

Oral History Society e-Newsletter

No. 1, Spring 2010

Welcome..

to the first edition of the Oral History Society's new e-Newsletter. You have received this Newsletter because you are a member of the Oral History Society and have provided us with your email address. We hope that you will find it interesting and useful — but if you do not wish to receive it in future, please email Michelle Winslow, m.winslow@sheffield.ac.uk, asking for your name to be removed from the mailing list.

Oral History now available online!

Volumes 1—35 (1972—2007) of *Oral History*, the journal of the Oral History Society, are now available to OHS members online. You can access them at <http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/journals/online.php>, using the Username and Password that you received recently when you renewed your OHS membership. You can then browse, search, download and print any articles and reviews free of charge.

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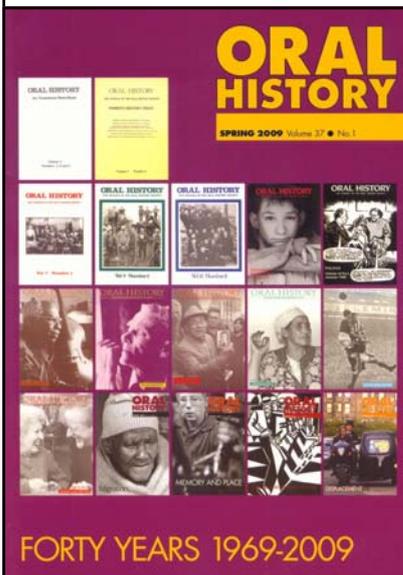
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Future events & calls for papers; projects; invitations to contribute to publications

Oral History Society journal celebrates 40th anniversary in style!

On 9 December 2009 some sixty members of the oral history community gathered to toast the fortieth anniversary of the Oral History Society's journal. After the journal's founding editor Paul Thompson regaled the audience with tales of its early days – in 1969 the publication became the world's first journal of oral history – further contributors charted its evolution to the present day, and considered its future challenges and ambitions.

One real highlight was the eminent historian Orlando Figes, who reflected on his use of oral history in research into Stalinist Russia, and the vast influence the discipline has had on his life and work: 'the privilege of this intimacy has changed both my perspective of history and my perspective as a human being'. He also echoed other contributors when he spoke of the way oral history – with



the journal at its fore – has enabled a shift in contemporary historical thinking towards a more democratic, people-centred approach.

Following the speeches, there was a wide-ranging debate, considering topics from the independence of the journal to the relationship between practitioners and academics in oral history. One thing *everyone* could agree on was that the journal has been crucial as a forum for the community to share its ideas and findings, and that it will continue to serve this vital role in an era in which the study and practice of oral history is flourishing. The celebrations ended with a toast to the journal's past, present and future, and a delicious piece of *Oral History* cake for everyone!

Rachel Crossley

UK Web Archive—Oral History Society website

The Oral History Society website is one of those selected by the British Library for preservation as part of the 'Digital Lives' Special Collection of the UK Web Archive. The Archive contains websites that publish research, reflect the diversity of lives, interests and activities throughout the UK, and demonstrate web innovation. The archived OHS sites are at <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/target/111968/source/subject>.

Oral History Society Membership Survey

In recent years there has been an upsurge in activity in oral history in Britain, one that the Oral History Society (OHS) has supported by developing a Regional Network of community based representatives, a training programme, and a website, as well as maintaining the journal, conferences, seminars and workshops. However, over the same period there has not been an increase in membership numbers.

Two separate studies therefore took place in 2008/9, into the profile of the Society's membership and its perceptions of the OHS and the services it offers. A quantitative on-line survey found that the majority of the readership classified themselves as 'white British', was predominantly female and over forty five. The survey also found that fifty one per cent of the membership had joined in the last two years, while twenty five per cent had been members for over five years.

The qualitative study consisted of thirty one in-depth telephone interviews. These found that there was a divide between those who had joined out of a general interest in oral history and those who had joined because they were undertaking a particular project or job. Tangible benefits, such as cheaper rates at conferences, seemed less important than intangible ones such as bestowing professional or personal credibility. Some believed that, due to their interest in oral history, it was almost their duty to support the Society. Many also felt that joining would give them a fuller grasp of the demands of oral history, providing them not only with knowledge, both practical and theoretical, but a sense of confidence as well.

Integral to this was a need to 'belong' - for the OHS to be more 'participatory' and ensure

that members were kept up to date with the latest thought and development in the field of oral history. Others felt that the Society should publicise its activities and the benefits of joining more effectively. The Regional Network was seen as having a crucial role to play. While regional activities were variable across the country, this seemed less important than being part of and involved in an oral history community.

However, it was felt by the majority that levels of membership were not a clear indicator of the success of the OHS. Increasing, or at least sustaining, the membership was felt to be important for financial and structural reasons, but was not thought to be the answer to the more fundamental issues of the image and role of the Society. Some felt that it was too 'academic', but many other interviewees felt that an 'academic' journal or image could only add 'gravitas' to the Society.

