

Unit 3: Week 1

XY Studio Societies

Bishopsgate Institute Special Collections and Archives document the experiences of everyday people, and the extraordinary individuals and organisations who have strived for social, political and cultural change.

Since the archive opened to the public in 1895 it has been steadily growing, with unique collections gifted and loaned to us. Some are London focused, but the lives they preserve and the issues they explore have national and global resonance.

“The collections offer both breadth and depth. We have 150,000 books, pamphlets, maps and photographs of London. The Lesbian and Gay News media Archive (LAGNA) alone holds 350,000 press cuttings. The photographic archives over 500,000 images. We have a growing oral-history archive and the collections contain fascinating ephemera, from banners and badges to club flyers and condoms. This trove of materials is supported by a searchable online catalogue.”

Bishopsgate Institute

Format Photographers Agency

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Established in 1983(2), Format Photographers Agency was a women's only photographic agency founded by Maggie Murray, Sheila Gray, Pam Isherwood, Anita Corbin, Jenny Matthews, Joanne O'Brien, Raissa Page and Val Wilmer. Other prominent members included Brenda Prince, Melanie Friend, Judy Harrison, Roshini Kempadoo, Jacky Chapman and Mo Wilson.

It offered a platform for female photographers to develop their creativity and enhance their careers.

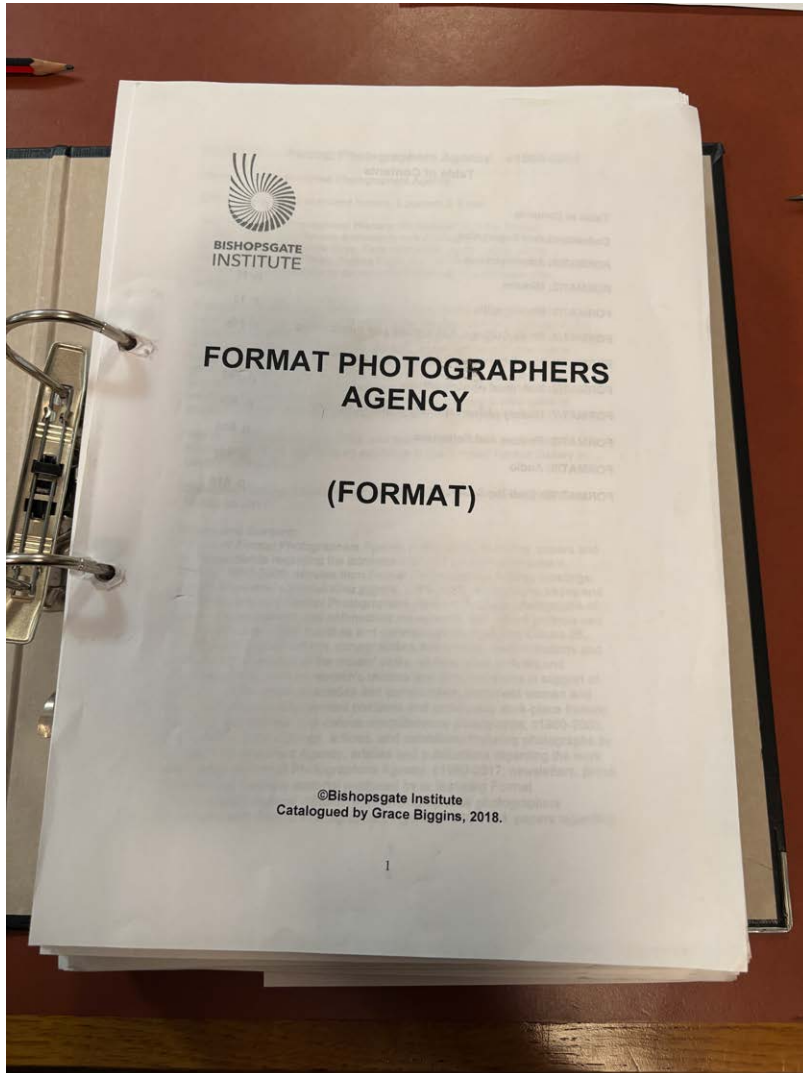
The agency's work documented the world from a different angle and represented issues, events and individuals who got very little coverage in the mainstream media. Their photographs captured a range of important political events and momentous social movements, including the women's peace camp at Greenham Common, LGBTQ+ marches and demonstrations, soup kitchens during the Miners' Strike, and various women's rights movements and demonstrations. Their photography also included portraits of men and women who were prominent at the time, women working in new areas of employment, and the lives and experiences of the everyday person.

The agency closed down in 2003, and their work has been celebrated in several exhibitions, including an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in London during 2010.



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The Format Photographers Agency archive started as a ring binder of 810+ pages. A thick stack of pages that all looked the same...

