for current collection development policies, but will also affect the nature of current and future collections. The transient nature of electronic material is a problem facing many other libraries, but particularly for those that have an element of being involved with campaigning and contemporary debates. As third wave feminism (see Section 1.11.2 in Chapter 1) is partly characterised by web zines and other ICT media, this has particular resonance for women’s libraries that seek to document feminism and provide access to relevant resources.

Again, this relates to a key issue of roles and aims. If the library is to be an extensive, comprehensive archive, it needs to highlight relevant feminist material, regardless of its format. Some institutions may wish to consider how to archive feminist websites whilst libraries looking at serving contemporary needs ought to be able to refer women to a range of potential resources, from books and journals in the physical collection to electronic resources. This relates to the mapping of women’s resources (see below) and collaboration issues.
In terms of the collections themselves, many are diverse and extensive. For example, at the Women in Jazz archive, there is

*a photography collection, the record collection, the oral history collection that I was trying to build up. You know, there's a lot of formats here, you know? It's not just books.*

Along with these items the jazz archive has recently acquired performance gowns worn by female jazz artists. But all these items require particular conservation conditions and expertise – something that is hard to achieve on voluntary and part-time staff and little direct funding. But Jen Wilson notes that:

*we're the only one [jazz archive] who's, we've got a multi-media, we're the only one with that in Britain, and Wales hasn't cottoned on to that.*

### 4.7.2 Catalogues

The majority of the women’s libraries have computer catalogues (except Glasgow Women’s Library and the now-closed Feminist Library), although the catalogues are often not complete (WRC) or are not available to the public (The Feminist Archive). Only the Women’s Library has a searchable electronic catalogue that is available via the Internet, and the Women’s History Project *is* an electronic catalogue.

The WRC’s computer catalogue is not complete because managing the library is not the Information Officer’s main job:

*it's probably second to the design and publications, in people’s views. I’d like it not to be but, that’s certainly the way it’s seen. So ... I’m lucky if I get to spend a day a week in the library.*

With such limited resources, the libraries are unable to provide the level of service that they may wish to offer or that would normally be expected from any other library in terms of standards of services. Further, the WRC does not

*have a cataloguing system in terms of, each book doesn’t have a specific number, each book just has a box number....*  

This is just one example of how the catalogues vary in terms of professionalism or library standards. Most of the staff also admitted to not having ever conducted stock checks (comments that were often made during unrecorded tours of the libraries). An accurate searchable computer catalogue based on regular stock checks is essential, especially if the libraries aim to serve researchers or academics.
The Feminist Archive (South) has various catalogues of its material, including one in Microsoft Access, but they are not available for users to browse so are not useful in a practical sense to a researcher. The staff devised the classification system using the European Women’s Thesaurus created by the IIAV, but have not had the resources to extend it to all the material in the archive.

*We have a book catalogue, and a pamphlet catalogue, and a poster catalogue, but it’s probably just as quick to go straight to the shelves!*

*...because it’s taken us an inordinate length of time, just to catalogue the books, pamphlets and posters, and such like, and that was supposed to be a trial run to see if we could do it. We thought the books would be easy and we’d get the nice new European Women’s Thesaurus you know and we’d do it, and it’s just taken, you know, forever, to do it. And the object was to find out how to do that, successfully, and then to take all those boxes, archive boxes, of women’s material and cross-reference things, so you go and look at [unclear name] box and it’s got so and so in it and that cross-references to that, but forget it, that’s not going to happen!*

With regard to the European Women’s Thesaurus, it is interesting to note the commitment of the Feminist Archive (South) to employ a specifically feminist approach for classification and cataloguing. As was noted in the literature review the issue of the inherently male-orientated nature of the major classification systems (i.e. Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress) has been a long-term concern for feminist librarians. For example, in Dewey Decimal, lesbian and bi-sexual material used to be classified alongside paedophilia and incest, reflecting nineteenth century male morals (Ilett, 2003, p. 260). Most of the libraries visited used either Dewey (e.g. the Women’s Library), or their own self-devised classification system. The latter were often not constructed for feminist reasons, but often for convenience or suitability to their own collections (e.g. Glasgow Women’s Library; the Women’s Resource Centre). The Feminist Library created their own specifically feminist system in 1979 but Ilett argues that they failed to promote this, or to engage with either the library profession or feminist networks about the important political stance that they were making by creating a female-centric classification scheme (Ilett, 2003, pp. 289-91).
4.7.3 Use of the collections

The use of Glasgow Women’s Library’s ‘library’ collection has diminished in recent years, as other services have developed. But one staff member thought that the books and journals:

[w]ill come into their own again in the next few years, because it will be, the projects that we have like the lifelong learning and Adult Literacy and so on will ... click up together and materials will start to be used in that context, and the book group as well, it’s becoming much more, they’re using the materials and they’re kind of looking more at what we’ve got. So that’s going to increase again, but ... in a way it’s like the basis of the library was the books you know, and, I think that it is sort of coming full circle.

To tackle a decline in use of the library materials, Glasgow Women’s Library is trialling satellite libraries, similar to an outreach scheme.

[We] are trying to address, the ... use of the books by having satellite libraries so we’re working with Women’s Aid and [?] Women which is for sexually abused young women, and like accommodation’s there and like taking our books to them, so that they [can use them], ... [and] ... we’re trying to increase that to Cornton Vale the women’s prison as well so at least they’re getting used because at the moment our space is so limited and the way that the library is working at the moment isn’t really concentrated so much on that.

Other women’s libraries are also trying to broaden the appeal of the collections. For example, the director of the Women’s Library states that:

I’ve been quite careful to pitch this library not just as a resource for people who are interested in women, women’s studies or women’s history. Because women make up 52% of the population so most of what is in here is relevant to a whole series of other disciplines, but there are often stories that have been hidden or locked up; there are ways of looking at things that shed a light that hasn’t always been seen before, so, I think it’s very very important to have the documenting of women’s experiences and concerns, ... that’s obviously their raison d’etre, but I wouldn’t want ... their use to be interpreted for people who are only interested in that.

Thus, whilst a collection may be useful for a researcher interested in one aspect of women’s history, the library is also trying to draw out the wider relevance of the collections. For example, the records of the National Council of Single Parents are...
in the Women’s Library but are relevant to more than those interested in women’s issues:

[B]ecause 90% of lone parents are women, [the records tell you] how single women who are single parents are perceived, it tells you about adoption, it tells you about women as single parents as workers etc. It also tells you about how a voluntary organisation organised itself, how it campaigned, what its relationships with government were, so you can never just tell women’s history, you’re telling a whole lot of things around it.

The Women’s Library is also looking at how their regular exhibitions can help promote the collections so that their resources are seen as being relevant to more people.

[U]ltimately the exhibition programme is to designed to be a window on our collection, so we would never have an exhibition that didn’t show, give an idea of what could be found within the library...

Frequently, such exhibitions will utilise rare or special material that falls into the category of ephemera, as well as the more traditional items of books and journals.

Whilst not having an actual collection of their own that is used directly, the Women’s History Project has been able to see its impact on some of the collections that it has mapped. For example, Dr Luddy states that the project has raised the profile of the Taoiseach’s papers which were also included in the project and are housed in the National Archive.

[W]e actually have huge chunks of information taken from the [Taoiseach’s] files as well, and I think people actually get a better sense of [those] archives. ... And that’s a collection that’s never really been properly [?]. It’s much more widely used now than it’s ever been.

