

# Oral History Society e-Newsletter

No. 3, Spring 2011

## Welcome..

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](mailto:m.winslow@sheffield.ac.uk), asking for your name to be removed from the mailing list.

## Useful software for oral historians

With the help of members of the OHS Committee, Graham Smith, OHS Chair, and Anthony Greenwood, webmaster, have compiled a list of software useful to oral historians. This can now be accessed on the Members pages of the OHS website at: <http://www.ohs.org.uk/resources/software.php>

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO ORAL HISTORY FOR FAMILY HISTORIANS

### New training course to be launched in April 2011

The Oral History Society will be adding to its suite of training courses in April 2011 with a new course for family historians. *An Introduction to Oral History for Family Historians* will enable participants to:

- understand what oral history is and how it can be applied to family research
- identify and access existing oral history material in local and national archives, and consider how to use it in their research
- be aware of the ethical issues that may arise when conducting oral history interviews with family members
- consider how they could leave a record of their own life for future generations of their family
- be aware of basic requirements for conducting their own interviews

It is open to anyone with an interest in using oral history as a tool for family history and research. It is not necessary to complete the

BL/OHS Introduction to Oral History training day before attending, but it may be useful to do so later to develop interview technique and knowledge of recording



equipment, copyright and other topics relevant to conducting interviews. The first course will be held at the East Midlands Oral History Archive at the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, on 15 April 2011. Further details are at <http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/training/family-historians.php>. Places are limited to twelve per course, and demand is likely to exceed places, so anyone interested in doing the course should apply early. Each course will be led by a BL/OHS Accredited Trainer with experience in conducting family research.

## It's not just typing—reflections of a transcriptionist

When I applied for the post of Secretary/Admin/Transcriptionist on the HLF Project at the Planned Environment Therapy Trust (PETT) in Gloucestershire, I only had a vague idea of what a 'transcriptionist' was. I knew it would be typing from a recording, and that was about it. I'd typed letters and reports from a dictation machine in the past and I thought it would be much the same. Audio typing – that's all it is, isn't it? Easy. No different to copy typing, surely?

I soon found out that it was a completely different kettle of fish to normal copy typing. To begin with, I discovered I wasn't just typing out boring letters and meaningless reports – I was typing someone's life story. I became engrossed in what I was hearing – transcripts can be like a good book, and on many occasions I find myself looking forward to loading up the next transcript, much the same as I look forward to opening a new book to read.

It is my job to type the transcript completely verbatim, and that includes all the 'ums and ers', all the 'you knows' and 'mmms', who laughs, who cries, the coughs and sneezes, the repetitions and even the obvious mistakes. My job is to reproduce on paper a totally accurate account of the interview - there is no purpose in tidying up the speech and leaving out what you might think of as irrelevant, such as the little side remarks or noises - because they probably will mean something to someone else. In addition, you might even give a wrong interpretation when trying to make sense of something that you can't understand, but that someone who subsequently reads the transcript will understand perfectly.

A very important thing to dutifully transcribe is - silence. The pauses in an oral interview can mean many things and it is important to note when they occur. It would be a very strange transcript indeed that contained no pauses, no moments of contemplation. In short, the oral interview must be faithfully documented and treated with respect during the transcription process. Transcribing is also a very useful learning

aid for our Oral Historian, who has the task of making the interviewee comfortable, relaxed, at ease with their surroundings, and of course, at ease with the Oral Historian! There is little point in creating that ambiance if you then rush the questions, interrupt, or even just plain talk over what they are saying because you are rushing to the next question on your agenda.

In my opinion there is no better way for an oral historian to improve their interview manner and style than to transcribe some oral interviews. When I am transcribing, I can tell immediately if the interviewer is making the interviewee feel uncomfortable, or if the wrong questions are asked, or even not asked. I can tell when the interviewee is getting tired, irritated, or even when they are trying to encourage the interviewer to ask questions from a different angle. When I did my first oral history a couple of months ago, I tried to remember all these things.

Another thing for a transcriptionist to look out for is punctuation. It is amazing how the meaning of a sentence can be so drastically altered for the lack or inclusion of a simple comma or ellipses. And exclamation marks are useful in many instances, but especially to show the sense of humour or maybe irony of someone's remarks – I think that without the exclamation mark, some interviews would come across as very harsh or humourless.