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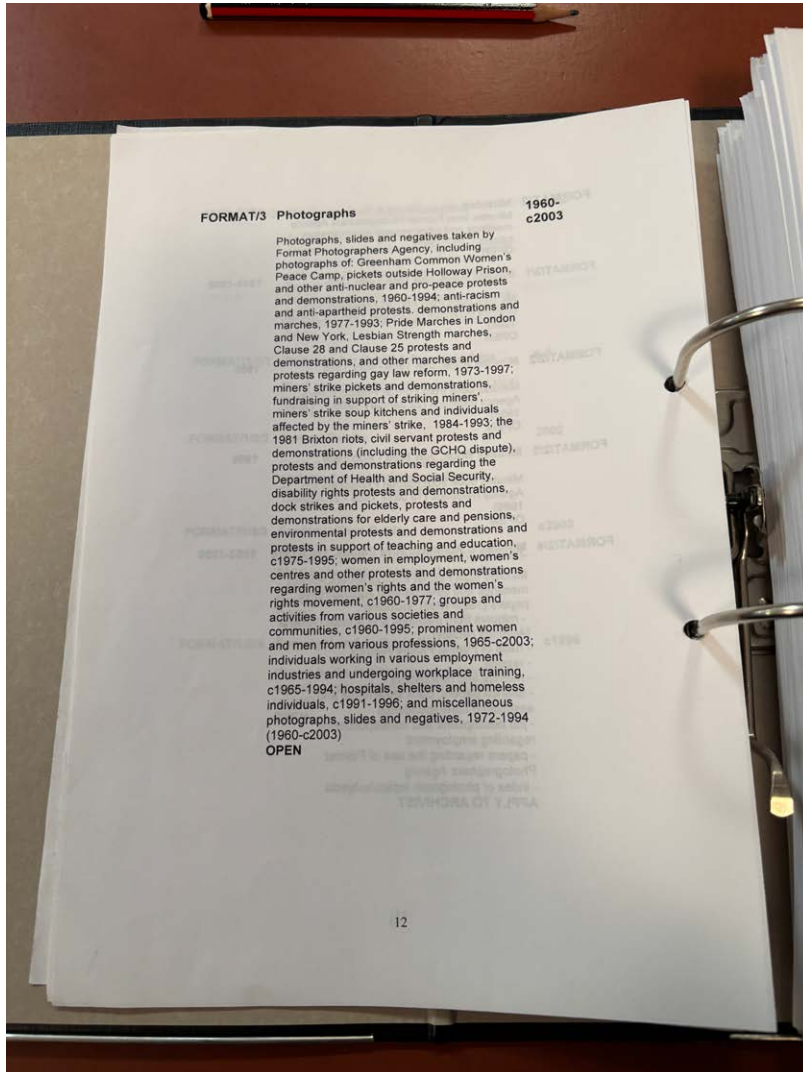
Table of Contents	
Table of Contents	p. 2
Collection Level Description	p. 3
FORMAT/1: Administration	p. 6
FORMAT/2: Minutes	p. 11
FORMAT/3: Photographs	p. 12
FORMAT/4: Press Cuttings, Exhibitions and Publications	p. 718
FORMAT5: Newsletters and Publicity	p. 742
FORMAT/6: Individual Photographers	p. 743
FORMAT/7: History of Format Photographers Agency	p. 804
FORMAT/8: Posters and Ephemera	p. 805
FORMAT/9: Audio	p. 807
FORMAT/10: Clothing & Objects	p. 810

This is the table of contents.

I wanted to look at photographs. Page 12...

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Page 12. A synopsis of the images contained in the photograph archive. Grouped by topic (anti-racism, pride, women in employment etc.) and a date range provided. The overall dates covered are 1960-c2003

How the archive works:

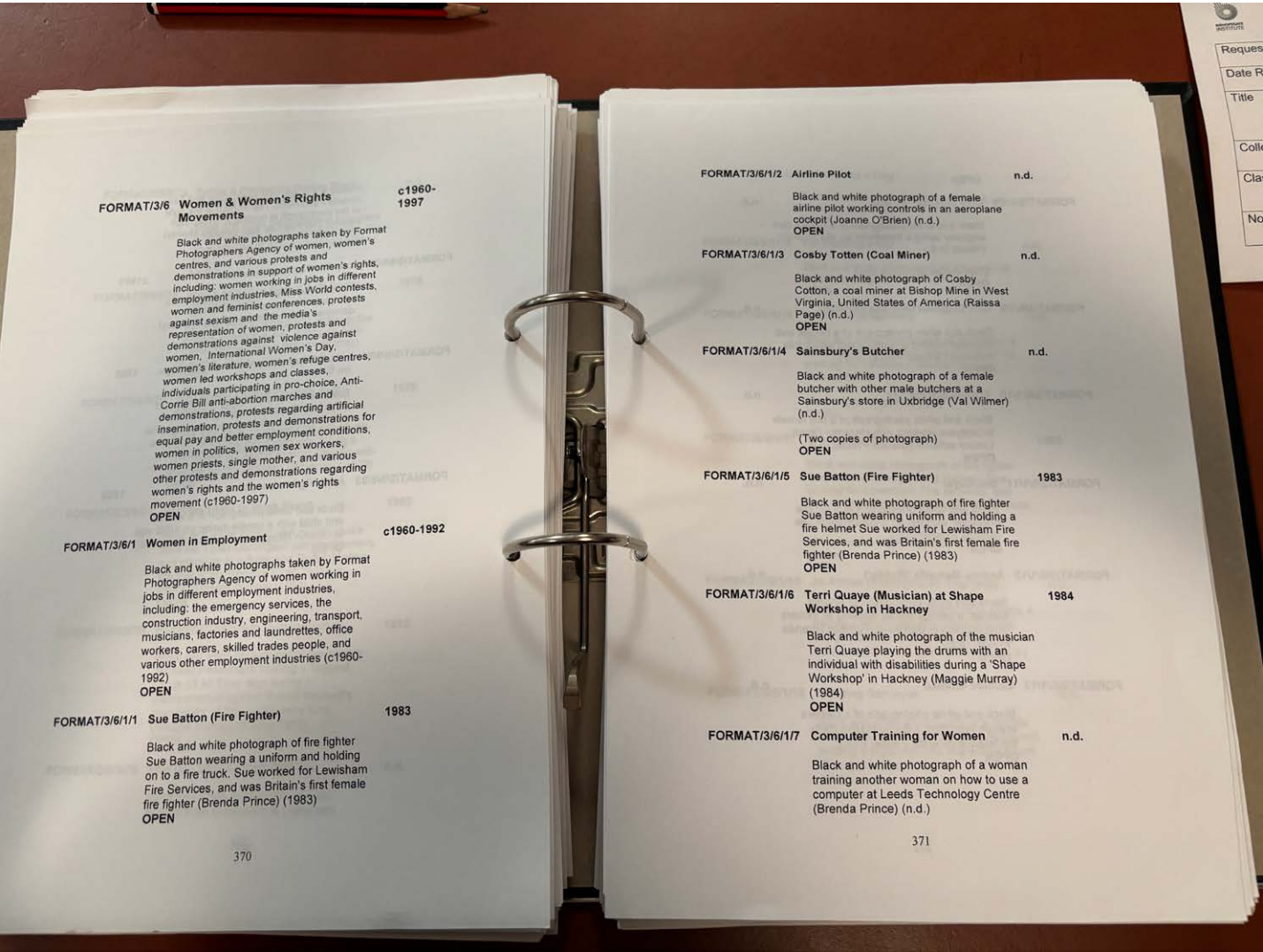
Each image is numbered, starting at 3/1/1.