Further, several important collections have subsequently been donated to the National Archive of Ireland after being listed by the Women’s History Project e.g. the papers of the Girls’ Friendly Society. This not only improves access to such archives, but also ensures their preservation. Dr Luddy mentioned instances of rescuing material for donation that was in danger of being thrown out or destroyed through unsatisfactory storage conditions. Thus the Women’s History Project has raised the profile and usage of women’s history and archives, but also of archives in general.
4.7.4 Role of ephemera
Apart from the Women’s Resource Centre, all the other libraries collect ephemera. The Feminist Archive (South) is particularly concerned with ephemera, from the second wave of feminism, but there is the danger that in not actively collecting more ‘mainstream’ materials i.e. books on women’s issues, these too will become lost to researchers or a woman looking for a piece of information. The Feminist Archive (South) does:

*occasionally ask for some books that have just been published…but really we’ve stopped actively doing that … because these are available, books … are always available anyway.*

However this assumption may not be the case in reality. Discussions on a (now defunct) Feminist Librarians mailing list suggested that books about women or classic texts from the cannon of women’s studies are not easily available, even in public libraries, and that the librarians were unsure as to what books to obtain in order to build up a collection of such books (the emails are unfortunately no longer unavailable as it was a Yahoo group and no longer exists).

The role of ephemera is important to all the women’s libraries (see section 2.3.2 in literature review). Often it is this type of material that is lost, never deposited in libraries or archives and yet is often rich in context and meaning.

ZZ: the important stuff would be all the ephemera of the 70s and 80s,
AT: things that would be harder for someone to find,
ZZ: Yes, so in terms of trying to prise things out of people, it’s the ephemera of the 70s and 80s, it’s the conference papers, and such like, that people have got in their cupboards somewhere, and we’re really trying to get from them now before we, really call a halt [to collecting material].

Women’s homemade newsletters, badges, banners etc are not easy items to locate, collect, catalogue and store, especially if few or none of the women working in the libraries have special professional qualifications that would help them deal with this type of material. It takes time to build up collections of ephemera and they are reliant upon women having kept such items, and realising their value and donating them to specific libraries. If a new women’s library wished to have a strong archive or historical presence, it would need to create collections of such material, which
could be difficult to accomplish. One of the most oft-quoted items of ephemera at the Women’s Library is the return train ticket of Emily Wilding Davison, a suffragette who threw herself in front of the King’s horse on Derby Day, Epsom, 1913 and subsequently died of her injuries. Material like this is not only difficult to source, but also difficult to preserve. Yet the combination of women’s lives frequently being left out of official documented histories, and their (continued, but fortunately decreasing) restriction to private rather than public spheres has created the situation whereby ephemera and primary sources are vital to documenting women’s lives (Beddoe, 1993, pp. 1-15).

In Wales, the AMC/WAW have been active in raising the profile of ephemera and other material that may document women’s lives but which is often in danger of being lost e.g. individual’s family photos, correspondence etc. Through their recent Roadshows they have endeavoured to raise awareness, particularly among the public, about the value of ephemera and other such material in recording the lives of women, material which is often ignored by traditional history records (see Beddoe, 1998).

4.7.5 Other services offered
As well as the traditional library-based services, some of the women’s libraries also offer other services. These include reading groups, discussion groups, cuttings services, consultancy services, free advice services, lifelong learning courses and also an allotment (which Glasgow Women’s Library maintains). The three main libraries who offer an extensive range of services are those that fit into the ‘community’ model as opposed to the academic model of women’s libraries i.e. Glasgow Women’s Library, the Feminist Library and Swansea Women’s Centre. Their extended services are examples of how they reach women in the community, attracting women who perhaps would not use the library and its traditional document-based collections and services.

Whilst the now-closed Feminist Library used to offer community services, there was some discussion at the time of interviewing as to whether they wished to go down
the ‘services route’. After the recorded interview with one member of staff, unrecorded discussions with other volunteers indicated that some of the Friends of the library wanted it to continue to concentrate on the ‘library’ aspect, whilst others saw the extension of services as being a more viable option for the future of the organisation. Ilett also states that the Feminist Library had been encouraged to extend its services and outreach programmes with the local community if it wished to be successful in attracting grant money, but that the collective had decided not to do this (Ilett, 2003, p. 288).

Glasgow Women’s Library provides an extensive range of extra services and credits its current success to continually keeping pace with what women in the community actually require. Over the years they have seen the decline in the use of the books and journals, and an increase in use of their other services e.g. lifelong learning courses. One staff member felt that the situation continues to evolve and that the book collection will come back into prominence in years to come (see quote in Section 4.7.3). Being appointed as one of the Scottish Parliament’s Linking Libraries has enhanced their documentary and electronic resources and may also provide services that draw in new users (see section 4.7.6).

Some of the services that Glasgow Women’s Library provides are similar to a Citizen’s Advice Bureau or a resource centre. For example, they:

\[
\text{have a monthly lawyer’s service where you can access free legal advice, and a monthly listening ear service as well, where you can get, you know, initial, not intensive counselling, but there is a trained counsellor, and then we have one-to-one support, and a new service that’s just about to happen is the lesbian outreach service...}
\]

Offering such a range of services is very resource intensive. Glasgow Women’s Library also provide a newspaper cuttings service, for a fee, to any member. However, this service is labour intensive and relies upon volunteer staff and is causing some resource problems.

\[
\text{[We] don’t know how we’re going to address it really because we’ve got cuttings going back 14 years, so we really don’t want to stop it but at the same time, there’s just so much you can do, and it’s like, at the moment, because the cuttings subscribers have decreased, the revenue is like, about, £20 a month, so it’s a [lot of}
\]
... and currently I think we’re about a year behind at the moment, so it’s like really, [laughs], bit demoralising really, but, it’s just the way of it, you know, you can’t do everything... it’s a very specialist thing, and if we don’t have the woman power to do it, then maybe we’ll just have to accept it.

Thus, although services may be worthwhile, the deciding factor on whether a service continues is resources, and ultimately, funding.

4.7.6 Electronic services
There are few electronic services available in the women’s libraries. As discussed in Section 4.7.2, only the Women’s Library and the Irish project have catalogues that are available to users electronically. Few other electronic services are offered, other than answering email queries. All of the libraries have websites, but these vary in content and currency, and often depend upon volunteers (or family) to maintain them. For example, the Feminist Archive (South)’s website was put together by the main volunteer’s step-son, and is kept up-to-date by herself and her husband.

Some of the websites are informative and concise and have sufficient amount of information to satisfy initial enquiries about the resource. The Feminist Archive (South)’s website has additional material such as digitised images from its badges collection and it is also felt that “the website seems to have done a very good job in, publicising the place”, and also increasing the number of visitors, particularly oversees researchers.

Other websites are still being created or are very new (e.g. the Feminist Library acquired theirs in 2002/03) or are very thin in terms of information provided (e.g. The Women’s Resource Centre). Glasgow Women’s Library website was out of date at the time of interview (three years old), but it has subsequently been redesigned and completely updated. At the time of interviewing, whilst the staff were aware and embarrassed about the situation, they lacked the resources (time and skills) to update and amend the site. In Wales, the AMC/WAW had an ‘in progress’ website although one member said

*the website at the moment I’m slightly embarrassed by, because this was literally a first draft, and the person who designed it for*
us said ‘right, there it is, but, it’s very much unfinished’. So there’s actually a lot of work that I’ve got to do ... to get that up and running. But it is there, it does mean people can look at it, they can download joining forms, ...

As yet the website does not provide a database of the collections across Wales that have been deposited under their name. They are keen to provide this facility, although note that another archive organisation (Archive Network Wales) has possibly eradicated the need for them to do it themselves on their own site.

