

# **ORAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018**

### **Chairman's Report**

I was delighted to be elected Chair at the AGM in June 2017. My predecessor, Graham Smith, did much to build the standing of the OHS as a leading authority on oral history in the UK. He first joined the committee in 1983 and was elected as Chair in June 2004 in succession to Beth Thomas. He led the Society through a period of enormous change, not least the expansion of community oral history activity funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund and the resulting growth of the training programme, but also a shift in thinking about oral history in the higher education sector. Graham worked tirelessly as an advocate for change and as a humorous, energetic and enthusiastic Chair.

A review of the year underlines the importance of engaging both members and interested practitioners across the UK and of promoting diversity in oral history, in part through support for our Special Interest Groups (SIGs). Our continuing success in training and education provision does much to maintain and merit our national and international reputation and this is evident in a range of events, the OHS journal and members' publications and initiatives taken during 2017. Finally, we have been keeping a watchful eye on our financial position in part to inform our discussions of the new strategic plan to run from 2019-2021.

The annual Conference, 'Remembering Beliefs', held at Leeds Trinity in June 2017, provided an important forum for a consideration of some highly topical projects and research. There was a well-attended community workshop, an important themed set of papers from the LBGT SIG, some highly engaging plenary speakers and overall, to paraphrase some feedback, the OHS lived up to its warm and welcoming reputation! We look forward to our next annual conference in Belfast in June 2018 on 'Dangerous Oral Histories'.

Similarly, we should not underestimate the importance of our regional networkers in supporting activities and events in all corners of the UK. The Society was delighted to offer additional financial support for the annual regional network conference held in Glasgow on the theme of Oral History and Performance, which proved a productive and enjoyable event and again attracted some excellent feedback.

Special Interest Groups are another way of engaging diverse communities with a shared interest in oral history. A number of the SIGs have held meetings throughout the year, notably a highly successful conference run by the LBGTQ group in

conjunction with the London Metropolitan Archive. In addition, lively and informative meetings were organised by the Psycho-Social and Environment SIGs.

Education and research, training and advice are at core of OHS activities. The OHS continues to support the enormously significant project run by the British Library with funding from HLF, 'Unlocking Our Sound Heritage'. The Life Stories/OHS training courses attracted 846 participants to a total of 94 training courses run in 2017, with a new course in digital editing proving popular. Our partnership with the Archives and Records Association for a course aimed at the archive sector again booked up quickly and tailored versions were also held in Preston, Glasgow and Inverness. The Higher Education Group ran another well-attended spring school aimed at postgraduate students interested in using oral history in their research. The journal published two issues in 2017, including a special issue on Cuba. In keeping with its tradition, the journal continues to showcase a wide range of articles on oral history practice and theory as well as highly engaging summaries of community-based and international projects.

We were sorry to lose both Sarah Lowry and Anne Gulland, who stepped down as trustees in 2017. I would like to thank them both for their respective contributions over a number of years and at the same time welcome a new member to the Board, Cai Parry-Jones, who is our new Publicity Officer.

As the accounts indicate, the OHS made a loss of £6k for the year. With reserves of around £90k, this is not cause for great alarm. However, in the light of this shortfall, the organisation agreed to bring forward our strategic review weekend, originally planned for September 2018 to March. This will allow us to review our spending priorities and if we wish to maintain and expand our activities we will be looking to attract new sources of income. The result of our deliberations will be discussed at the AGM in June 2018.

Finally, I would like to thank all those responsible in very different ways for the activities above as well as those whose contributions will be more fully documented in the more detailed reports which follow. I would also like to thank the British Library for their continuing hospitality, to our members for their continued loyalty, which is invaluable. To Eleanor Lowe, we extend our congratulations on the birth of Nicholas and our thanks for her continued administrative support, also to Liz Ison, our Journal Editorial Assistant, and Polly Owen, our Conference Administrator, and finally to fellow officers and trustees for their enormous efforts, all of them undertaken willingly and on a voluntary basis, on behalf of the organisation.

**John Gabriel**

**Chair, Oral History Society**

## Regional Network Report

The OHS Regional Network has had another busy year, with networkers involved in several initiatives across the country. We had a very successful annual network meeting in Glasgow in October 2017 attended by 24 networkers from across the country. At the recent Strategy Review weekend trustees recognised the valuable work done by networkers who are all volunteers and offer their time to provide advice and guidance for people embarking on oral history projects.