When 3/1/1 became 3/2/1 it was the start of a new section.

This page had no further page numbers for reference to sections, had no tabs to mark new sections, had no headline or text hierarchy to mark a new section, you just had to guess. There was a correlation between the listed synopsis and how far into the archive you went...

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This is the start of a section and each entry in the section. There are 706 pages that look like this...

Once you choose the section you want to look at you fill in a request form for that entire section, which ranges in number of photographs from 40 to 100+.

Prior to this you also have to fill in a form with personal details for thier archive, a declartion with a list of all artefact you take a photograph of.

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While I was waiting for the archive to arrive I looked at the archive in front of me and analysed what I could see. I noticed:

It's a photographic archive but there are no images. Why are the images text? Text as image.

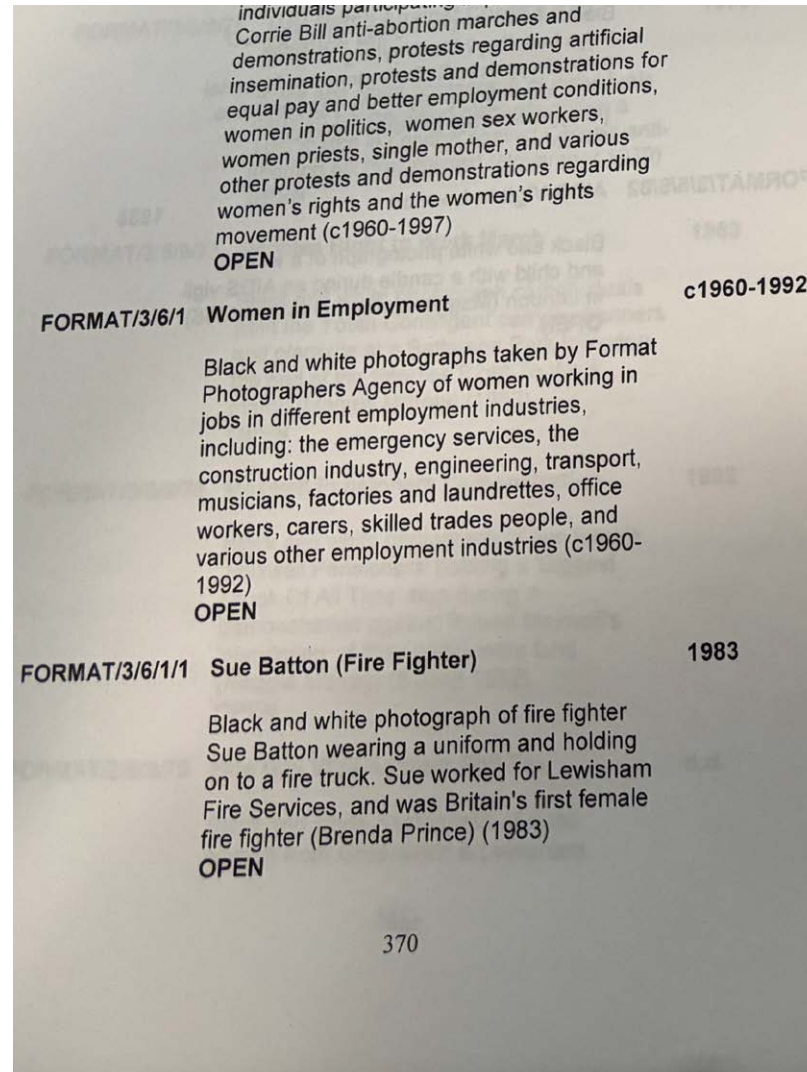
Does this imply text more important than image?
Does this give text a hierarchy over image? Text as communication?

The formatting, or lack of formatting - no hierarchy. Why? Really unhelpful but made me consume it differently.

The lack of referencing for finding sections - is this intentional?

Everything I expected an archive to be - organised, systematic, indexed, structured was, but also wasn't, there.

I would have chosen through looking at image rather than reading the captions. Image would have come first. This forced me to see image as text and so I decided to make choice of images I was interested in and see if they were the same as I would have chosen if I had seen the image first.



I read the first entry. Did this give this entry hierarchy?
I read the title, 'Women in employment' it didn't interest
me so I moved on.