AA: We have the website and it's important that it's, developed, but the idea of putting the archive on the website, has been somewhat superseded by Archive Network Wales. ... Which will be, all archive collections, will go onto it ... well this is what I'm working with [X] with now, so that we've got a compatible programme, process, so that, our, our collections are catalogued in the same way, and therefore go through,

BB: So that you go, you do what I did the other day, you put us in, and all our collections should come up...

By developing external professional links, AMC/WAW may thus be able to save themselves time, money and effort.

The Women’s Library’s website is the most up to date and informative for a researcher, reflecting perhaps the fact that this is the most securely funded and managed women’s library in the British Isles. Another example of an up-to-date website is that of the Women’s Resource Centre which has a team of three volunteers who oversee the website, with each person having a specific area of expertise. Although the website is updated weekly, the paid worker overseeing the library information admits to not having much website experience.

[O]ne does design, one uploading and one research, and I email things to them and they just put it on! And that’s as much as I know about the website! That’s about as much as anybody knows apart from the three volunteers who do, the site! Which is a bit bad, but, you know. It’s updated every week, and we try to put on, we try to put on latest books that have come into the library on a weekly basis as well.

The problem for most of the women’s libraries with regard to websites is the lack of technical skills among the staff or volunteers. Several have had the website created for them by someone else, but after this person leaves, or once the project is finished, the website cannot be updated as remaining workers simply do not know
what to do. Out-of-date websites may give a negative impression to potential visitors who may then query the currency of the library’s other resources and services. Few of the libraries however are able to designate someone, either a paid worker or volunteer, to be responsible for the website. One member of staff at one library said: “I’m not actually sure, who’ll be doing the work! It’s quite worrying really.”

Another worker said:

*nobody’s really responsible for it [the website] right now. The person who was doing it moved to New Zealand, so we really need to address that and it’s on the agenda and it will get addressed in the next few months because we really need to have that up-to-date.*

When discussing the likelihood of virtual libraries, all the library staff interviewed felt that physical (*in situ*) women’s libraries would still be essential. Quite apart from the fact that few of them offer any electronic services (other than email enquiries), many of the staff felt that women seek out women-only spaces, and that the space and the woman’s time in it was as important as the resource or service they came for. Therefore, although it may be possible to deliver some services electronically, the staff felt there would still be a role for actual women’s libraries or centres. This is not only because many of the users are coming to the libraries to consult books, printed material or journals that wouldn’t be available electronically, but also because the staff believe there is intrinsic value in women-only spaces.

Unlike any of the other women’s libraries in the British Isles, the Women’s History Project is solely represented to the public via the Internet. The website provides access to search two databases and enables anyone to search for material about a range of topics pertaining to women in Ireland. In terms of its usage, the director of the project stated that:

*On average it’s about 1000 hits a week, … , and that's been the same roughly since about 1999. It's just constant. It dips a bit in the summer. And I mean, we've had people from New Zealand, America and all over the place, saying they've used it.*

However, because it is only a referral database of where the information is within Ireland, it is not possible to establish how much the actual materials and documents have subsequently being consulted.
4.7.7 ‘Mapping’ of collections

In the United Kingdom, the mapping of collections relating to women has recently been addressed by the Genesis project which is hosted by the Women’s Library. Funded by the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) Genesis is a mapping initiative that aims to identify and develop access to women's history sources across the British Isles\(^5\). Information is provided via a searchable database which holds descriptions of women's history collections from libraries, archives and museums from around the UK. A total of 46 partners have contributed details of their collections to Genesis (although this figure includes some institutions that have submitted collections from several different departments which then count as separate partners e.g. the British Library). The partners include 28 higher education institutions; four national repositories; 11 specialist repositories and three associations. AMC/WAW is one of the associations. The Feminist Archive (South), Feminist Library, and Glasgow Women’s Library are all listed as specialist repositories. The Women’s Library is one of the higher education institutions included. Genesis has:

\[\textit{created a kind of map of women’s resources, both inside mainstream libraries and collections that don’t highlight women’s history, and also includes the smaller women’s libraries. So that created a good network.}\]

[\textit{W}hat we’ve found with Genesis is that there’s all sorts of collections held in other academic institutions and privately, we haven’t even done the private ones, but you know, the Women’s Royal Voluntary Service, it’s in a warehouse somewhere, but you know, there are major collections that are still held by the organisations themselves.}\]

Genesis does not cover the Republic of Ireland, but fortunately the Women’s History Project in Ireland has accomplished a similar project, which began just before Genesis was launched. The mapping of repositories in Ireland began in September 1997, recording relevant records that document women’s lives. After the

\(^5\) Although the website says it covers the British Isles, it has been established – see Footnote 1 in Chapter 1 - that the British Isles includes the Republic of Ireland. Genesis does not cover the Republic of Ireland, although one collection from Northern Ireland is included. The correct wording should therefore be that it is a UK-wide project.
initial year, the group successfully won more money for searching of more repositories in Ireland until 2001. A total of just over 400 repositories were mapped in these two rounds of research. Dr Luddy states that at first, many of the repositories wrote back to the researchers saying that they had nothing in their archives that was relevant to the project but that the team was welcome to visit. On visiting, it was found in most cases that there were significant amounts of material that did relate to women’s lives. Thus these mapping projects are useful in not only documenting material about women that is possibly already known about by the public e.g. a women’s group’s archives, but also in raising awareness (among the public and the archive and history professions) that documents that contain evidence about women’s lives are not just restricted to particular material, or to material about women who were significant in public life, or who made important achievements.

The grant money for the Ireland mapping project has now ceased, with the project now hosted by the National Archive of Ireland, which Dr Luddy hopes will secure its long-term future. She would like to see future project money being awarded in order to enable further rounds of visiting repositories and private collections to find more material documenting women’s history in Ireland.

We update it every now and again, in terms of names and addresses and contact numbers. What we want to do, we’re hoping to do this in about two or three years time, is actually get money, maybe on the 10th anniversary, of 1997, to actually get more money to update the actual databases because even since we’ve done it, there’s been lots of stuff, that has become known to us, that wasn’t known before we finished.

The success of the Women’s History Project is a reminder to AMC/WAW as to what they would like to accomplish. Whilst mapping projects such as Genesis, Archives Network Wales and Collections Wales (the latter of which has been incorporated into Wales on the Web) do cover collections in Wales, having a dedicated mapping of women’s collections in Wales is an ongoing ambition of the group.

The mapping of collections, whether achieved by Genesis or other organisations, creates valuable tools for researchers. Such an exercise also presents wider
implications for collaboration and networking between existing women’s resources and women’s libraries. As will be discussed in a later section (see 4.10), there is very little direct networking between the various women’s libraries in the British Isles. The mapping projects therefore highlight the potential for the women’s libraries to move out of their own sphere and co-operate with broader related networks or resources.

4.8 Staff
Whilst the staffing levels vary from two to 24, all the libraries rely upon volunteers as part of their staff, with only a few libraries employing paid staff. Although there was great variety in the number of women working in the libraries, a common theme was the lack of professional library or archive qualifications of those working (as either paid staff or volunteers) in the libraries. (The Women’s Library was the exception as all its paid staff either had, or were in the process of acquiring, such qualifications.) This situation is changing though. In the summer of 2005, Glasgow Women’s Library began advertising for a full-time librarian (35 hours a week) with a salary of £24,432 pa. A degree or post graduate diploma in library and/or information studies was considered an “essential” criterion (Glasgow Women’s Library, 2005b, Staff). Some of the key tasks for the new librarian will be the implementation of a library management system and

\[
\text{to research and implement a cataloguing and classification system appropriate to the needs of the organisation, its staff, members and users. (Glasgow Women’s Library, 2005b, Staff)}
\]

This will overcome the library’s current lack of classification system and computer catalogue (see Sections 4.7.1 and 4.7.2) and will help create a more professional image for the library.