Some members felt that, while oral history and the oral history community had grown and developed, the organisation itself had not. To ensure it maintains its almost rightful position both within and without the oral history community, it was thought vital that the Society should further develop and maintain its relationships with Higher Education across the disciplines, as well as establishing more solid links with funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The research made clear that greater 'participation' or a more proactive Society, would not necessarily equate to higher membership. However, the concerns and suggestions of members are now being taken forward as part of the trustees' five year Strategic Plan, developed in 2009 (for a summary of this, see page 4).

Kate Melvin

[Record] [Create]: Oral History in Art, Craft, and Design— 2010 Oral History Society Annual Conference, Sackler Centre, Victoria & Albert Museum, 2-3 July, 2010

The 2010 Oral History Society Annual Conference will be held in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum London, National Life Stories at the British Library, Camberwell College of Arts (University of the Arts London), and the University of the West of England, Bristol.

Oral history has become a significant methodology for understanding the contexts of art and design practices. Interviews with individuals involved in creative practices as producers, consumers or mediators are providing access to undocumented and alternative histories in the arts. This international conference will bring together the global community of those working with oral history in the fields of architecture, art, craft and design (incorporating fashion, product design, photography, and new media).

For further details, see <http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/conferences/2010.php>, or contact the conference administrator Belinda Waterman, email belinda@essex.ac.uk.

The People's Park—an oral history project in Southampton

'Look after your pennies and the pounds will look after themselves,' you can hear your grandparents saying. For one group in Southampton this is certainly the case. A group of parents who all used St James' Park, Shirley, wanted to be able to 'spend a penny' in a real toilet. Tired of having no facilities in their park, they approached Southampton City Council to enquire about turning an unused park building into a disabled toilet and a kiosk offering simple refreshments.

The council were totally supportive of the idea, and encouraged the group to form the Friends of St James' Park (FoSJP). The group has gone from strength to strength, gaining local

City Council. This brought members of the public forward with stories to tell, including the last full-time park warden from the days when parks had 'park-keepers', and members of the ARP unit from those wartime days.

Wanting to share the history of the park with the wider community, rather than shutting it away in a cupboard, the group included a history project in a lottery bid that was being prepared to improve the general park facilities. Fourteen people were trained in oral history in Spring 2009 by Padmini Broomfield, who was then working for Southampton City Council Museum Services. Devising an organised system for documenting

and preserving the material has been one of our first challenges, and we are in the process of logging the information that we had already accumulated during the past few years. Although our group had written personal memoirs before, we had not recorded them using audio equipment. Despite our initial reservations, we have now risen to the challenges and recorded our first few stories, including Mr Burnett, the last park-keeper. It is a team effort using all our skills, but we are getting there! We are totally encouraged by the support we receive from



recognition and national support. In 2006 they looked after their pennies and opened their facility, and three years on they were shortlisted to get over a £1 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), to include an Oral History Project recording people's memories of the park!

A park reminiscence day event resulted in the donation of a local history archive and this was shared with local junior school children to encourage them to think about how we find out about what happened in the past. The park building turned out to be a World War II Air Raid Precaution (ARP) building. During the Park's centenary celebrations in 2007, FoSJP produced a history display with support from Southampton

the public, who really seem to appreciate our displays.

Over the next year the group will be recording more interviews and publishing extracts on its website at <http://www.fosjp.org.uk>. In 2011 the group will be publishing a book on the history of the park and its people. FoSJP have also organised a series of public talks which bring local historians and academics to their local community. Big things can come in small packages – this project is a positive example to all who have thought about making a small change in their community. This group is an inspiration to all of us!

Michaela Lawler-Levene

South Yorkshire Women in Industry Project—Oral History Toolkit

The HLF-funded South Yorkshire Women in Industry project interviewed women of all ages and from a wide variety of industries in the region, including one woman who worked at Rotherham's KP Nuts for over forty years, and the only female working in a track repair team on Doncaster's railway tracks. The project has now produced an Oral History Toolkit with advice on setting up a project, equipment, interviewing and taking care of recordings. The toolkit can be downloaded from <http://www.sywdtindustry.org.uk/documents/sy-women-in-industry-project-oral-history-toolkit.pdf>.

Oral History Society Strategic Review

Throughout 2009 the Committee of Trustees of the Oral History Society has undertaken a range of activities to review current activities and to plan for the future. These activities have included two membership surveys and a series of discussion, evaluation and strategy meetings. During this process it has become clear that our members remain passionate about oral history. It also has become clear that our impact as a small Society has been immense.

Over £60 million has been invested in community oral history through the Heritage Lottery Fund alone (which we continue to advise). At the same time there is growing acceptance of oral history across the education sector. Oral history appears routinely used in a variety of media. We have also clarified our vision of the Society based on what our members told us. Above all we want to continue to be a membership based organisation promoting the collection, preservation and use of recorded memories of the past.

We have arrived at a number of conclusions that will shape our future direction. The existing Society activities that continue to be appreciated by the membership *and* assist in promoting oral history include:



Members of the Oral History Society Committee enjoying a break in the snow at the Strategic Planning weekend in February 2009.