I read the second entry (still working on hierarchy?)
and I liked the human connection of the title, a woman's
name, 'Sue Batton (Fire Fighter)', so read the blurb. I had
seen this image in the gallery on the way in so I made a
physical and emotional connection with this text, and it
made me smile. I wanted to see this photograph.

I then start to scan titles, ones that appealed were
anything to do with the media, women in employment,
women's names and popular culture (music, Miss
World). I listed all 'images' I wanted to see from text.

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3/6/2 arrives as a tied folder of a stack of images.



Each image is in a plastic sleeve with a sticker on the front with agency stated 'FORMAT' and the reference number 3/6/2/1.

This identifies it as part of something larger - the archive, a set or category, a process of identifying, categorising and placing has taken place. By whom, when, why, how, implications?

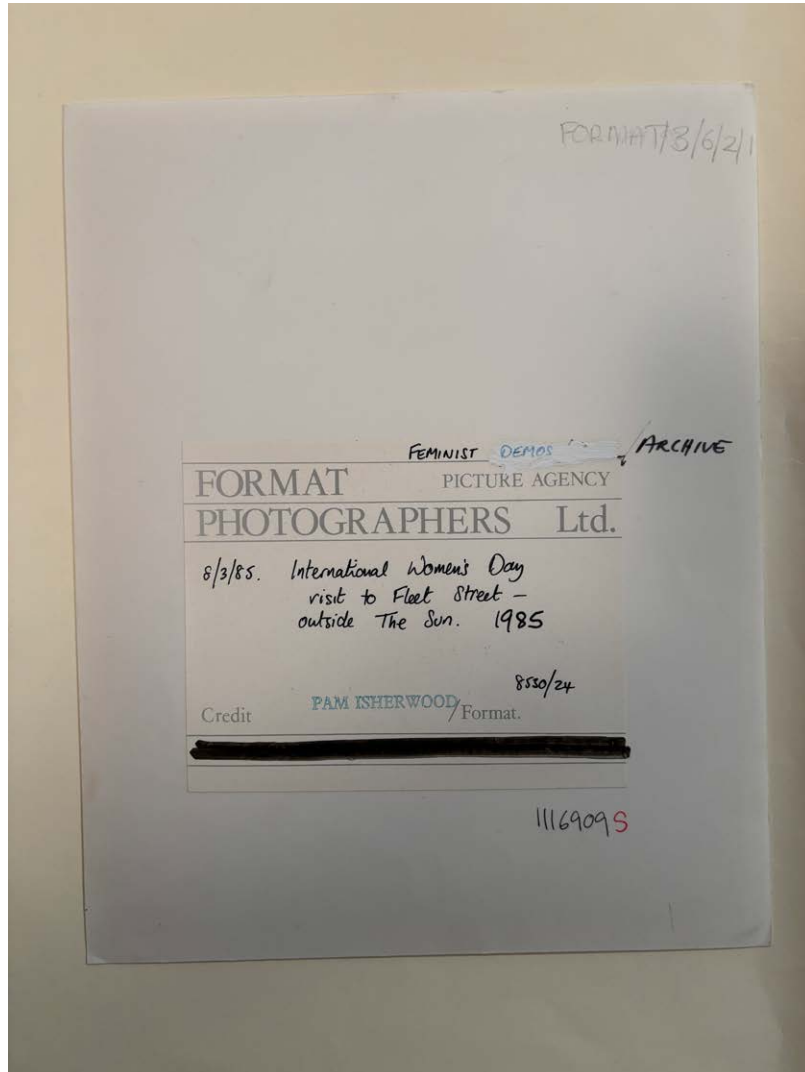
The photograph is inside the plastic sleeve that opens at the top.

The plastic sleeve being transparent means you can see the image clearly and it's protected.

It also isolates it as an individual object, disconnected to anything else. Reflective of the notion of 'photograph'?

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On the back is a pencil note on the actual photograph noting the agency FORMAT and a reference number 3/6/2/1. Same identification, different format. Connecting the folder to the image?

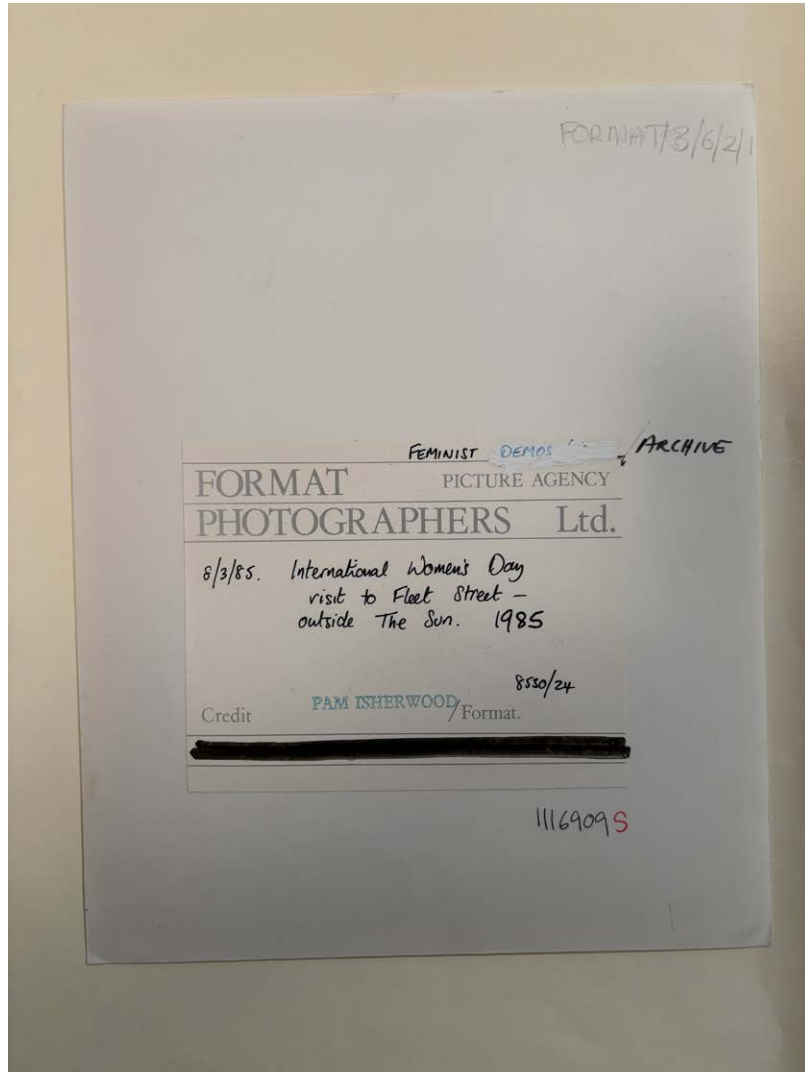
There is also a standardised piece of paper that has printed and handwritten text. Printed text appears on all pieces and states:

'FORMAT PHOTOGRAPHERS Ltd.' This tells you it is a registered limited company, and implies there is a business operating of a certain size.

'PICTURE AGENCY' clarifies what the company is. The word AGENCY implies something larger than individual.

'Credit' suggests if used you need to reference correctly and give credit to the source.

'/ Format' suggests how the material may be credited. Picture credits in publications would use this format and suggests it would be used in newspapers, magazines, books, printed materials. But this may be my bias...



Handwritten elements:

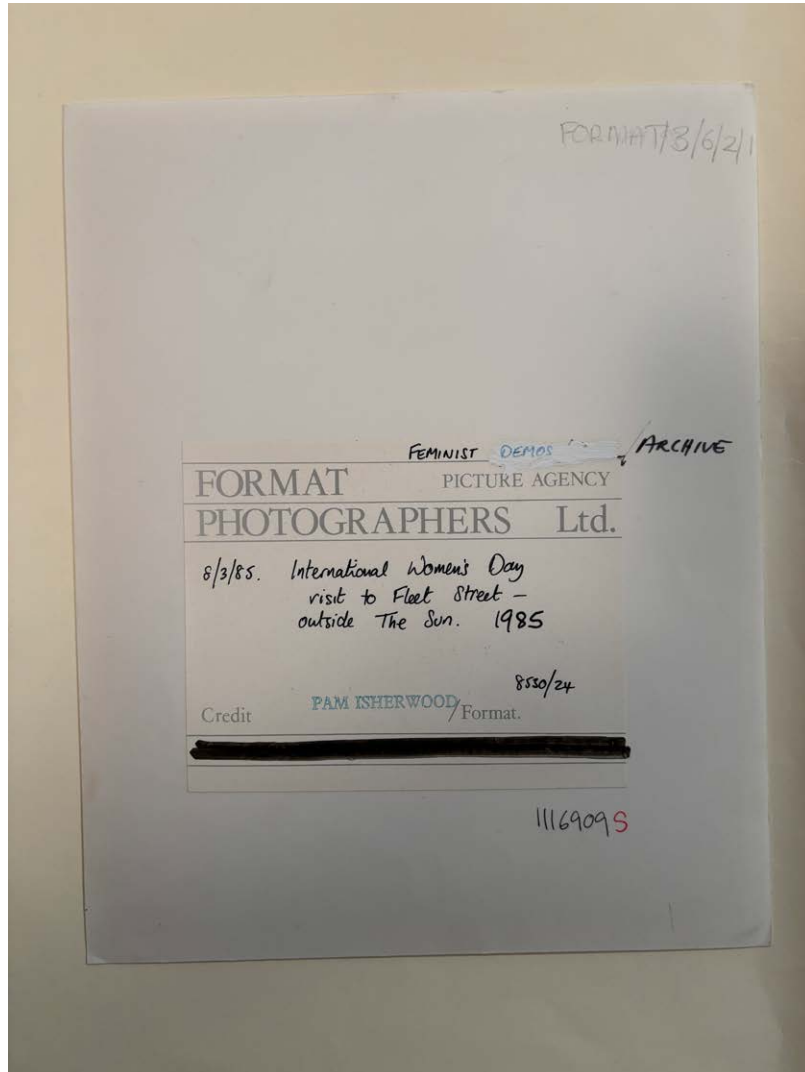
Vary on each piece of paper for each photograph.

Main text:

8/3/85 - Formatted in a recognisable form as a date this tells us the date of when the image was taken.
'International Women's Day visit to Fleet Street - outside The Sun. 1985' - Gives the image context physically - Fleet Street is in London; outside The Sun pinpoints the exact location of the image;
time - 1985 pinpoints the year; we also know the day and month from the previous date.
socially and culturally - International Women's Day tells us that this image most probably is in support of, but definitely in relation to women.

