

ANNUAL REPORT

2014/2015

A report of the Society's activities over the last year including details of our organization and our activities on behalf of oral history.

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Chair's Report

The Society's 2015 annual report takes a different format from previous years. Up to now, the chair has authored the report, however from this year onwards individual trustees will be reporting directly on their own areas of responsibility. We are fortunate to have such energetic and dedicated committee members and I would begin by thanking them all for their efforts in promoting oral history generally and our Society in particular.

This year will see Robert Wilkinson stepping down as our Treasurer, a position he has held for many years. Our financial health owes much to Robert's careful husbandry of our funds. The trustees will be making a recommendation to the Annual General Meeting in respect to his replacement. I thank Robert for his long service as Treasurer, and I am delighted that he has kindly agreed to continue supporting the Society through the transition period and in acting as a liaison between the Officers' Group (executive) and the Trustees' Committee.

Earlier in the year, Wendy Ugolini and Siobhan Warrington resigned as trustees. Both played important roles on our committee: Wendy ably representing Scotland, and Siobhan taking responsibility for international matters. Committee members will miss their engagement, ideas and good humour. Angela Bartie has replaced Wendy as the Scottish Oral History Group (SOHG) representative. Angela reports that the SOHG is currently planning a conference on the future of sound archives in Scotland and we look forward to further news on this and other developments.

The trustees have appointed Nicola Benge as our administrator to the Trustees' Committee. Our aim here is to free up more resources for meeting the aims of our strategic plan, by moving tasks such as minute taking from committee members. Rob Perks, who for many years has taken the minutes of the Trustees' Committee in his role as Secretary, will now be able to concentrate on new initiatives (see below).

We are currently seeking to replace Elspeth Millar who was responsible for the *Oral History* journal's administration. Elspeth's contribution to the Society has been significant as she also administered our training programme through a period of rapid growth. All involved in training provision were appreciative of her abilities in organising both trainers and trainees. Emily Hewitt, who has replaced Elspeth in organising our training provision, attended her first Trainers' Group meeting earlier this year and presented an analysis of our programmes.

In the last training year, we ran 84 training courses with 736 participants. This is a marked increase in courses offered, although only a slight increase in the numbers participating (65 courses in 2013 with 723 trainees). The largest increase has been in tailored courses offered to groups (an increase of 19 courses and 144 participants), with community organisations and charities making up more than half of the demand. Overall participant satisfaction rates from feedback collected remains high with all course offerings showing an average of just over 96 per cent satisfaction reported. A recurring challenge, however, has been trying to provide hands-on training with a range of digital recording equipment during the workshops. This continues to be under discussion in ongoing curricula reviews.

Part of Rob Perk's future work will increasingly involve the *Save our Sounds* project that was awarded £9.5M from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project will drive forward much needed oral history digitisation through regional centres. Rob, and his team, including Mary Stewart, one of the Society's Trustees, have worked hard to win this funding at a time of financial stringency. *Save our Sounds* will ensure the survival of oral history collections that would have been otherwise at severe risk. The project is especially timely and important as an intervention given that the situation for archives, libraries and museums continues to look bleak.

The Society has pledged to defend oral history in public institutions, but we can only do so if local groups contact us for assistance. We need to continue to monitor the situation and ask that Regional Networkers and other Society members keep us apprised on developments across Britain and Northern Ireland.

In line with the Society's strategic plan, we also continue to develop benefits for members. The governance work required to begin the development of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) is now complete. In the next year, we hope that SIGs will begin to take off in key areas for oral history, but this will be dependent on Society members becoming involved. In other membership news, Kate Melvin (as Membership Secretary) has secured an advantageous arrangement for members with an insurance services agency. This means that professional indemnity insurance will be available to members at a preferential rate – especially important to our increasing numbers of freelance members.

Finally, I would note that the Society continues to represent oral history at a national level. The most recent example is our membership of the Arts and Humanities Alliance (AHA). The AHA is led by the Royal Historical Society and involves learned societies across arts and humanities coming together to find common ground in representations to government. Such involvement demonstrates how far oral history has come. However, as always, we have more to do if we are to secure the funding and resources necessary to meet continuing and increasing interest and demand in oral history.