- **our journal *Oral History*** - a biannual publication, leading academic *and* community oral history
- **our conferences, seminars and workshops** - see page 2 of this newsletter for details of our 2010 conference
- **our Regional Network of Oral Historians** - 47 Networkers around the UK. See their 2009 reports at <http://www.ohs.org.uk/regions/index.php>
- **our training courses** - over 500 people attended our training days in 2009
- **our web site** <http://www.ohs.org.uk> - is visited by around 10,650 people every month

We remain committed to supporting and developing these activities. However, we want - with your help - to do more. For the next four years we have made a number of plans. These include strengthening communications with our membership, beginning with a members' e-newsletter and developing members' pages on our website. We will be making regular requests to members for news, think-pieces and resource items to help us to meet these aims. Again members can help spread the word and ensure the preservation of oral history at both local and national level. In addition we are currently:

- extending and developing our training programmes
- looking at ways of applying the lessons of our successful HLF partnership to other funding bodies
- establishing a Higher Education Network (OHS-HEN)
- improving the availability of oral history resources – we have started this by making back copies of *Oral History* available on-line to members through JSTOR
- launching a new archive initiative, through which we will promote the value of oral history amongst archivists

Raphael Samuel History Centre
Friday 11 June 2010, 4.30—6.30 pm
Stewart House, 32 Russell Square, London, WC1

Memory Today: a symposium

This symposium is the latest in the Raphael Samuel History Centre 'Conversations and Disputations' events. It will celebrate the publication of *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwartz. Speakers include Sally Alexander and Rick Crownshaw (Goldsmiths), Shahidha Bari (Queen Mary), Graham Dawson (Brighton), Stephan Feuchtwang (LSE) and Lynne Segal (Birkbeck). Entrance free; all welcome. Email Katy Pettit, k.pettit@uel.ac.uk for further information or see <http://www.raphael-samuel.org.uk>.

'Pool of Memories'

This HLF-funded project by the Friends of Moseley Road Baths in Birmingham will document the history of the baths, the oldest of only three Grade II* Listed swimming pools still operating in Britain. It will record memories of people who have swum, socialised, washed or worked there, and produce a book, DVD, teaching pack, website, exhibition and 'Theatre in Education' scheme. See <http://www.moseleyroadbaths.co.uk> for a virtual tour of the baths, or email memories@friendsofmrbs.co.uk.

Contributions invited to 'ARC', the newsletter of the Society of Archivists

The July edition of 'ARC', the newsletter of the Society of Archivists, is a special issue for the Film, Sound and Photographic Archives Group. Articles of 400-800 words on these topics are invited, with .jpeg images, by 30 April 2010. Please send them to David Lee, Wessex Film & Sound Archive, Hampshire Record Office, email david.lee@hants.gov.uk.

'Archival Voices'

The October 2010 edition of the Journal of the Society of Archivists is planned as a themed edition with a focus on articles on 'archival voices'. Papers are invited on subject relating broadly to this theme, and might include oral history projects, sound archives, and the use of audio recordings in outreach and other projects.

The deadline for submission is 21 May 2010, and papers should be no longer than 6,000 words. To discuss possible articles, please contact Dr Alexandrina Buchanan (Co-editor) at Alexandrina.Buchanan@liverpool.ac.uk. Guidelines at <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/0037-9816.asp>.

Call for Papers—The History of Post-war Women's Health, Centre for the History of Science, Technology & Medicine, University of Manchester, 22-23 October 2010

This two-day conference will bring together researchers interested in the history of post-war women's health. In contrast to most histories of women's health, which focus on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it aims to showcase research on the politics, policy and practice of women's health after 1945, a much less studied yet dynamic era for women as patients, providers, caregivers, policy-makers, and activists.

Proposals are invited for individual papers of twenty minutes in length. Submissions from postgraduate researchers are particularly welcome, and bursaries to cover transportation and other costs for postgraduates may be available.

For further information, please contact the conference organisers Dr Emma Jones, emma.l.jones@manchester.ac.uk, and Elizabeth Toon, elizabeth.toon@manchester.ac.uk.

Proposals for papers (300 words) should be submitted to Elizabeth Toon by 1 June 2010.

Oral History in the 21st Century Classroom

The Oral History Association is planning a Special Issue of *The Oral History Review* on 'Oral History in the 21st Century Classroom', to reflect the growth of oral history as an educational methodology. The journal is seeking contributions that approach oral history learning and teaching from experiential, pedagogical, methodological and/or theoretical perspectives, including articles, interview transcripts, photographs, multi-media material and course syllabi. If you are interested in contributing to this issue, please submit your ideas to Glenn Whitman at gwhitman@saes.org. The deadline is 1 September 2010.

Your comments, suggestions and news, please...

Do you have any comments about this Newsletter, suggestions for future editions, or short items that you would like to submit for inclusion? Please send them to Cynthia Brown, cib2@le.ac.uk. She also welcomes items of up to 1000 words for the 'Current British Work' section of *Oral History*, the journal of the Oral History Society.