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Handwritten elements:

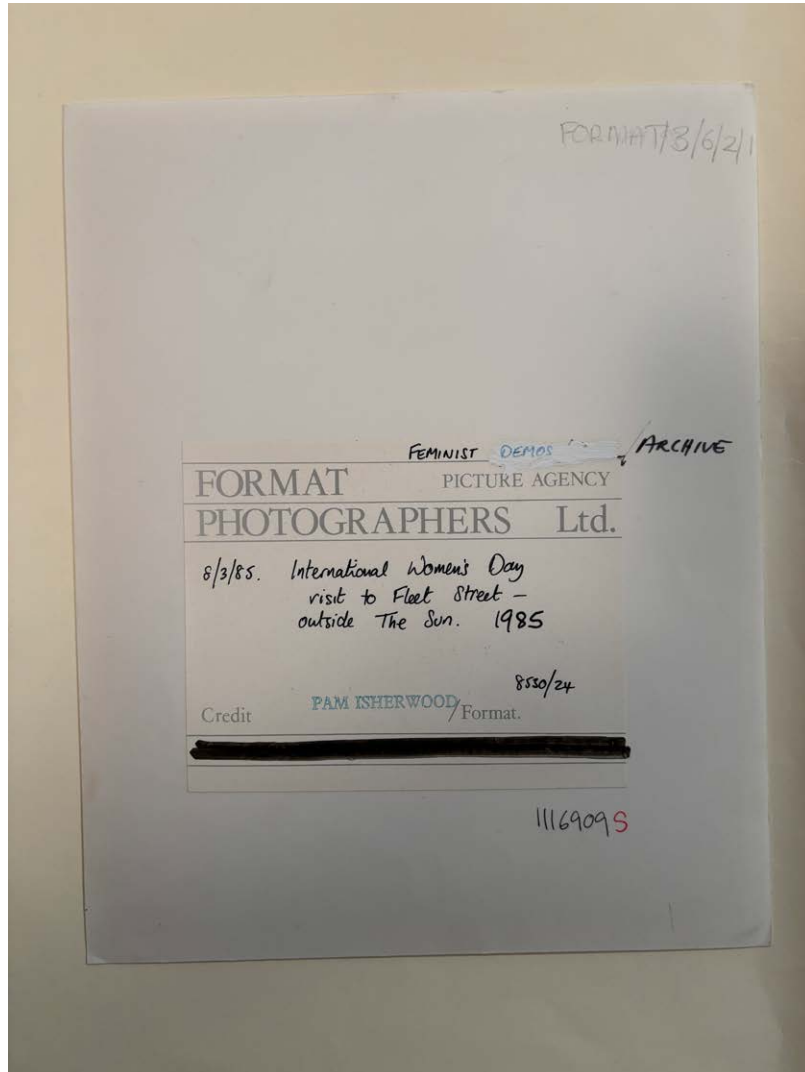
Vary on each piece of paper for each photograph.

Additional:

Top: 'FEMINIST DEMOS / ARCHIVE' shows two colours of pen. The black is in keeping with the longer description below and was probably written at the same time. The blue is on tipex which is covering previous text. I can't work out what the original word was. There must have read FEMINIST _____ / ARCHIVE. This has been deliberately changed and I speculate it was a word that is now out of date, the meaning has changed and it now appears derogatory or wrong. If it was wrong this alerts us to how archives that present as fact and truth can be 'wrong'. If it is terminology that has become out dated and meaning has changed or attitude to meaning has changed then it shows a narrative of its own of social and cultural change.

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Handwritten elements:

Vary on each piece of paper for each photograph.

Additional:

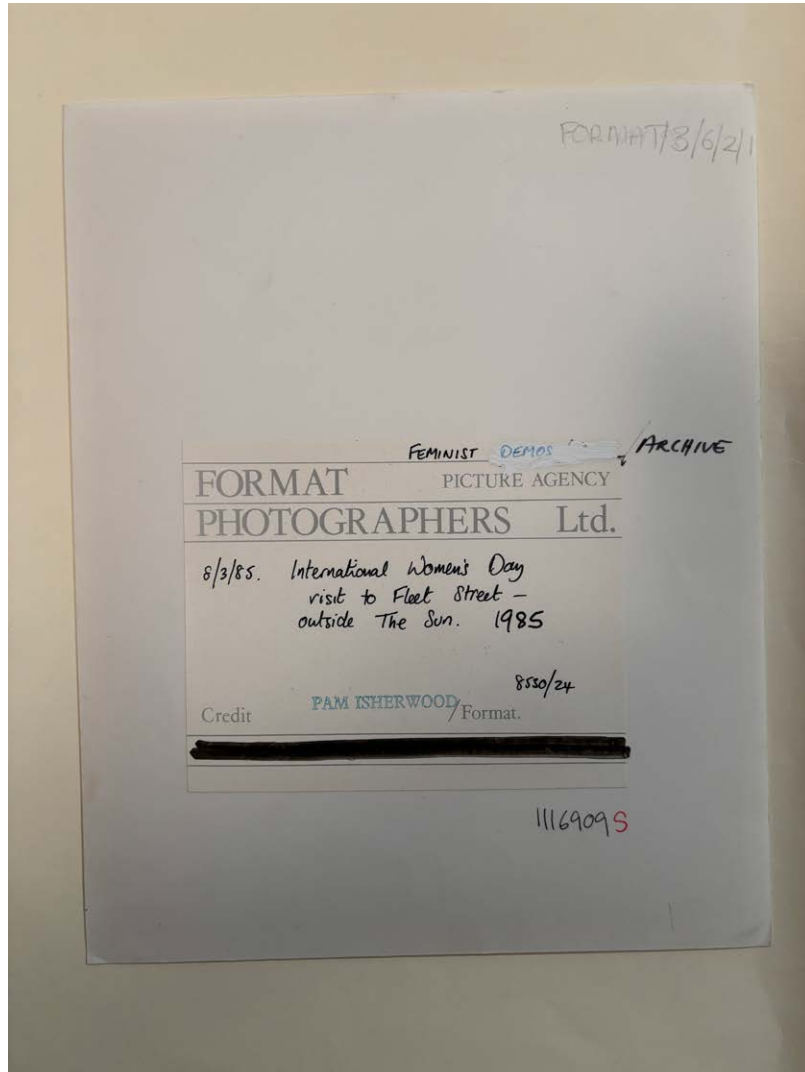
8530/24: another number in the same pen - possibly an alternative categorising number from a previous era /archive / set? Hinting at its own history as an object as well as history of the event in the image.