But by far the most rewarding thing about my role as a transcriptionist is being able to feed my thoughts and feelings about an interview to the rest of the team, and in doing so to share my insight and the information I've picked up. And just occasionally, I'm happy to say, I even pick up little things that the interviewer hasn't noticed, which leads to thoughtful discussion and greater understanding. Yes, I'm really glad that being a 'transcriptionist' is part of my job description – in fact, it's a real privilege! And the final exclamation mark was one of joy, not irony!

**Chris Long**

### Historical Justice & Memory Research Network

This new network was launched in December 2010 by researchers working on issues of historical justice in Australia, Indonesia and Germany. As Klaus Neumann, one of its founders, notes: 'Much of the scholarship in our field is centred on case studies. We are convinced that many of these would benefit from insights gained in research on other cases, including those that may seem far removed. We are confident that a website that connects researchers working on similar issues but in different parts of the world will encourage the kind of cross-fertilisation that has often been lacking.' Researchers joining the Network will also be encouraged to contribute to a blog 'to prompt lively discussions' about theoretical and methodological issues and new developments in the field. The contact email for the project is [historicaljustice@swin.edu.au](mailto:historicaljustice@swin.edu.au).

## Enham Alamein Community Heritage (EACH) Project

Enham, a registered disability charity, was established in 1918 as a rehabilitation centre for disabled ex-servicemen returning from World War I. Following the Battle of Alamein during World War II, the people of Egypt wanted to show their gratitude to Britain and the Allied Forces for ending the threat of occupation. A large sum was donated to Enham in 1945, for housing and improved medical facilities. In honour of this gift, the village became 'Enham Alamein'. Today, Enham supports over 3,000 disabled people each year.



The Enham Alamein Community Heritage (EACH) Project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, began in summer 2009. Staff and disabled clients from Enham have worked on the project together with volunteers, University of Winchester BA History work placement students, Year 5 and 6 Smannell and Enham Church of England Primary School pupils, and local residents. The project has aimed to unite the community in celebration of and pride in Enham Alamein's history and diversity, and increase disabili-

ty awareness among the wider community. Potential interviewees were found via local radio and press, flyers, and word of mouth.

In the Spring Term 2010, Smannell and Enham Primary School pupils began researching their local history. Assisted by a Winchester student placement, they prepared questions to ask former pupils of their school, from the 1930s to the 1990s. Having invited suitable candidates to visit the school, they recorded twelve interviews. Eight further interviews with local residents, past and present, were carried out by volunteers. The school pupils also worked with disabled clients from Enham to film a documentary about the history of the village, including an additional seven interviews. DVD copies are available from Enham for a small donation.



Between June and November 2010, a programme of touring exhibitions and workshops was organised for the wider community. This included displays at five Test Valley primary schools, the Museum of Army Flying, the Royal Green Jackets (Rifles) Museum and Andover Museum. There is display at Hampshire Record Office, 3 March-16 April 2011. For more information about all aspects of the project, please visit:

[www.enhamalamein.wordpress.com](http://www.enhamalamein.wordpress.com).

ity awareness among the wider community. The main objective has been to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in telling the story of the village.

Oral history training was organised for Smannell teachers, Enham learning staff, and volunteers, by Padmini Broomfield of the Oral History Society. Professional recording equipment

**Kelly Mitchell**  
Project Manager

Images: above, disabled ex-servicemen taking a break from work at Enham Industries c1935; left: Enham clients & pupils from Smannell & Enham primary schools, filming in Enham Alamein in 2010.

## TEN YEARS OF THE EAST MIDLANDS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE (EMOHA)

### The first five years—Cynthia Brown, former EMOHA Project Manager

In 2000 the Centre for Urban History at the University secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a three year project to establish an oral history archive. This was initially for the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland, but as the name suggested there were hopes of extending it in due course to cover the whole of the East Midlands region. The initial impetus came from the large number of recorded interviews that already existed but which were not easily accessible to potential users—either because they were not yet catalogued, or had never been deposited in the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland (ROLLR). They included several large collections from the 1980s and '90s, but we also tracked down a number of smaller collections recorded by individuals, local community groups and other organisations, all of which were eventually digitised, catalogued and deposited in the ROLLR.



Humberstone Gate, Leicester, with the now-demolished Lewis's department store

The Record Office was a crucial partner in the whole enterprise, particularly after we were offered a large collection of archive recordings from BBC Radio Leicester. Generous staffing through the HLF—three full-time and four full-time posts—also enabled us to produce educational resources, and newsletters, offer free advice and training in oral history, and provide a range of resources on our website, including Information Sheets, 'virtual' exhibitions and links to other oral history projects in the region. These remain accessible at [www.le.ac.uk/emoha](http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha). We achieved a

lot in a relatively short time—but unfortunately our attempts to secure more funding from the HLF or other sources were not successful, and by the end of the three years most of us had already moved on to other jobs. Only one of our number remained to continue the work...

