

Women in Black UK Newsletter, May 2022

It is good to be back! The last newsletter, in Spring 2020, was sent soon after our first COVID 19 lockdown. Much has happened since then and it has been a delight to make contact with groups and to discover that given various constraints and limitations, great work has been taking place. Sadly we discover that the Glasgow group have folded and there has been no response from Borth and Aberystwyth, Birmingham, Leicester and Sheffield. If any of you have information on these, or indeed other groups, please do let us know.

Here is a round-up of what is happening around the UK and beyond. Be inspired and encouraged by the range of approaches - it is always good to share ideas, approaches and resources.

From Bradford Women in Black. We have regular banners e.g. Women in Black Silent Vigil for Peace and each month we have a theme, e.g. Palestine or Children in times of war. Our last 2 vigils at the beginning of March and April were on the War in Ukraine. We have a generic leaflet about Women in Black in Bradford and a leaflet each time around the theme. Our numbers vary but we have a core group of about 10. We stand in the line with our banners, in silence, but we have one or two women who give out leaflets to people and answer any questions they may have. We find that we generally get a very positive response from people. Last month one of our members was interviewed on our local radio station about Women in Black and about the vigil on that day in particular.

The group meet on the 1st Thursday of each month between 4.30-5.30 in the centre of Bradford, junction of Bank St and Hustlergate.

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From Cambridge Women in Black. In March we had the "We Are All Connected -- Umbilical Cord" event linked to COP26. A community artwork - an "umbilical cord" was on display on Parker's Piece as part of the protests against COP26 meetings in Glasgow (Nov 2021). The cord was crafted by local artists Jill Eastland and Cathy Dunbar with groups of mostly women and non-binary people from all walks of life, including women who have been homeless and women who have experienced abuse.

Jill Eastland explained "We have created a umbilical cord, more than a kilometer long, as a metaphor for our connections to each other and the planet. It is an exercise in solidarity and is being created from reused art, rags, yarn, found objects and everyday detritus. We have stitched together hundreds of pieces made by different people to create the cord."

The group meet from 12pm to 1pm outside the Guildhall in Market Square each first Saturday of the month.

- **Contact:** Zareen Taj, tajzareenok@gmail.com

From Edinburgh Women in Black. We are a very small group, having lost not only Eileen Cook (such a loss to the whole peace movement up here) but a few other stalwarts, due to ill health/age, but we have managed to keep the vigils going. We are keen for new people to join. Jan Benvie is the new contact, she has agreed to take on responsibility and pass things along.

The group meet for weekly vigils on Saturdays between 1-2 pm at the East end of Princes Street opposite the Balmoral Hotel.

- **Contact:** Jan Benvie, jbenvie@yahoo.co.uk
<https://www.facebook.com/womeninblackedinburgh/>

From Women in Black Leeds. For the past 18 months we have been holding vigils twice a month, 1st & 3rd Tuesdays, and we have gained several new members. We focus on Palestine each time. More recently we have noticed more public interest/awareness. We have updated our leaflets, sharing info from Amnesty International, and have ordered a supply for distribution. Peace!

The group vigil on the first and third Tuesday of each month, 12:30-1:30, Dortmund Square, Leeds

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<https://www.facebook.com/groups/womeninblackleeds/>

From Women in Black London. We have continued to meet every Wednesday from 6pm-7pm at the Edith Cavell Statue at St Martins Place in central London. In lockdown we maintained a 'virtual' vigil each week producing and circulating a leaflet. During our one hour vigil, we hand out up to 300 leaflets to those passing, although this number has been down due to the pandemic with fewer people on the streets. As more people return to London we are handing out more leaflets. WIB London also has large placards on the four sides of Edith Cavell statue. We have estimated that more than 5000 people see our vigil in an evening as they walk, drive and sit on buses.