1116909S: Different pen, different handwriting, different categorising system?

PAM ISHERWOOD is stamped in the 'Credit' space. This implies she is the photographer of the image, that her name is to be credited with /Format at the end so would read Pam Isherwood / Format. A format of picture credit in publishing. The stamp suggests she has taken many photographs for FORMAT and it has become quicker and easier to invest in a stamp to credit her images than hand write it. This reflects Pam's prolific nature and popularity as a photographer?

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Handwritten elements:

Vary on each piece of paper for each photograph.

Additional:

Black strikethrough along the bottom: Censorship? What was there? I can but speculate. Its possible it was the address of the agency and has been removed through privacy acts as the image moved from the agency into an archive. Where were their offices? Did they have offices? Was it run out of their home?

Social and cultural implications: Woman photographer and International Women's Day, Fleet Street, The Sun and 1985 suggest women's movement, women's causes, women fighting against injustice of a male dominated, patriarchal society.



The Image:

Woman: Central, in focus, fills middle third, dominates image. Holding up a page from a newspaper with black marker pen saying 'SEXIST ABUSE'. The headline reads 'VIRGIN VICE GIRL IS NICKED BEFORE SHE GETS FELLA' and the image is of a naked woman, sat, side on with face to camera, in a similar pose to the Page 3 girls The Sun ran for xx years.

The Sun sign above her head situates the newspaper in her hands as The Sun and that she is outside their office. Her face is angry / indignant / cross / frustrated. It is clear she is taking action and it is a protest of sorts. She is an isolated figure in terms of gender and motivation oppositional to what protests tend to be - large, organised groups. The home made nature of her 'protest placard' combined with these factors make it appear an independent protest rather than an organised group, a personal protest? I find her protest placard a really strong example of graphic communication design...



Placard as protest:

The sign she holds is clearly a newspaper page, probably from The Sun although I cannot confirm that as the detail isn't sharp enough in the image and her hand covers parts and some parts are folded where the devices that anchor a newspaper to a brand usually are.

It's simplicity suggests spontaneity. It isn't on a board or a pole. It's just a piece of paper being held up. The contextualising of the slogan speaks really loudly to me. A far stronger message is communicated by writing over the image of what you are protesting about. The flat nature of newspapers (black and white, mainly text, large simple image) allows the text to read clearly and gives it greater impact. The text-image relationship elevates the meaning of the message, contextualises the slogan and her physical body.

I am inspired by this quick, lightfooted, but graphically strong communication and am going to use it as a method in my practice to articulate my personal protest.



The Image:

Background: Other than the sign in a recognisable font as logo, and the number which I assume is the building, there are a lot of men looking. The men you could deduce as workers from inside The Sun as they are wear bemused faces and journalist type relaxed clothing. They are not wearing coats and are standing beneath the sign, to the side, as if on the office steps. They are also looking up and down the road as if there is spectacle and other things going on. Maybe more protestors.

The other people in coats on the left appear to be walking, maybe part of a protest? The person on the right in a coat smoking looks disinterested.

There is a feeling of conflict. Between the people present in the image, between gender, between demeanour. All demonstrate, add to, and fuel, what the conflict is about. It also shows everyone has a voice.

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Additional Imagery

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There were so many great images, different themes emerged:

Protest graphic communication design

Small words being powerful and provocative as my Unit 2 work

Details in the images that gave clues to time, era, society and culture

Power of images

Questions of truth in imagery

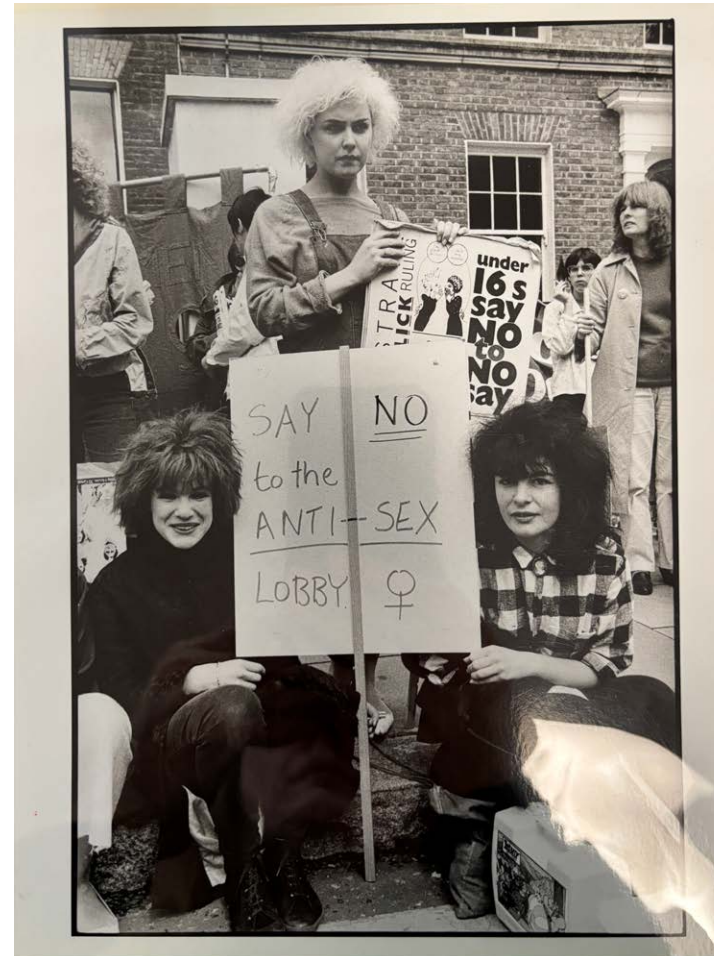
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NUJ (magazines) pickett Sunday Sport in 1986. The placard at the back catches my attention 'Porn is the theory rape is the practice'. Such strong small words, what has changed since 1986, this situation has deteriorated not improved with more porn influence in popular culture than ever, particularly in magazines with female poses and online