Although staff may not have library or archive qualifications, they may possess other qualifications that are appropriate – some volunteers had been teachers for example and are thus familiar with helping people and looking for information. However, in terms of the quality of the services, some staff did worry that their lack of library qualifications might be hindering the development or professionalism of the services offered.
some of the volunteers, have had a background in libraries, but none of us, none of the paid staff have any library training. And I think that’s probably why the cataloguing hasn’t happened!

I’m not an archivist and therefore this is where this place [has] now, got to the point where it must have some professional care to be of any use. ... [Y]ou’re jumping in at the dark and as I say, even doing the catalogue on the computer, we’ve just devised something which seems reasonable, in Microsoft Access you know, but what a professional librarian would say about it is another matter...

I don’t know enough, and that’s one of the problems of just being a volunteer, retired teacher doing this stuff, is that I’m not really in the swing any longer, ..., it’s not part of my career and I’m not caught up in it, and that’s why it does need a young properly trained archivist to get in contact.

The issue of professionalism is important. Some members of the AMC/WAW committee felt that they were not perceived to be a professional group, even though many were respected academics or archivists. In Ireland, the Women’s History Project sought to pre-empt claims of amateurism by making sure that:

*the people that were employed to do the work, actually were archivists, even though essentially we didn't actually need archivists because we weren't archiving, we were only copying down, we actually made sure that we employed archivists.*

The Women’s Library is also keen for its staff to possess the relevant qualifications.

*We all have library qualifications, [or are] currently taking ... library and information science qualifications, so we kind of encourage that professional development. [T]he university here runs a number of women’s studies courses and again some of the staff have done those in the past, or are indeed are about to embark on that course, so, there is both aspects, yes we do want people with library qualifications and we also actively encourage people on staff to improve their knowledge of women’s studies.*

The additional qualification in women’s studies is an important point. Although the women working in the libraries may not have formal library qualifications, they may have qualifications in women’s studies or other related areas. The commitment required for working in a women’s library means that the person must be dedicated to the ideals of where they work. This is perhaps why many of the workers in the women’s libraries, as paid staff and volunteers, have become involved with the libraries after using the services as a member of the public i.e. coming from the
women’s side rather than the professional library side. For Glasgow, workers often become involved through:

...using the library. And sometimes through direct referrals either through other women’s organisations or quite a lot through the volunteer sector, in Glasgow, because we’re on their books...

Other libraries also use referral services or use “the Volunteers Bureau, we have adverts there, occasionally we put ads in The Guardian, for volunteers”.

One library (Glasgow Women’s Library) provides specific training for the volunteers, and reimburses their travel costs for travelling to and from the library. The volunteers can join one of four areas of work in the library: Administration, Cuttings, Reception or Research. And at the Women’s Library they

...try to take the skills and experience of the volunteer and match that up to appropriate projects in the library. So for example, there’s one volunteer who, has, a sort of background in communication, and she works with tour groups. So they don’t always come into the library you know, it depends where their strengths are.

Some staff mentioned how they would like to have more volunteers (or paid staff) to help with projects and the work:

I would love to have a paid worker come and do some... of the big, tasks, we have here, you know sorting out the, all the donated books and someone just focusing on that kind of thing.

The number of people needed to manage the workload is important. As one staff member pointed out:

...we always feel that there needs to be more [volunteers], that’s always been a problem, because the ones here get very tired really...get really burnt out, so we’re always on the look out for someone who’d be reliable and would want to stay for a while.

This element of ‘burn out’ is important because some of the paid staff and volunteers in some of the libraries have been involved with the organisation for 10 years or more. This is not unusual in women’s libraries. Vera Douie, the first librarian of the Library of the London and National Society for Women's Service (as it was then known) held the post for thirty years. Personnel interviewed in Glasgow Women’s Library and the Feminist Archive (South) had been volunteers and/or paid staff at the respective organisations for between eight and ten years at the time of
interviewing. The founder of Women in Jazz had been involved for 17 years at the
time of interviewing. When this is in a low-paid or unpaid capacity, it calls for a
large amount of personal commitment in terms of time, money and energy. This is
related to the issue of the women believing in the principle of their work and being
committed to it personally; this appears to be especially so where the institution is
formed as a collective.

In addition to staff burn out, when an organisation relies solely on volunteers, there
can be problems at times with ensuring the continuation of regular access to the
library. At the time of interviewing, the Feminist Library had about 10 core
volunteers. However, there had been occasions when access to the library was
hindered because of staffing problems as can be seen in the quote below:

...sometimes we’ve had to close the library, if no one can come in. Recently we’ve had a problem with Tuesday mornings. The usual volunteer got a paid job and, somebody else took over but then she has childcare issues, so we’ve had, recently, had a bit of a problem.

Unfortunately, this compounds the image of a slightly unprofessional service.
Combined with this, is the problem that “people … , take things more seriously, if
there’s a paid worker.” Thus the libraries that rely solely on volunteers may be
perceived as being less professional or competent, unable to maintain continuity of
service which creates a negative impression for funders, users and potential users.

4.9 Clientele

A library being a service institution can justify its existence only
when it satisfied the information requirements of its users. Thus
users’ satisfaction is one of the basic objectives of the collection

Evidence from the literature of women’s information needs highlighted a key
problem facing women’s libraries and information resource centres. Women, in a
variety of different countries and contexts, tend to rely on their informal networks,
friends and colleagues when seeking information (see Chapter 2 Section 2.4.6). Few
studies found that women went to resource centres, public libraries or even women’s
libraries for their information. Given the low usage of the women’s libraries (see below), it may be that many women simply do not know about these institutions.

4.9.1 Numbers of users
Some of the women’s libraries could not provide accurate statistics on the number of visitors or users to their library although some staff did estimate the number of visitors they had. One member of staff said that user figures were presented at the AGM, whilst another library provided accurate statistics that they kept, but asked for these not to be published or quoted.

> We keep them [statistics] for our own purposes, just to see how things are working, and again, the split of who’s using us and why they’re using us is very useful for planning services.

This quote shows an appreciation of the importance of knowing how many people are using the facilities, particularly so that services can be adapted where necessary. Although some of the libraries felt that numbers had definitely decreased over time, without accurate and current statistics, it is not possible to see which facilities are now less used or where there is scope to develop new services. One library maintains a visitor book, but a volunteer said that they kept forgetting to ask people to sign in, so it wasn’t a true reflection of the number of visitors.

The now-closed Feminist Library was, by the end of the 1990s, receiving on average 50 visitors a month, which equates to just over 10 a week. (Ilett, 2003, p. 288). As it was only open three days a week, this is about three visitors a day, which seems somewhat low, and is one possible reason for its closure.

According to Ilett, the newly refurbished and relocated Women’s Library received a total of about 3000 people who used the reading room in its first year of its re-opening (Ilett, 2003 p. 257) which is about twelve people a day. There were an additional 15,000 people attending exhibitions and other events at the new Women’s Library (Ilett, 2003, p. 258). Ilett remarks that these figures are lower than the estimated 60,000 visitors predicted in its HLF bid as the National Library for Women (Ilett, 2003, p. 319).
Figures for Glasgow Women’s Library (GWL) show that a similar number of visitors/week can be achieved on a small budget. Ilett (who has been involved with GWL since 1992) quotes a figure of 15,000 users pa for GWL, which equates to 1250 per month, or about 300 a week (Ilett, 2003, p. 319). However, when I was interviewing the staff at Glasgow they did not have firm figures to hand and suggested it is about “100 plus [per week], including people on courses. But we can get that with email enquiries a week as well”. The discrepancy may come from whether women who access the range of lifelong learning courses are classed as library users or not. Certainly, the staff felt that the use of the actual ‘library’ i.e. the books, had declined over time.