Graham Smith, Chair

Membership

As Membership Secretary, I presented and led the discussion on membership at our strategy meeting. Following this review, the Trustees decided that the Society should remain a membership organisation with at least the present levels of services and benefits. I am currently coordinating on-going work in designing membership packages for different groups of members such as freelancers, archivists and so on. Trustees decided to create a new, parallel tier of membership, with the addition of a 'Supporter Network'. This would include a database of those who wish to support the Society and its work but who are not yet members. It was felt that this list should grow organically rather than be 'created'. Key information about 'supporters' would be held including basic demographics, details about their oral history activities and where their interests lay. The 'supporters' would be kept up to date with news and campaigns.

Kate Melvin, Membership Secretary

Diversity and inclusion

Over the past 12 months we have worked to meet the actions set out in the 2014-17 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in the following ways:

- We created and followed an open and fair strategy for recruiting new members to the Regional Network and Oral History Society (OHS) Trustees committee. Opportunities that arose were advertised on the OHS website and through other channels and were open to all.

The OHS inclusion officer has completed a one-day Diversity and Inclusion Training session. We are investigating the possibility of making similar training available to other committee members.

At the end of November Llafur Welsh People's History Society and the OHS ran a very successful oral history continuing professional development day at St Fagan's Museum. Over 40 practitioners attended and plans were laid for further events of this kind in Wales. I'd like to thank Owen Collins for all his hard work in organizing such a valuable event and Beth for hosting. In addition, we ran a smaller, informal meeting in London in January this year, when new London Networker, Martin Bisiker, talked about his work recording the memories of those that worked on the Atlantic convoys in WW2. We aim to hold another event of this kind in the early autumn, hopefully focusing on audio trails.

- We sought to broaden opportunities for OHS members to get involved in the activities of the society. This includes involvement in conference organization. In addition, Mary Stewart and I wrote a plan for supporting and financially supporting OHS members to run events for oral history practitioners in their local areas. We presented our ideas at the Regional Networkers' meeting in November, where they met with some support. However, as yet no one has come forward to run an event, in spite of the offer of both payment and administrative support. If anyone is interested in, or knows someone that might be interested in, running an event, please do come forward. Excellent ongoing work in this area continues through organisations such as the East Midlands Oral History Association. We are looking to build on their example.
- The remodeled OHS website will include a section where projects can post information about their activities thanks to the hard work of Michelle Winslow. Anne Gulland and Fiona Cosson continue to do an excellent job of promoting project activities through social media.
- The 2015 conference organising committee were able to offer three bursaries covering delegates' travel, fees and accommodation, thanks to a grant from the Society for the Social History of Medicine.

In closing, I would like to propose prioritising the following over the next 12 months:

- Despite our recent efforts to reform the recruitment process, membership of the OHS Trustees committee particularly continues to lack diversity. I am currently working with fellow Trustees to address this.
- That more Trustees' Committee members participate in Diversity and Inclusion training.

I will be attending the annual conference and AGM and will be happy to address any questions raised here.

Sarah Lowry, Diversity and inclusion officer

Publicity

I've been in post for four years and have been focusing on improving the Society's social media presence by:

- Posting on Twitter where we now have nearly 3000 followers (increase of 1000 on last year)
- Updating the Facebook page
- Posting messages to the oral history group on LinkedIn
- Writing blogposts on the Oral History Noticeboard, often a write up of the OHS research seminars that take place twice-termly at the Institute of Historical Research

This year I have been improving our direct communications to members: i.e., the newsletter. The newsletter used to be an attachment to an email but now I do it via Mailchimp, which is much faster and enables me to link direct to webpages. I can also monitor how many people click onto the newsletter and which links are the most clicked on.

I'm sending out newsletters more frequently (used to be once every two to three months) but they are much shorter than before.

I have also been trying to include more images on the newsletters but this is difficult as we have very few images. It would be good to have a bank of images so I would like to put a call out to members about this.

I am always willing to advertise members' news so please email me: annecgulland@yahoo.co.uk if you have something you would like to publicise. I can't guarantee that I will include everything!

This year I will be focusing on posting more to the revamped OHS website and updating the blog regularly.