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### The last five years... by Colin Hyde

Thanks to financial support from the University of Leicester, I was able to stay in a part-time post which required external funding. Having been involved with oral history locally since 1989, and having had at least a passing involvement with all but a few of the major projects in the area, I could not bear to see the interest and goodwill EMOHA had generated evaporate and then have to recreate it all again the next time oral history became flavour of the month.

The last few years have seen a wide variety of projects come and go. That EMOHA is still up and running is down to hard work and the continuing support of the Centre for Urban History. At the Centre we run courses which include oral history at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Funding for digitisation has enabled recordings from our collections to be made more easily available for both students and the public. The HLF in the East Midlands directs all local projects with an oral history element to EMOHA for advice and support. Cynthia graciously leaves training in the region to EMOHA, but continues to be involved as one of the OHS rep's and through the annual East Midlands Oral History event. Through all these positive developments the one thing that has suffered has been the business of collecting, cataloguing, and archiving old and new recordings. It also seems unlikely that in the foreseeable future there will be a catalogue or archive of oral history recordings covering the East Midlands. On the plus side, EMOHA is in a more stable situation than it has been since the HLF funding stopped, the work remains fascinating and worthwhile, the future is full of potential and... I'm still here! Contact me at [emoha@le.ac.uk](mailto:emoha@le.ac.uk), 0116 252 5065.

### Oral History Association Annual Meeting 2011

The annual meeting of the Oral History Association (OHA) will take place on 12–16 October 2011 at the Renaissance Hotel in Denver Colorado on the theme of ‘Memories of conflict & disaster: oral history and the politics of truth, trauma, and reconciliation’.

The deadline for submission of proposals has now passed, but further information about the meeting itself is available at [www.oralhistory.org/annual-meeting/2011-oha-annual-meeting-call-for-papers/](http://www.oralhistory.org/annual-meeting/2011-oha-annual-meeting-call-for-papers/).

### Oral History in Higher Education

The History Centre at the Higher Education Academy recently commissioned Graham Smith of Royal Holloway, University of London, Chair of the Oral History Society, to produce a booklet on oral history for teachers and students in higher education.

This is now available online at [www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross\\_fac/healthistory/elibrary/internal/rg\\_smith\\_oralhistory\\_20111015/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/healthistory/elibrary/internal/rg_smith_oralhistory_20111015/).

### Oral Historian’s Digital Toolbox

A new resource for oral historians has been developed as a result of work on oral history and new media on behalf of the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Centre for Oral History & Digital Storytelling at Concordia University. The *Oral Historian’s Digital Toolbox* contains a listing of existing and emergent digital tools, and will be updated at regular intervals to reflect the changing nature of the digital world. It is available at <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/oralhistorianstoolbox>.

### Heritage Lottery Fund—Consultation on Strategic Framework 2013–2019

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is inviting views on its Strategic Framework for 2013–2019 in the light of an increase in the money available to invest in the UK’s heritage. As the HLF website notes:

‘We have set out our proposals on a range of issues, based on analysis of the emerging funding environment for heritage in the next few years, research and evaluation of the impact of our funding, and discussions with other organisations, partners and funders across the heritage sector.’

This is an opportunity to tell the HLF how you think it should respond to the challenges and opportunities you expect to face in the future:

- what it should continue doing
- what it may need to do differently
- what new initiatives could have the greatest impact

The consultation period runs until 26 April 2011. You can register your views at: <http://tinyurl.com/662mncy>

### Story Bridges: a guide for conducting intergenerational oral history projects

The above book by Angela Zusman has recently been published by Left Coast Press. It provides step by step guides to planning and implementing intergenerational oral history projects, using young people to interview elders., including how to locate and train interviewers, conduct the interviews, and archive them for future access. Sample documents and case studies are also included. See [www.lcoastpress.com](http://www.lcoastpress.com).

### European Social Science History Conference, 11–14 April 2012, Glasgow - Ambivalent Pasts: nostalgia & life stories research

This conference is organised by the Oral History & Life Stories Network. More details are now available at <http://147.156.155.104/?q=node/171>.

### 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](mailto: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.