The WRC is unusual in that library use is by appointment only, and visitor numbers are closely monitored. Although the number of visits was quite low at the time of interviewing (when the library had been open about eight months), the librarian hoped that numbers would improve.

“[W]e’re not a drop-in, and people come in and use us for very specific reasons, they’ll come and use us when they are fundraising, or they’ll come and use us when they are developing or changing, it’s not like a reading or a research library... . [W]e’ll probably find that this time next year we’ll be really busy when we’re well known [by women’s groups].”

4.9.2 Types of users
The types of women who visit women’s libraries cannot be easily categorised. Each library, because of its style and nature, seems to attract different types of women. For example, the Women’s Resource Centre is used by women’s voluntary organisations and other voluntary sector groups if they have a specific remit for women. It is unique amongst the libraries visited in not serving individual women.

Several libraries are used primarily by researchers and students. For example the Feminist Archive (South) finds that:

“... it does tend to be, mostly, PhD students, probably, or Masters degrees, it’s probably post graduate stuff on the whole, although we do get some... undergraduates.”
I think that there are more serious, more academic PhD type people coming now than [there] used to [be] and I think that’s a direct result of the website.

The Women’s Library finds that:

Because all of our users register, they have to fill in their registration form, and on their form they’re asked to specify what their research is for, and most people do mark the box private research... . It’s very difficult to break that down, and I think quite a large element of that is probably ... not just personal interest but actually research they’re doing, postgraduate level research. So our users are a mixture. That’s the largest single group ... we ... have a lot of academics, both from this university but also from other universities and indeed from overseas as well. [W]e have people who come in for work related projects, and we also have school students, and anyone over the age of 14 can use the Reading Room unaccompanied.

In contrast, at Glasgow Women’s Library,

...a lot of the users aren’t library users, if you know what I mean, they’re not book readers, particularly, they’re coming for the other services. But I think it’s always, because it was a grassroots organisation, I think it always has had a lot of strands and I think that it always has meant that people use it for different reasons, other than books you know, and although books is always a part of it, and the feminist background of the library it’s still strong, it’s not, sort of, intellectually, you know, used, in the way that maybe ideallistically someone was thinking at the start.

Women in Jazz, being primarily archive-based, is also used predominately by researchers, either for private or academic purposes. Both AMC/WAW and the Women’s History Project, do not have ‘physical’ visitors as such as they are organisations with virtual collections, databases highlighting what material exists, and where it is located. They therefore do no know the physical location or any personal details about who is using the archive website, or who might subsequently visit the actual institutions (where possible) to access the specific archives. As noted earlier the website of the Women’s History Project is able to count the number of hits it receives, so they have some indication of the popularity of the site and the interest in this field.

The libraries with a community role such as the Feminist Library and Glasgow Women’s Library attract women for reasons other than research. As the above quote
explains, to maintain numbers of visitors, the library needs to adapt its services to still draw people in. Glasgow Women’s Library has achieved this by developing lifelong learning courses as well as still being a useful resource for academics and research students. At Glasgow Women’s Library the users are coming for a:

... mixture of accessing the books, accessing other information, lifelong learning, accessing the projects. I would say accessing the projects is taking up most of the library users. But there’s a lot of cross-over there, so women come in having never been to the library thinking that they maybe quite like books and want to get some reading done and then end up seeing a lifelong learning course and before you know it they’re doing Tai-chi and wood block printing!

This diversity means that there is no typical user.

[I]t really is Big Issue vendors, women academics, media people, readers. About 60% of our users are from Glasgow, but you don’t have to be a member to use the library either, so we have 1600 plus members, but... most of our users aren’t members in fact and you can access the library free of charge, everything’s free in the library. We refund any travelling costs for people attending courses, or... the literacy course. So there really isn’t a typical library user at all, they’re so varied, they come from all walks of life... out of the... library users... about 60% are from social inclusion partnership areas, so you know, women living in geographical areas designated as areas of priority really, of social inclusion partnerships.

This emphasis on social inclusion and the community is important to Glasgow Women’s Library and has enabled them to draw in and develop extra services such as being designated as a Linking Library for the Scottish Parliament. They see it as important:

... to engage with local communities..., and that’s what it’s all about, and if local communities have an ownership of that space, they’ll use it. But if they don’t, and if they go in and it’s clinical and you have to be a researcher or academic, that will alienate them.

The re-located Women’s Library is also striving to increase the number of local people who use the library, and one method of generating interest in the community is through its exhibition programme. They have found that:
... about 75% of our new visitors have come in through the exhibition, so it’s been incredibly effective in increasing the number of people who come and know about the collections. Therefore, whilst acknowledging that they are primarily a research library, they also want to engage with the local community and thus open up the collections to more people. Whilst both Glasgow Women’s Library and the Women’s Library are engaging with the local community, Ilett found that the (now closed) Feminist Library had a “surprising ambivalence” towards reaching out to its local communities of women, even though funding was more likely to be available if they did engage with the local community (Ilett, 2003, p. 288). Certainly, as has been noted earlier, some personnel at the Feminist Library were against developing services that were not directly related to the library and its resources, unlike staff at Glasgow Women’s Library who looked for opportunities to reach new communities by developing new services.

4.9.3 Men

Do women’s libraries consider men to be part of the local community and thus one of the target groups they wish to encourage to use the facilities? A common perception of women’s libraries is that men are banned from coming into the libraries:

TENS [sic] of thousands of pounds have been given to wacky politically-correct projects - by Scotland’s poorest council. Glasgow has a £1 BILLION housing deficit but councillors have given taxpayers' cash to: ... Glasgow Women's Library where men are banned £9,179. (Howarth, 2002, n. p.)

This popular misperception (the quote is from The Sun newspaper) of men being banned is not borne out in reality, as the table below shows.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Are men allowed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive Wales</td>
<td>n/a – virtual collection. But, some sensitive collections deposited under their name may have restrictions on access e.g. papers from rape support organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Feminist Archive (South)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Feminist Library</td>
<td>Yes, but not to their discussion group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow Women's Library</td>
<td>Yes, by appointment outside of usual opening hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea Women's Resource Centre</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Jazz</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's History Project, Ireland</td>
<td>n/a – virtual collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Women’s Library</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Women’s Resource Centre</td>
<td>Yes, but not had one yet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Access for men in the women's libraries**

Although there may be some restrictions on the access given to men, they are only excluded from one archive and the resource centre in Swansea. Women’s resource centres were traditionally founded during the Women’s Liberation Movement when ideas about separatism were prominent. Further, they often run projects in sensitive areas e.g. rape, thus having men in the Centre may not be suitable. In terms of the physical women’s libraries, their policies do not restrict the potential number of male visitors, but the dual barriers of the names of the libraries and the misperception of being banned may prevent men from accessing the facilities.

The issue of male users also relates to staffing. At times, the Women’s Library has employed male staff (most notably David Doughan who has also written a variety of papers on women’s history). Ilett notes that because the Fawcett Library (as it was known at the time) employed male staff (and had a male Head Librarian from 1988-2000), some women’s groups were disinclined to donate their material to it, or to use its resources (Ilett, 2003, p. 245). This was particularly the case in the 1970s and 1980s when feminist thought and action was at its peak. The ideology of separate women’s places is evaluated in detail in Chapter 5.
4.9.4 Young women

A further possible reason for the decline in use of the women’s libraries could be the rise of the Internet, which may be particularly used by the younger generation of women.