Anne Gulland, Publicity Officer

Website

www.ohs.org.uk

The Oral History Society website is a well-used resource, visited by oral historians in the UK and internationally. In the period July 2014 - May 2015, the site averaged 15,000 visits a month, with 27,700 page views. The most popular pages remain ethics, vacancies, advice, journal and conferences. During the same period the 'contact us' portal received 138 enquiries for advice on topics including archiving, editing, video/phone interviewing, equipment, transcribing, membership, insurance, publishing, museum display, training, conferences and the journal. Fifteen of these queries were international, from Australia (1), Canada (2), Czech Republic (1), Germany (1), Kuwait (1), New Zealand (1), Pakistan (1), Poland (1), Republic of Ireland (1), Taiwan (1), and USA (4). Queries are mostly answered by the OHS website coordinator. Questions involving specific expertise are forwarded to appropriate Trustees and Regional Networkers to respond to.

The website is currently undergoing reconstruction by IDZ Design. The new site's structure and look will retain existing features, however it will be more dynamic as nominated OHS officers will have greater ability to update and edit the site. Some new features include easier viewing on smartphones and tablets, ability to book training courses on line and a section to provide information on a range of special interests, for example, archivists, community groups, family historians, higher education, museums, psycho-social therapists and schools. Work on the website is nearing completion and the re-launch will be later this year. In the weeks after the site goes live there will be inevitable glitches, should members spot any issues, please alert us to them: m.winslow@sheffield.ac.uk

A reminder that submissions of news, events, vacancies and volunteer positions are always welcome. Details of how to submit information are on the corresponding pages of the website.

Michelle Winslow, Website Officer

Archives Sub-Committee

The sub-committee has met twice over the past year, expanding and refreshing its membership, and building a new partnership with the Archives and Records Association (ARA). It decided that it did not need to form a special interest group as several such forums already existed.

Elsbeth Millar, Andrew Flinn and Craig Fees co-led a session on behalf of the group at the ARA conference in Newcastle in August 2014 attended by forty people, indicating demand for the planned addition to the training programme (run by NLS and the Oral History Society) on 'archival management and oral history' aimed at archivists, curators and records managers. A programme for this is being finalised with the aim of running the first course in the autumn of 2015.

The sub-committee suggested that an 'archives clinic' be a permanent feature at the annual OHS pre-conference workshops and the first of these will take place at the Royal Holloway, University of London conference.

Members of the sub-committee also contributed to the British Library's successful £9.5m bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for 'Unlocking the UK's Sound Heritage', and to the UK Directory of Sound Collections, which will underpin the digitisation campaign due to get underway around the UK in 2017.

The sub-committee continues to monitor the presence of oral history in the UK archive sector, and the impact of local government spending cuts, providing expert advice and support as required. The closure of the North West Sound Archive early in 2015 was widely regretted but had happened before any campaign to prevent the closure could be mounted. Members have been in close contact with those organisations now in receipt of NWSA collections.

The full membership of the sub-committee is:

Martin Astell, Sound Archivist at Essex Record Office and Chair of ARA Section for Film Sound and Photography (also an OHS Regional Networker)

Jonathan Draper, Senior Archivist at the Norfolk Sound Archive, Committee Member of ARA Section for Film Sound and Photography (also an OHS Regional Networker)

Craig Fees, archivist and oral historian for the Planned Environment Therapy Trust Archive and Study Centre (also an OHS Trustee)

Andrew Flinn, Reader in Archival Studies and the Director of the Archives and Records programme in the Department of Information Studies at University College London

Bridget Hanley, Collections Manager at Suffolk Record Office

Cathlin Macaulay, Curator of the School of Scottish Studies Archives, Committee Member of ARA Section for Film Sound and Photography

Rob Perks, Lead Curator of Oral History, BL (also an OHS Trustee)

Mary Stewart, Curator of Oral History, BL (also an OHS Trustee)

Hilary Young, Digital Curator, Museum of London (also an OHS Trustee)

Rob Perks, Secretary and member of Archives Sub-Committee

Higher Education (HE) Group

The Society's HE Group was set up in response to a perceived lack of institutional support for the increasing use of oral history across a range of disciplines in teaching and research in Higher Education. The group now consists of eight Trustees (Angela Bartie, Joanna Bornat, Fiona Cosson, Jenny Harding, Graham Smith, Shelley Trower, Michelle Winslow and Hilary Young). Angela Bartie replaces Wendy Ugolini, a valued member of the HE group, who resigned from the OHS committee at the end of 2014 due to work pressures.

