

## Women in Black UK Newsletter, December 2023

Welcome to our Winter Newsletter. While we keep on receiving terrible news from Israel and Palestine, we are finding hope in the many actions that new and longstanding vigils around the UK have been organising. The fact that our numbers have increased since October, is not only a reminder of Women in Black's origins in Jerusalem and Haifa. It also shows what a powerful formula for feminist, anti-militarist action WiB is. Please share this update with your fellow vigillers.

### **Bradford**

Joyce Robertshaw tells us that the Bradford vigil discussed focusing on Palestine/Israel during their monthly vigil, but have decided to have peace as their theme to highlight all wars. Individual WiBs have been involved in local demonstrations and one member has made two banners which she stands behind every afternoon for 2 hours. Other women join her when they can. At the beginning of November, the group gave out leaflets and white poppies to passers-by, which were well received.

Vigil: first Thursday of each month, 4:30-5:30pm, junction of Bank St and Hustlergate.

Contact: Joyce Robertshaw, [joycerobertshaw@gmail.com](mailto:joycerobertshaw@gmail.com)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/womeninblackbradford>

X (formerly Twitter): [womeninblack\\_bradford](https://twitter.com/womeninblack_bradford)

### **Brighton: vigilling has restarted**

Seeing the dreadful suffering of the Israeli and the Palestinian people, women from WILPF, WiB, Quakers and other groups felt that it was time to restart the Brighton vigil. The group had first formed during the Iraq war. At present, around ten women are holding a weekly vigil at the war memorial, Old Steine. Many people walk by this location and buses stop at traffic lights. Women are handing out around 100 leaflets during the hour-long vigil and talking to passers-by whenever possible. Jenny Engledow says: "we had a young Palestinian man stop to talk, a woman who is Jewish and feeling desperate and many people just appalled at the present situation and agreeing that all the violence has to stop."

Vigil: Fridays, 1-2pm at the war memorial, Old Steine.

Contact: Jenny Engledow, [brightonwib@11qp.co.uk](mailto:brightonwib@11qp.co.uk)

### **Bristol: new vigil**

This group was formed shortly after the war in Israel and Palestine broke out and amazingly, they are standing together three times a week at College Green in front of the Council House. Lisa Saffron says: "one of us engages with people passing by and hands out leaflets, while the rest stand in silence. We are experiencing sympathy and respect from the public for what we are doing. As you know, it feels very powerful to be doing this as women in silence." Vigils are coordinated via a WhatsApp group, with around 70 members. This means that there are between 5 and 12 different women at each vigil, with new ones joining each time. Women are encouraged to make and bring their own placards.

Vigil: Sundays 12-1pm, Mondays 5-6pm and Thursdays 5-6pm, at College Green in front of the Council House.

Follow this link to join the Bristol Women in Black WhatsApp

community: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/FK9zcytGad40BwahgO51oJ>

### **Cambridge**

In November and December new women have joined the Women in Black vigil in Cambridge. Vigilliers are standing by the local Palestine Solidarity Campaign stall and they feel that they are getting a good response from shoppers in the Market Square.

Vigil: first Saturday of every month, 12-1pm, Market Square.

Contact: Zareen, [tajzareenok@gmail.com](mailto:tajzareenok@gmail.com)

### **Chesham: new vigil**

We recently received an email about a new Women in Black group in Chesham. Since late November, the women have been holding weekly vigils on Saturday at noon, at the roadside by the clock tower. They are focusing on Israel/Palestine, essentially calling for a ceasefire and end to the killings. They have placards but not flags. We will share more details as soon as we hear more from them.

Contact via Facebook at the Chiltern Peace and Justice Group.

### **Edinburgh**

Jan Benvie tells us that the group “has had fairly small turnouts in the past year, mainly because many of our number are getting older. However, we announced that our focus on 14 October would be peace in Palestine and Israel and we were amazed by the turnout.” In the following weeks, a good number of women have been standing for peace even on dreich Saturdays (dreich is a Scottish word meaning depressing, miserable or cold). Some women who were in Glasgow for the day held an informal WiB vigil and others supported the annual event for Medical Aid for Palestinians in Edinburgh and they raised £15,812 - significantly more than usual. Margaret Ferguson Burns, from WiB Edinburgh, was in New York at the end of November for the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and while there, she joined the Women in Black vigil at Union Square.

Vigil: Saturdays, 1-2 pm, East end of Princes Street opposite the Balmoral Hotel.

Contact: [jbenvie@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jbenvie@yahoo.co.uk)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/womeninblackedinburgh/>

### **Haringey: new vigil**

This group got together in mid-November in response to the violence in Israel and Palestine. Organisers Ruth Valentine and Helen Mayer chose to vigil outside Wood Green Library because this location has space to stand, lots of passers-by in not too much of a hurry, and a good local feel. Reception from people range from widespread interest to active support, with a small number asking to take photos. Ruth adds: “we give out about 200 leaflets on Sunday, so if even a tenth of the people read them, we're doing something.” Both the leaflet and placards have been carefully written to be as in-divisive and inclusive as possible. The vigils are being coordinated through a WhatsApp group.

Vigil: Sundays, 11-12pm, outside Wood Green Library, Haringey, London

Contact: [ruth@ruthvalentine.co.uk](mailto:ruth@ruthvalentine.co.uk)

### **Leeds**

For the time being, the women of Leeds are holding their vigil weekly, rather than twice a month. They have slightly modified their leaflet to reflect the current situation and have a new banner calling for “Cease Fire Now”. Tricia Griffin reports that their numbers have increased exponentially; up to 30 women have been standing together. She describes that “many people of all ages and ethnicities were happy to take a leaflet and many wanted to stop and talk”.