Where are the younger ones? They’re there, on the *f-word*⁶ and they’re doing it that way, and it seems to me that yes, there is very much a need. Now that may be all that they want and they’re doing it electronically and that’s fine.

The *f-word* is a “webzine was founded by, and is mainly written by younger feminists, those of us born during or after the feminism of the 60s and 70s” (*the f-word*, 2005, n. p.). Established in March 2001, it was receiving 35,000 hits a month by September 2003 (*Brooks*, 2003, n. p.). In June 2003 Caroline Redfern the founder decided, after considerable debate on the site about the issue of ‘older’ feminists feeling excluded, to change the strapline from ‘young UK Feminists’ to ‘contemporary UK feminism’ (*the f-word*, 2005, n. p.). She is keen to stress that its emphasis is still to engage and showcase the voices of younger feminists. The website itself was commended by the Women in Publishing organisation in their annual New Venture Awards 2002 and the founder was listed as one of the top females to watch in 2003 (*Brooks*, 2003, n. p.). Its aims are to use the *f-word* (feminism) in a positive way, and to rekindle feminist debate on key issues concerning women in Britain today (see screen shot below).

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6 See [http://www.thefword.org.uk/](http://www.thefword.org.uk/)
Thus, the younger generation of women, born after the second wave of feminism are likely to look for solutions to their information needs electronically, rather than by going to a physical women’s library. This is perhaps an important reason for women’s libraries to develop their electronic services which are currently fairly limited (see Section 4.7.6).

4.9.5 *Friends/Membership schemes*
Although some of the libraries have declining visitor numbers, many have a loyal base of support with friends or membership schemes. These schemes provide each library with a ready-made group of interested and like-minded women who can help raise awareness of the individual library. And for some of the libraries the membership schemes are also an important source of income (e.g. AMC/WAW, Feminist Library, Feminist Archive (South), Glasgow Women’s Library, the Women’s Library) whereas for the Women’s Resource Centre “the membership fee is not a money raising revenue”. The cost of joining is relatively similar across all organisations, with some operating a sliding scale of fee to match an individual’s ability to pay (see the table in Appendix 5).

However, the changing fortunes in terms of visitor numbers is also evidenced in changes in membership numbers. The Feminist Library, for example, had c. 1000 members in 1982, reaching a peak of c. 1700 in 1985. However, by 2000 this had fallen dramatically to 95 (Ilett, 2003, p. 281). In contrast, Glasgow Women’s Library’s membership has risen from acquiring its 500th member in 1995 (Ilett, 2003, p. 318) to over 1800 today (Glasgow Women’s Library, 2005a, Aims).

4.10 *Networking and relationships*
Networking between women’s libraries can operate on several levels. Staff may be networking between themselves, as a group of women’s libraries, but also with other women’s organisations in the British Isles. There may be potential for networking with other libraries or resource centres in their local area. There is also the potential to network internationally with other women’s libraries and resource centres.
Despite this potential to network in different spheres, there was relatively little evidence of networking.

Internationally, some of the women’s libraries do maintain informal networks. For example, the Feminist Archive (South) receives items from its international network of women’s organisations:

\[BB:\text{... we're on the list of various peoples, for example, do you know the WIN organisation, in America?}\]
\[AT:\text{Women's Information Network?}\]
\[BB:\text{Yes, Women’s Information Network, they send us all their material which is worldwide, so we get South American journals, and so on as well, in return for our little contribution of about one newsletter, and a few other things that we send them ..., [and] there are one or two [other] organisations that we're still collecting from.}\]

Glasgow Women’s Library also notes the importance of the network of women’s libraries in establishing their own library. The website states that:

\[\text{The Library is a unique resource in Scotland but has always sought support and links with sister organisations world-wide. Many of the Library projects, policies and initiatives have developed after peer group visits, contacts or discussions. One early inspiration came from exchange visits with Kunstlerinnenarchiv, Nurnberg (now located at Bildwechsel, Hamburg) in 1990/1. ... Over the Library's history we have held hundreds of events, undertaken research, training and partnerships, visited and hosted workshops, conferences and exhibitions. ... We have visited international sister projects as well as making firm links with local and national women's initiatives. (Glasgow Women’s Library, 2005, Aims)}\]

In an interview, one worker from Glasgow Women’s Library mentioned how she had attended an international conference for women’s libraries in 1998 in Amsterdam (the Know How Conference on the World of Women's Information) and found it to be:

\[\text{... the most mind-blowing conference I’ve ever been to and the most representative of black and ethnic minority women, and that was really, a really powerful thing... I think everybody got so much out of it... their conferences are held every four years, and I couldn't make it to the last one but I'd like to find out where the next one's going to be and maybe go because I think everybody got so much out of it.}\]
At the time of interviewing, the director of the Women’s Library had just recently returned from a conference in India about women’s resources in South Asia. Further, when the predecessors to the Glasgow Women’s Library were setting up their projects:

they’d made a lot of contacts between ‘87, ‘88, ‘89 and ‘90, lots of contacts with similar sister organisations, in, Europe, particularly Germany. Glasgow's twinned with Nuremberg, so they made really good contacts that we still have today with women working in the arts and culture in Germany. And what they found in Germany, is, was, there's big support, public sector support for women's organisations and to provide women's spaces and promote women's work, unlike here.

This is confirmed by the literature whereby in 1994/95 there were more than 50 women’s archives and libraries in Germany (Dickel, 1995, p. 113). The Women’s Library is also involved with “a group of European women’s libraries who get together every now and again”. But international networking can be time-consuming and as one woman said:

... we've got to sort out how we're operating, day to day, to start with, and then we can start worrying about, what's happening outside Britain.

Moving to a national level, there are interconnections between many of the women involved in related organisations. For example, several of the founding members of AMC/WAW have personal experience of some of other women’s libraries and they are also involved in related women’s issues and groups across Wales. The same names occur in various circles. It is therefore likely that within the field of women’s libraries and related projects in England, Ireland and Scotland there are groups of women that recur across related women’s networks. It might be expected therefore, that networking would be well established but this is not necessarily so.

There is agreement that networking is helpful, and Glasgow Women’s Library felt that they “work in a really good network with them [the Women’s Library], and I think it’s very important”. There are other instances of networking e.g. Glasgow Women’s Library and

... it might have been somebody from Bristol, ..., were trying to instigate some kind of network, where we all maybe met
occasionally, and we’re all supportive of that, [but] it sort of lost its momentum... but I think this is something the Women’s Library could do... facilitating a network, because it’s not like there’s that many of us, ..., for us to come together each year and maybe meet and that in the different places, I think that’d be a really positive thing to do, so I’d like to see that happening, but we’re all so busy and so skint, or, we can’t do it.

[name] and [name] have been down to most of them and things, and [their jobs are] ... a lot more to do with networking and stuff, and when our plans for becoming the Women's Library of Scotland, [X] contacted all the other libraries and there was going to be a meeting about how that would affect everybody...

We don't actively seek it, but if we find we have some duplicate stock then we will try and find a good home for that, at another, er, women's library collection.

Yes, we’re in touch, we exchange newsletters with Scotland, with the actual Women’s library rather than the lesbian one, but we do send stuff to the lesbian one when we’ve got it, you know. ... and we’re in contact with other organisations, like the feminist, the Older Feminist Network in London and so on, and again this is all email and newsletter exchanges.”

We do have, we have one member in Wales, and, we’re linked to the library in Scotland, the Glasgow Women’s Library, and we share publications and resources, so we don’t, in a ... library and information sense there’s no restriction there but we can’t really offer, huge amount to people [i.e. members] in those areas.