Over the past months we have held vigils on

- Military spending
- Militarism and the Environment
- Spending on Nuclear weapons
- Saudi' continual war in Yemen,
- Ongoing wars in various African countries
- Afghanistan
- Refugees
- Russian war in Ukraine

In April we held vigils on GDAMS (Global Days of Action on Military Spending)

Our leaflets always looks at the particular effect war has on women and leaves a space for people to sign their concerns which we send to the UK government.

Our weekly photograph and leaflet is added to Facebook and Twitter's each week and to the Women in Black international website. Our weekly numbers range from 10 to 20 women, some of whom have been coming for years and some for just a few weeks. Leaflets and placards are agreed on email before each vigil.

The group meet weekly to vigil on Wednesdays, 6-7pm, around the statue of Edith Cavell (St Martin's Place).

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Oxford Women in Black. Along with many other vigils, Women in Black in Oxford suspended their activities during the worst of the pandemic. However, since late March the Oxford vigil has

been rebooted, not least by the kind donation of some weatherproof correx placards by WiB London. Given the state of the world, we have increased the frequency of our vigils from monthly to weekly. We continue to focus on protesting against war and against the arms trade that fuels war and has a devastating impact on the people in many countries throughout the world. We are noting that these have become very immediate and discussable topics since the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Passers-by are not always enthusiastic to receive our leaflets, but a surprising range of people happily take stickers that feature the Picasso peace image.

The number of women participating in the rebooted vigil has been increasing as the word goes out through the Network of Oxford Women and local peace-focused groups and organisations. We have benefited from great coverage in the *Morning Star*! And we hope to feature in the *Oxford Mail* before long. The Quakers at the Meeting House in St Giles have kindly agreed to accommodate our banner and placards in between vigils, and we look forward to building links with people there who might feel moved to join us on Saturdays. We welcome all who support our feminist, anti-militarist perspective.

The group meet every Saturday, 2pm-3pm at the Martyrs' Memorial in St Giles' in central Oxford. Wear black if possible, but come anyway!

- **Contact:** Carol Stavris, carolstavris@gmail.com

Women in Black Portsmouth. Women in Black Portsmouth have now had over 200 monthly vigils since they started in January 2005. During the last two years of disruption, there has always been one woman at the vigil. Even during the lockdown, a cycle ride, plus an hour's walking in circles didn't seem like breaking the rules! The vigillers discovered zoom and so it has become a blended event. Sarah Coote said: *"sadly, our small group has shrunk and it is becoming difficult to envisage how we can sustain the vigil much longer. We might have stopped in February, but the war seemed to make it imperative that we be there. So the future is, as for everyone, unpredictable"*.

The group meet on the first Saturday of the month between 11 am and 12 noon, facing the naval base.

- **Contact:** Sarah Coote, slcoote@yahoo.co.uk

Women in black in Europe

Since the end of February, Women in Black groups in Belgrade, Bologna, Leuven, Madrid, Rome and Toledo have been holding vigils to oppose the war in Ukraine and highlight how this conflict is affecting women and girls. Several groups have also joined peace marches in their cities. You can see their statements and photos here:

Belgrade

<https://zeneucrnom.org/en/>

Bologna

<https://www.facebook.com/Donne-in-nero-Bologna-792657614114366/>

Leuven

<https://www.facebook.com/wib.leuven>

Madrid

<https://mujeresdenegromadrid.blogspot.com/?m=1>

Toledo

<https://www.facebook.com/mujeresdenegrotledo/>

Women in Black International

Our international website provides a listing for every Women in Black vigil, enabling women in your area to find out about your group, when it is held and who to contact for more information. Whether you are a new group, a long-established one please check your entry and let us know if the details are correct, need updating or whether your entry should be deleted. Please send the information to Sian Jones: wibinfo@gn.apc.org

<http://womeninblack.org/vigils-around-the-world/europa/united-kingdom/>

Feel free to forward the newsletter to your friends and fellow peace activists. Please send your news, photos and comments about this Newsletter to wibinfo@gn.apc.org

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Cambridge WiB