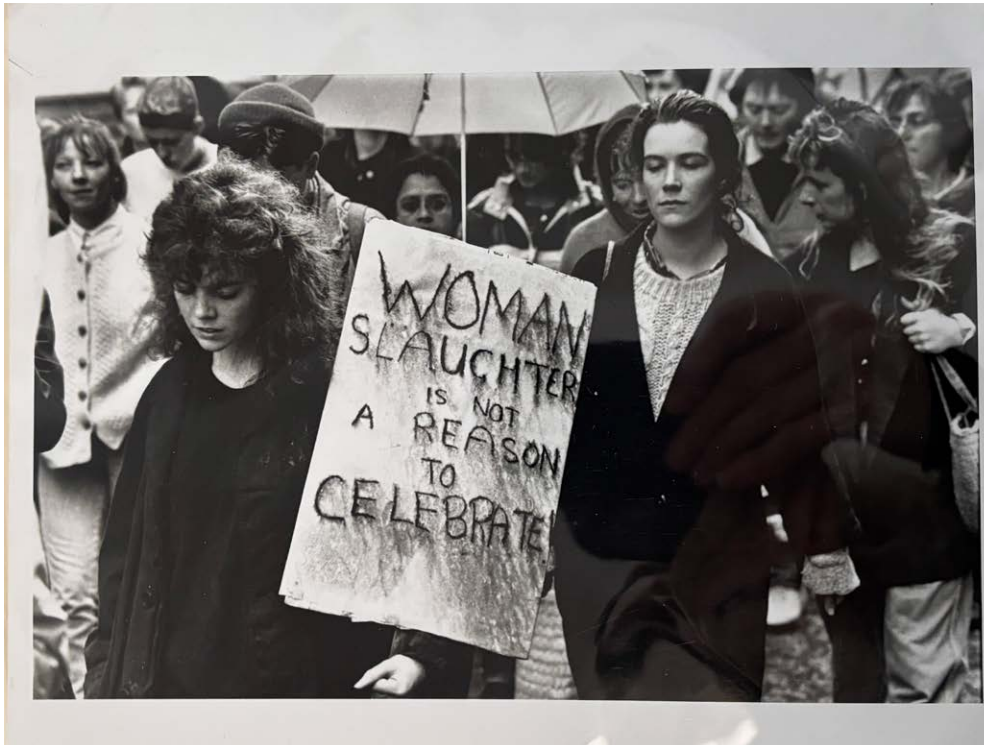


Interested in the graphic communication design of the placards. Small words are powerful linking to my Unit 2 work and my personal love of small, powerful words that provoke thought, opinion and debate. I had the Asterix lunchbox in the bottom right hand corner. I was only 5 at the time and did not have hair like this!

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A very emotive image, the rain blurring the placard, the facial expressions of the two central women and the text on the placard create a powerful sadness, despair and hopelessness.



I was impressed with the professional placards that look consistent, strong and united. Something in the reproduction of the printed placards takes away from the emergency of the handwritten signs of other images, and within this one, and a feeling of being handed it to hold prevails which challenges the very nature of protests.

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I was shocked at this image. So powerful and intriguing by its surprising nature. I don't immediately recognise what the masked women stand for. It's interesting they are being photographed by someone else, I notice the leaning in of the woman on the right, 'posing' for the image. Highlighting even 'news' and 'factual' images are staged and not a transparent reflection of what is happening, questioning all imagery as 'real'.



The energy and solidarity of these women transcend this image. The blurred face at the front add immediacy, movement, action. I love it. The women also look happy. Happy to be together, speaking their minds, moving for better.

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Love the graphic communication design of the posters on the cinema. Lusty Lovers? What is this?! The women look happy. They look like they are protesting

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What is real?

These images drew me to question fact and reportage imagery as staged

Conflict of creating a true representation of people and emotions versus 'having a photograph taken'

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Additional Imagery

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Additional Imagery

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FORMAT
3/6/7/51



FORMAT
3/6/1/37



FORMAT
3/6/1/65



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Collectively map and present the types of societies associated (real or imagined) to this material using the following prompts:

Classification as sorting (into groups) – what ‘societal groupings’ could this material belong to?

Classification as systematizing (these groupings into larger systems, taxonomies, and data infrastructures) – what ‘societal systems’ does this material play a role in?

Classification as assigning (use systems to assign classifications of things) – what information has this material been ‘assigned’, and what impact does this have on the societies in which it is associated?

See second PDF