In Wales, AMC/WAW established a relationship with the Women’s History Project because “in fact, we did at one stage, because we had contact with Maria quite early on, and we were actually very keen to do the same thing” that is, to conduct a mapping exercise to create a database of women’s archives across Wales. Thus, knowing what else was happening in the world of women’s libraries and women’s archives is important.

However, although there are elements of networking such as sharing of newsletters, email exchange and some meetings, there is not much active collaboration or networking on a practical level. When asked if she thought there was much of a
network between the various women’s libraries and archive centres in the British Isles, one woman replied:

*No! emphatically* ... *I don’t think they’re terribly well advertised, and I don’t think they’re terribly well known. I’m not even sure they know what their target audience is.*

In terms of library or archive networks, there is potential for the women’s libraries to be involved with professional bodies such as CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals), ASLIB (the Association for Information Management) and the Society of Archivists. However, these networks did not seem to be utilised in terms of raising the profile of the women’s libraries within library or archive circles. The Women’s History Project and AMC/WAW may both be unusual in their links with archive networks. In the case of the former, they are hosted by the National Archive of Ireland which the director hopes will ensure the continuation of the project. In Wales, AMC/WAW have established working relationships with local record offices and the National Library of Wales to ensure that these locations act as repositories for any material donated under the AMC/WAW name. Thus, the status of the archives and the organisation is raised by having links to the profession.

Aside from these two instances, there appears to be little other engagement with the relevant professions. Women’s libraries are rarely feature in library or archive literature (see Chapter 2). They are, to some extent, all moving along their own paths, in their own geographic networking circles. Furthermore, few of the women who were interviewed in each library had visited any of the other women’s libraries in the British Isles even though there is a relatively small number of institutions.

*Well, the sad thing here is that I actually haven’t seen all the other libraries and that’s partly because I’m not a full time archivist etc, and this is crazy, ... although] I actually have been and seen the Fawcett Women’s Library [sic].*

On a local level, several of the women’s libraries are involved with the local community. This is the case whether they are more academic orientated or geared towards meeting women’s social and community information needs. For example, the WRC is involved in the voluntary sector and they “go out to a lot of voluntary sector events and activities … promote ourselves.” The WRC, with its emphasis on
supporting voluntary groups, hopes to develop relationships that will be beneficial to its clients.

I very much hope that in the next month or two, we’re going to get all the voluntary libraries together so that we can start doing a bit. Because there are a few libraries knocking around, an organisation called Bassat [?] which is a research centre, place, and another place does this and another place does that. We’ve all got specific, we’re very small, some of them are even smaller than our library.

Glasgow is also involved in the local community through:

... networking, we’re involved with a lot of forums, that comprise ... of, organisations, ..., that include you know different community groups, so there’s a West of Scotland lesbian and gay forum, ..., there’s a youth network, there’s a women’s voluntary sector network, there’s an adult literacy network. ... [A]nd also we feed into different local authority consultation things as well. [X] is involved in managing a database of women’s organisations throughout Glasgow for the Scottish Executive and they pay us to do that work.

Within Wales, the women interviewed all felt that there could be more networking and communication, particularly to decrease feelings of isolation and to facilitate resource sharing. Committee members of AMC/WAW were asked about the level of networking in terms of women’s groups and women’s resources in Wales. It is interesting to note that during one interview the question was followed by a very long silence, then a discussion of some of the women’s groups around, and the suggestion by one committee member that they and other groups represent “survivors from an earlier women’s movement”. It was noted that there

isn't a network across Wales, of women, of all the different women's organisations, linked to women ... There's so many different kinds. There are things that are specifically feminist and then all the things like the WI and Merched y Wawr and the Town's Women's [Guild], who would probably say that they weren't feminist groups, but none the less, they're very much relevant.

The women interviewed in Wales agreed that improved networks would be beneficial, but they may be difficult to establish.

It is difficult. Because although I work in here all day, all the time, I'm finding it difficult finding who's out there, and I'm hoping that you know, the Archive, Women’s Archive of Wales, will sort of, be an umbrella sort of thing where we can all, at least know that it's there and we can use it, and they can come up to us, and be this
two-way traffic thing, 'cos if it's an umbrella, we can all say, look we're here, and this is what we've got, so that they can have this, like a dartboard, where they know, who's out there. And if we want to know something, ..., some group that we've vaguely heard of and can't find, if we could use them as resource as well. Because what the Archive, you probably know what they're doing, is that at least they're logging who's got what where, all over Wales, which is fantastic.

Networks then, in both professional and women’s spheres, do appear to be an area for potential growth and development, although inevitably establishing and maintaining viable and valuable networks consumes already pressurised resources.

4.10.1 Relationships between the women's libraries

Networking and relationships between the various women’s libraries appears on the surface to be fairly routine. But closer analysis of the transcripts revealed unspoken, or half-hinted at, problems concerning these relationships. These principally revolve around the Women’s Library.

One person said that they suspected relationships had changed when the Fawcett Library was awarded £4.2 million and became the Women’s Library. Prior to this, all the women’s libraries were in similar positions with low levels of funding, insecure project money, in cramped and often inappropriate building conditions, relying upon poorly-paid or purely volunteer staff and with restricted opening hours due to lack of staff. One person commented that the former Fawcett Library had been “in the doldrums” during the 1970s (and this is confirmed by the literature) as there was a rise in costs, decrease in donations and decrease in membership (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 230). The Fawcett Library’s HLF grant changed their outlook and ambitions considerably. But, on being asked whether she thought the benefits of this grant to one women’s library had trickled down to others, one woman replied “I don’t think anybody except the Women’s Library has benefited from that.” Likewise, another woman commented that “[w]ell I suppose they've [the Feminist Library] been a bit over shadowed by the Women's Library.” It was also noted by one woman that with the Women’s Library being part of a university it “inhibits people developing … less formal networks.” Other comments were:
Well they're very big and shiny now...

AA: And they're very different, a very different animal really.
BB: And they're very different from the old Fawcett Library I think.

... [a]nd in fact if you go to the building, the library is a very small part of it.

Whilst the women interviewed were all positive in terms of the success of the Women’s Library in being awarded a substantial HLF grant, it is possible that the slightly uneasy relationships stem from an element of inequality. For example,

... they've had their lovely million pound grant etc., so they're well in there, and it's difficult to get my mind round how this place runs on nothing...

That is, whilst nothing has changed for several of the women’s libraries, the public profile of the Women’s Library is considerably greater than it has been in previous decades. Its physical environment has also been significantly enhanced. As a consequence, where there had been some degree of similarity among the women’s libraries there now appears to be what could be seen as a two tier system.

A further issue that may have clouded the previously harmonious relationships is the initial replacement name chosen by the Fawcett Library (see section 4.4). This name was not welcomed by staff at other women’s libraries.

... I mean, we did get miffed, as did the Scottish women when they [the Fawcett Library] were going to call themselves the National Library. ... Yes, we were at a meeting when that was, that was put forward. And I know, er, we and Scotland did get cross at that point! [laughs]. But they did change it.

For Scotland and groups in Wales, the use of the word ‘national’ is problematic for two reasons. One is the geographical connotations of applying ‘national’ to an institution in England and with predominantly English resources. Secondly, the temporary new name also assumed a position as the only women’s library in the British Isles. To some extent it could be argued that the replacement name of the Women’s Library also implies this, as if there were no other women’s libraries in the British Isles. Whilst the history and scope of their collections do, to some extent, give them some degree of superiority over the other women’s libraries, they are not the only women’s library in the British Isles. But, it is unfortunate if this perhaps
unavoidable hierarchy undermines delicate working relationships within a relatively small network of women’s libraries.