Members of the HE group (Joanna Bornat and Jenny Harding) presented a paper entitled 'How to Use Oral History Methods' at the 6th ESRC Research Methods Festival (8-10th July) at St Catherine's, Oxford. Following their paper, they were interviewed on camera by a representative from Sage Publications on the topic of oral history methods as part of a major new set of videos with methodologists for launch as a discrete Research Methods video collection in 2016. They were also invited to submit a paper for the ESRC Journal MethodsNews (published in Autumn 2014).

The Oral History HE group collaborated with the Institute for Historical Research in presenting a fourth Oral History Spring School (in April 2015) and fourth series of Thursday evening seminars. The Spring School was highly successful: with all places filled, lively participation and very positive feedback. Graham Smith, a leading contributor to previous Spring Schools, took a break this year and Paul Thompson joined us to provide a compelling introductory session. The programme was also organised and taught by Joanna Bornat, Jenny Harding, Joel Morley and Shelley Trower. The seminar series included an interesting range of papers and was generally well attended. In January 2015, Joel Morley joined Anne Gulland and Michelle Winslow in organising the seminars as Shelley Trower stepped down.

Members of the HE group have also been in discussion with other oral historians (Cilla Ross, Leroi Henry, Arthur McIvor and members of the HE Network) about a proposed Professional Doctorate in Oral Histories, Organisations and Livelihoods. On-going discussions are focused on the structure of the programme, modes of delivery, cross-institutional collaboration, resourcing the taught programme and thesis supervision, and the institutional home of the award.

Last year the HE group launched 'OHS HE Network' (initially secure email group open to UK HE researchers, lecturers, and postgraduate students) and collected information about participants' institution, discipline and interests. However, we are aware that the email group and blog are not particularly active and not facilitating dialogue and interaction in the ways we would like. Therefore, we plan to review the way the HE network functions in the coming months. Fiona Cosson will start the process by overhauling the email group.

Jenny Harding, Higher Education Group

Regional Network

Former Networkers:

In the last twelve months four Regional Networkers have left the network and we'd like to express our thanks to them for their contributions and wish them the best of luck in their different ventures:

- North East - Jo Bath
- South East - Janet Nixon
- South West - Chris Webb
- North West - Jason Hurley
- Northern Ireland - Linda Ballard

New Networkers:

In the last twelve months we have one new Regional Networker:

- In London we have a new networker, Martin Bisiker, founder of the educational charity Legasee, which specialises in recording oral history films with veterans.

Events:

In November 2014 the Regional Network held its annual event at the British Library in London, hosted by Rob Perks, Padmini Broomfield and Juliana Vandegrift. In the morning Networker discussions were led by Mary Stewart and Sarah Lowry with their proposed strategies to increase regional and local OHS activity as a result of feedback from OHS members. (Enquiries about this can be sent to Juliana Vandegrift.)

In the afternoon, Graham Smith hosted a discussion on the event theme of 'First World War and oral history'. Our guest speakers were Ben Copsy, Research Manager from the 'Objecting to War' project (Peace

Pledge Union) and Dr Edward Madigan, Lecturer in Public History and First World War Studies at Royal Holloway, University of London. Both speakers' presentations inspired lively debate.

As part of our ongoing commitment to review the strategic direction of the Regional Network in the OHS five year plan, we have been looking at ways to encourage more of our networkers to attend the annual network event. The meeting is a great opportunity to meet up with other networkers, many of whom are freelance, and share ideas, support each other in our fields of interest etc. Those who attend come away with positive comments about the benefits of meeting up with each other and the chance to discuss Regional Network items at the Friday evening business meeting. It's always a really great atmosphere and we've noticed that a core of networkers, about a dozen, attend regularly year after year. However, I have been a networker for eight years, since 2007, and there are still networkers that I have yet to meet. The Trustees would like to encourage more people to take part in the annual event and therefore it has been decided that networkers must attend at least one annual event in November every three years as part of their commitment to the Regional Network. The Society will reimburse travel and accommodation for those networkers not supported by an institution. This year's annual 2015 Regional Networker event is going to be held on the evening of 13th November and all day on 14th November in Worcester at The Hive (Worcestershire Archives & Archaeology Service). Details will be sent out later in July.