Vigil: Tuesdays, 12:30-1:30pm, Dortmund Square

Contact: [leedswomeninblack@gmail.com](mailto:leedswomeninblack@gmail.com)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/womeninblackleeds/?ref=share>

### **London: new Saturday vigil**

Since October, around 60 vigilliers have been holding a weekly vigil outside Friends House, Euston Road. This location has some footfall, but more car traffic, so the placards that women make and bring have big enough lettering. Their messages include: mourn the dead, save the living, stop the killing, end the occupation and apartheid. The vigil on 9 December was dedicated to Ruth Cohen, a founding member of the original Women in Black group in Jerusalem in 1987. Ruth stood with them for many years and remained an activist after returning to London. This month it will be twenty years since she died. Ruth's daughters, Judith and Jessica, were at the vigil alongside activists who knew Ruth personally.

Vigil: Saturdays, 12-1pm, outside Friends House, Euston Road.

Contact: [miri.weingarten@gmail.com](mailto:miri.weingarten@gmail.com)

Instagram: [women\\_in\\_black\\_london](https://www.instagram.com/women_in_black_london)

### **London: Wednesday vigil**

In the past weeks, women who had not been at the vigil for 20 years, have come back. They said that they were sure that they would find WiBs standing around Edith Cavell's statue on a Wednesday afternoon. No doubt a great example of how valuable it is to stick to a good location and schedule! Although many of the recent vigils have been focusing on Israel/Palestine, during COP28 vigilliers brought attention to the links between the military and high consumption of petroleum fuels and associated emissions.

Vigil: Wednesdays, 6-7pm, Edith Cavell Memorial, St Martin's Place.

Blog: <http://london.womeninblack.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/womeninblack.london>

X (formerly Twitter): [@WIB\\_London](https://twitter.com/WIB_London)

### **Oxford**

The Oxford crew had a very galvanising experience on 28 October. On that Saturday there was an unprecedented turnout for the vigil, moved by the events in Israel/Palestine and also by the tea party and book launch of Cynthia Cockburn and Sue Finch's history of Women in Black. Carol Stavris recounts that around 20 people really enjoyed the talk given by London WiBs Sue Finch and Liz Khan about the book. Since then, Oxford vigils have been running weekly and they have created a WhatsApp group to coordinate who will be going. In November, the Oxford group held a vigil about the UN meeting of states on the Nuclear Ban Treaty and in December, following the vigil, they sang alternative carols for Palestine outside St Michael's Church, collecting for Medical Aid for Palestinians.

Vigil: Saturdays, 2-3pm, Martyrs Memorial.

Contacts: Carol Stavris, [oxfordwib@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordwib@gmail.com)

### **Portsmouth**

As well as the usual peace witness (on the ground or on zoom), the group has invited some Muslim women to join them. When the weather has been good, WiBs have also joined local Stop Bombing Gaza rallies.

Contact: Sarah Coote, [slcoote@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:slcoote@yahoo.co.uk)

Vigil: first Saturday of the month, 11am-12pm, at the junction of Edinburgh Road and Alfred Road, overlooking the naval base.

## **Planning the next international Women in Black meeting**

The next international WiB conference is due in 2024, two years after the wonderful Armenian women hosted the last one online. London WiBs have proposed to host the meeting and they believe that this could be done most inclusively online, in a series of zoom meetings spread over a few consecutive days or weeks. Vigillers from around the world have welcomed the idea, but are also asking to reconsider if there could be a mix of online and in-person events. Could you please help us think creatively how best we could hold an inclusive, informative conference? How could your group be involved? Which are the key themes for your group? Which workshops would you like to lead?

Contact: Sue Finch, Liz Khan or Rebecca Johnson at: [wibinfo@gn.apc.org](mailto:wibinfo@gn.apc.org)

## **Letter in The Guardian**

Thank you, Carola, for sending your letter to The Guardian and getting to a wider audience key parts of a recent WiB leaflet about Israel/Palestine. Here's the full text and a link to the article:

The key to negotiating peace in Israel and Palestine? Women

Remona Aly's observations on the group of Jewish and Muslim women meeting to rebuild relations in a safe space highlights the pressing need to reach out and feel the hurt of others during this time of heightened fury and tension. Women's courage in taking a stand against violence, militarism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, misogyny and racism of all kinds has been evident for many decades, for example in the Black Sash movement founded in South Africa, and the Women In Black international network founded by Jewish and Palestinian women in Jerusalem and Haifa in 1988.

Women In Black continues to this day in the UK and internationally, holding one-hour women-only silent vigils calling for peace, justice and sustainable security in the Middle East, Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan and beyond.

The patriarchal violence and militarism that accompany these conflicts and wars are fuelled by the production, sale and trafficking of weapons by various governments and companies, undermining peace and violating human rights and humanitarian laws. Women In Black maintains that only dialogue, diplomacy and political solutions can bring sustainable security, with justice and peace.

Carola Addington, Teddington, London

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/03/the-key-to-negotiating-peace-in-israel-and-palestine-women>

## **WiB leaflets and photos**

Please remember to visit the page of the UK groups to see recent pics and leaflets:

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

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