4.10.2 Marketing
It has been found that the women’s libraries appear to have low profiles within women’s circles and librarianship. Whilst each library produces a range of marketing materials, including websites, leaflets and newsletters, few have the resources to conduct a large-scale (or even small-scale) marketing campaign. Much of their marketing is in the form of profile-raising articles in newspapers or appropriate journals (see Chapter 2 Section 2.3.5), and in being mentioned in the acknowledgements pages of various books (see Chapter 1 section 1.11). A former member of staff at the Fawcett Library noted that most of their profile raising comes from being acknowledged at the front of many women’s studies books (Doughan, 1990, p. 152).

Marketing is most successful when a group is carefully targeted for the information. Given the diverse nature of the users of the women’s libraries, the libraries may feel that it would be difficult to create a marketing campaign that would appeal to all the different types of users. Furthermore, without accurate user survey results, it is difficult for the women’s libraries to assess who is currently using them, and how to target more people of the same type, or how to attract current non-users.

The women’s libraries may also find it difficult to conduct marketing, given the slight dis-engagement from both feminism and librarianship – two networks that would be useful in terms of widening their profile and also reaching new interested members.

4.11 Physical space
Notions of space are important for feminists. In the 19th and (most of the) 20th centuries public space was associated with men, public life and masculinity. Women were mostly confined to private home spheres (Massey, 1994, p. 280, p. 233), with this division of public and private spheres being developed in the mid-19th century
(Massey, 1994, pp. 233-234). As public life (the professions, politics, culture, education) began to open up to women during the 20th century women have moved out of the private spheres and into public space. This brings conflicts and tensions however, as many public spaces are designed by men for men (Edemariam, 2005, pp. 12-13; Matrix, 1984). As a consequence of the previous restriction on women, and their uncomfortableness with public (male) space, women have increasing sought out women-only spaces. This is mostly seen in the 1970s and 1980s, but was also evident in the early 1900s (at the Women’s Service House in the 1930s). Women’s libraries therefore represent a conscious decision to create a female space.

*The re-emergence of the women’s movement over the last 15 years has meant that women have seen the need for, and started to make, new kinds of buildings. ... [w]omen’s centres that are both meeting places and advice centres, places for teaching and learning skills previously inaccessible to women...* (Bradshaw, 1984, p. 90)

For the two libraries that fit the ‘community’ model of a women’s library, their physical space is important as they need to be accessible to all types of women and to have a friendly atmosphere. Staff at Glasgow Women’s Library stressed (during a tour of the library) that some women may be intimidated by the concept of libraries and have certain preconceptions about the venue or atmosphere, thus it is vital that the library is welcoming and not intimidating.

Five of the seven physical libraries are small spaces and some are single-room entities. Most do not have access for disabled people. Constrained physical conditions are not peculiar to women’s libraries:

*At present most women’s centres and refuges, for instance, are housed in old and badly repaired buildings. Yet buildings help or hinder the development of new ideas in all sorts of subtle ways* (Bradshaw, 1984, p. 90).

The exception to the small and often cramped conditions of many of the women’s libraries is the Women’s Library which was re-opened in an award-winning purpose-built building in February 2002. In moving to a new building the library has been able to not only increase the actual capacity in the library from 10 to 40 users at

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7 Edemariam’s article in the Guardian raises the issue of breastfeeding in public, after a woman was
any one time, but also to house all the material on site (on two floors of storage) as well as create an exhibition space, seminar room and café. From the pictures (below) the library can be seen to be quite different to the other libraries and is similar to an academic library in its design and layout. As one woman said of the Women’s Library: “It's much more accessible [now] and there's nice shelving and there's proper tables to work at.” The Editor of the *Women’s History Review* referred to it as: “[a] sparkling, airy new building, bright and shiny as a new pin, with its wooden flooring…” (Purvis, 2002, p. 165).

However, some staff at some of the other libraries made off-the-record comments about the physical space of the Women’s Library, providing anecdotal comments about women finding it to be cold, hard, unwelcoming and oppressive. This could be countered by the fact that the library is part of an university and as such, is likely to have endeavoured to provide a prestigious and suitably ‘academic’ environment, which may be unfamiliar to some women. In contrast, the community-type libraries aim to draw in particular types of women, and providing cups of tea, comfy chairs and a more ‘homely’ atmosphere is more appropriate to their aims. Indeed, research into women’s spaces found that:

asked by police to stop breastfeeding on a bench in a street in Norfolk, Edemariam, 2005, pp. 12-13).
the client group in each case emphasised that the place should be welcoming, comfortable and easy to find your way around. (Bradshaw, 1984, p. 99)

A recent development for Glasgow Women’s Library is its planned move into bigger and more convenient premises. At the end of 2006 it will relocate to the newly refurbished Mitchell Library in Glasgow city centre. This is likely to increase its public profile and usage. It will be interesting to see what the design and spatial environment on the new location will be like, given its current homely, cosy space.

Figure 7: Glasgow Women's Library
Pertinently, the two most recently formed organisations, AMC/WAW and the Women’s History Project both elected to operate as ‘virtual’ libraries, not creating a physical building for archives and women’s information, but to concentrate on mapping current material and rescuing it where necessary, depositing it in established libraries or archives. AMC/WAW in particular discussed the resource implications of creating a separate women’s library, but it was not considered to be a practical approach. Several founding members also had experience of other women’s libraries, which unfortunately sometimes showed the new group how they did not want to develop:

AA: But the other thing is, the Feminist Archive was kind of a lesson for me, in how not to do it. You know, admirable that it is. When I worked there, there wasn't a proper cataloguing system, we were trying to institute, and none of us were really experts in that thing...
BB: You end up making one up yourself...
AA: And, there was such, once you'd been there for a while you found out what a wealth of material there was there, but it was impossible for anybody else who wasn't very much involved with it to know what was there, because there wasn't a good catalogue. We didn't even own a working computer then. Somebody had given us one that didn't work, and we always intended to get someone to mend it, and this sort of thing, you know. Well, so, they would be
given boxes and boxes and boxes of stuff you know, there was no problem about collecting stuff, but it would remain in those boxes for a long time because there was nowhere to put it and no way to deal with it, you know. And of course it was all volunteer labour, you know ...

Thus, whilst it was a ‘dream’ or an ideal situation, to have their own women’s library, the committee of AMC/WAW felt that it was not advisable to pursue the dream, given the problems other women’s libraries routinely experience.

However, whilst these virtual archive collections greatly improve the resources for researchers, they do not address the needs of contemporary women who may have different uses for a women’s library e.g. the courses offered by Glasgow Women’s Library, or the supportive nature of a women’s space. But has the role of a social centre for women diminished with changes in society? The decline in user numbers at the women’s libraries, particularly in those that operate within the contemporary-needs model would suggest that the era for these spaces is passing and whilst there are instances of dynamic women’s groups, women’s publishers, women’s bookshops, feminist debates etc (e.g. Virago, Libertas! – mail-order lesbian books, and the Fawcett Society), maybe there is not sufficient demand to justify creating new physical women’s centres or libraries.

4.12 Conclusions
The findings from the women’s libraries across the British Isles reveal a number of similarities and differences. Whilst their diverse origins, aims and roles create a varied pattern of women’s libraries, their shared financial, managerial, professional, locational and resource problems can be seen across most, if not all, of the organisations.

Declining user numbers in some cases, and even closure of one of the libraries visited suggests, to some extent, that these organisations are no longer viable, or needed. Yet, on the other hand, some of the women’s libraries have growing membership figures, diverse and successful projects and have been awarded
significant amounts of national grant money. Unfortunately perhaps, whilst “you can have the greatest will in the world to do it … really, it all comes down to money”. The following chapter analyses the findings presented here.