Ongoing review of administration/goals for the Regional Network:

As part of our continual strategy review for the network, one main point has arisen in the last twelve months: Formal signed agreements have become a way of life these days between organisations and their volunteers and therefore we have written one based on current guidelines for volunteer agreements. This sets out what sort of support volunteers can expect from the Oral History Society as well as the contribution they are making to it. We will be introducing this to all new networkers we take on from this point onwards. We'd also like to give our existing networkers who have been in their roles for several years to as recently as March the option of signing up to our new agreement. Please send enquiries to Juliana Vandegrift if you'd like to sign the new agreement.

Juliana Vandegrift, Regional Network Coordinator

Padmini Broomfield, Deputy Regional Network Coordinator

Journal

Following the 2014 REF, submissions to *Oral History* have increased. The journal has received some excellent manuscripts during 2014 and early 2015 from the UK and overseas. 2015 will see two strong issues. The journal's reviews section, edited by Anindya Raychaudhury, has been particularly strong as have the two news sections, with reports on oral history work in the UK and internationally, provided by Cynthia Brown and Siobhan Warrington, respectively.

Following the OHS annual conference in Manchester in July 2014 the editors were pleased to be able to publish two articles originally presented as papers. We hope very much that the 2015 conference will result in even more publications in *Oral History*, originating as paper presentations.

In mid-2014 Roger van Zwanenberg, retired managing director, now chair of Pluto Books, was invited to a meeting with the journal editors to discuss aspects of the journal's publishing and production process and costs. His proposals included cost reduction, making the journal more 'cutting edge' and providing a better link with the Oral History Society website, as well as making more of the journal's membership of JStor. The editors welcomed his proposals and, beginning in 2015, two actions have followed:

- from issue 43/1 2015 the journal size has been reduced to a standard printing size with an immediate cost saving of over £500
- from issue 43/2 2015 the section 'Future Meetings' will be published on the OHS website. This will mean that more meetings and conferences will be able to be included and updated more frequently than twice a year:

Roger van Zwanenberg's advice was much appreciated by the editorial group and he has continued his contact during the following months. Our discussions have helped to consolidate our commitment to retaining a position of independence, though we continue, periodically, to be approached by commercial publishers interested in taking on the journal.

The journal editors have contributed to discussion concerning the redesign of the OHS website being carried out by IDZ Design. Proposals include moving the news sections to the website at a future date and providing the journal with more features, including social media and audio links.

Late in 2014 the editorial group was sorry to hear that Ellie Millar, the journal's editorial assistant would be resigning. The editors had very much appreciated her support including her contribution to discussions in the years since 2008. Her post was advertised as part of a combined OHS Administrative Assistant appointment and Nicola Bengé duly joined in early 2015. Sadly, she has decided that the dual responsibility is more demanding than she had expected and the journal part of the post is currently being advertised.

The editors continue to work with Richard Fontenoy, the copy editor, in teams which include all members of the group. With his professional help the editorial guidelines have been developed with the aim of improving our own practice and simplifying the notes we provide for authors.

It was decided that the group would benefit if its range of expertise were to be widened with an increase in its membership. An advert was run on the OHS website with the result that seven high quality applicants expressed an interest. Four were interviewed and three invited to join the editorial group. The three are:

- Lindsey Dodd, lecturer in Modern European History, University of Huddersfield
- Sean O'Connell, professor of Modern British and Irish Social History, Queen's University Belfast
- Christine Wall, reader in Architecture and Deputy Director, Centre for Research into the Production of the Built Environment, University of Westminster.

They will attend their first meeting of the editorial group in September 2015.

Members of the International Editorial Advisory Group continue to provide the editors with helpful contributions to the editing process, co-ordinated by Heather Norris Nicholson. Following an offer from the Finnish Oral History Network, a proposal to collaborate with a themed issue with the working title, 'Oral

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history on the move: multiple sites and sources of memory', is currently under discussion. This themed issue is likely to be 44/2 2016.

Journal editors:

- Zibiah Alfred Loakthar
- Joanna Bornat
- Fiona Cosson
- Jenny Harding
- Haley Moyse Fenning
- Heather Norris Nicholson
- Rob Perks
- Anindya Raychaudhuri
- Sheena Rolph

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