**Current networkers:** There has been no change in the list of regional networkers over the past year. We are currently fairly well represented in most regions of the country. The current group of networkers offer a wide range of expertise in oral history work in different sectors – museums, archives, community and schools projects, academic institutions, media, reminiscence, performance among others. The network facilitates sharing of this expertise so that if a networker is unable to answer a public inquiry themselves, they most certainly know someone who can help. List of networkers at: [www.ohs.org.uk/about/regional-networkers/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/about/regional-networkers/)

The vast scope and range of oral history activity taking place in the country is best seen in the annual regional network reports. The **Regional Network Annual Report 2017** is now published online along with reports from previous years. We encourage all networkers to submit updates from their regions.

The **Annual Network Event** was held in October 2017 at the Scottish Oral History Centre (SOHC) in Glasgow. The two-day programme included the business meeting a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshop, and a day of presentations on the theme of *Oral History and Performance*. Twenty-four regional networkers from around the UK were joined by the new Chair, John Gabriel and treasure Nick Chalmers.

At the business meeting networkers shared news about their recent activities such as the schools workshop, the initiative to present audio and video on the OHS website, discussions about freelance pay rates and issues relating to Heritage Lottery Funded community projects.

The CPD workshop is intended to explore and discuss a range of topics that networkers encounter or are often asked to advise on in the course of their work in their regions. This year three speakers raised important issues and sparked off discussions about developments in technology and collaborative working - Sarah Lowry on using smart phones and iPads for recording oral history interviews, David Walker on developing strategies for managing collaborative projects between his university and a working industry, and Mary Ingoldby on the challenges and impact of gathering and disseminating oral testimony in busy NHS institutions.

The Saturday programme focused on how oral history in Scotland has traditionally inspired and produced art forms of song, music and performing arts. Presentations covered a range of projects in which oral history collections inspired and were

interpreted through creative means: inspiring fiction, theatre and performance and touring exhibitions.

The annual network event 2018 will be held at Newcastle University, co-hosted by Professor of Oral History and former chair of the Oral History Society, Graham Smith, and Janette Hilton, Project Director, Living History North East. Date is confirmed as Friday 26th and Saturday 27th October 2018.

More information and annual reports: <http://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/>

**Juliana Vandegrift/Padmini Broomfield**

## ***Oral History* Journal Report**

We want to start our report this year by paying tribute to and thanking Sheena Rolph who has retired from the editing role on *Oral History* she had held since 2001. Sheena has a quietly perceptive, often humorous, but also extremely well-informed approach to editing. We are already missing her contributions, at meetings and by email.

Since our last report, a year ago, the editorial group, with the excellent support of editorial administrator Liz Ison, has continued to receive and discuss submissions and move to publication. As ever we approach editing in a way which we hope is helpful to all who send us their writing, whether or not it is eventually published.

Following from the Cuban special issue, we now have two more special issues in preparation. Working jointly with editors who have commissioned collections in relation to specific themes, in Spring 2019 we will be publishing an issue on Parenting assembled by Australian oral historians. This will be followed in 2020 by a special issue on LGBTQ+ themes: 'LGBTQ+ lives: history, place and belonging'. Meanwhile, we continue to receive submissions and also to invite participants in the OHS annual conferences to write up their papers for consideration.

In addition to these special issues and a steady flow of articles, plans to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the journal are progressing. Currently we are discussing the possibility of an online special issue with reflections on iconic articles published in past issues of *Oral History* and written by invited contributors. Accompanied by audio clips from the Oral History archive, we feel that this online venture will be a celebration as well as engaging publicity for the journal.

Liz Ison has improved our online presence by uploading onto J-Stor all the abstracts attached to *Oral History* articles, dating back to 1999 when the journal first included abstracts. In these and other ways we seek to position the journal more obviously as a destination for writers and researchers interested in sharing their work with oral history audiences.

At the end of 2017, while editors were preparing number 46/1 for publication we found that our printers, Russell Press, had been very suddenly closed by their owners the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. We had had a very good working relationship with the Russell Press. While commiserating with the printers who lost their jobs just before Xmas we were forced to find a new printer at short notice. Fortunately, with the help of Smith+Bell, our designers, we found Latimer Trend & Company of Plymouth and so far have been satisfied with their work.

Though we've lost one editor, we're delighted to welcome Kate Melvin who will be reviving the journal's 'Learning' section. We look forward to a flow of lively and insightful articles now that she has joined the editorial group.

And, yet again, we look forward to another year of interesting and stimulating publishing activity.

### **Joanna Bornat/Liz Ison**

Editorial Team: Zibiah Alfred Loakthar, Joanna Bornat, Fiona Cosson, Lindsey Dodd, Jenny Harding, Heather Norris Nicholson, Sean O'Connell, Rob Perks, Anindya Raychaudhuri, Christine Wall

## **Website Report**

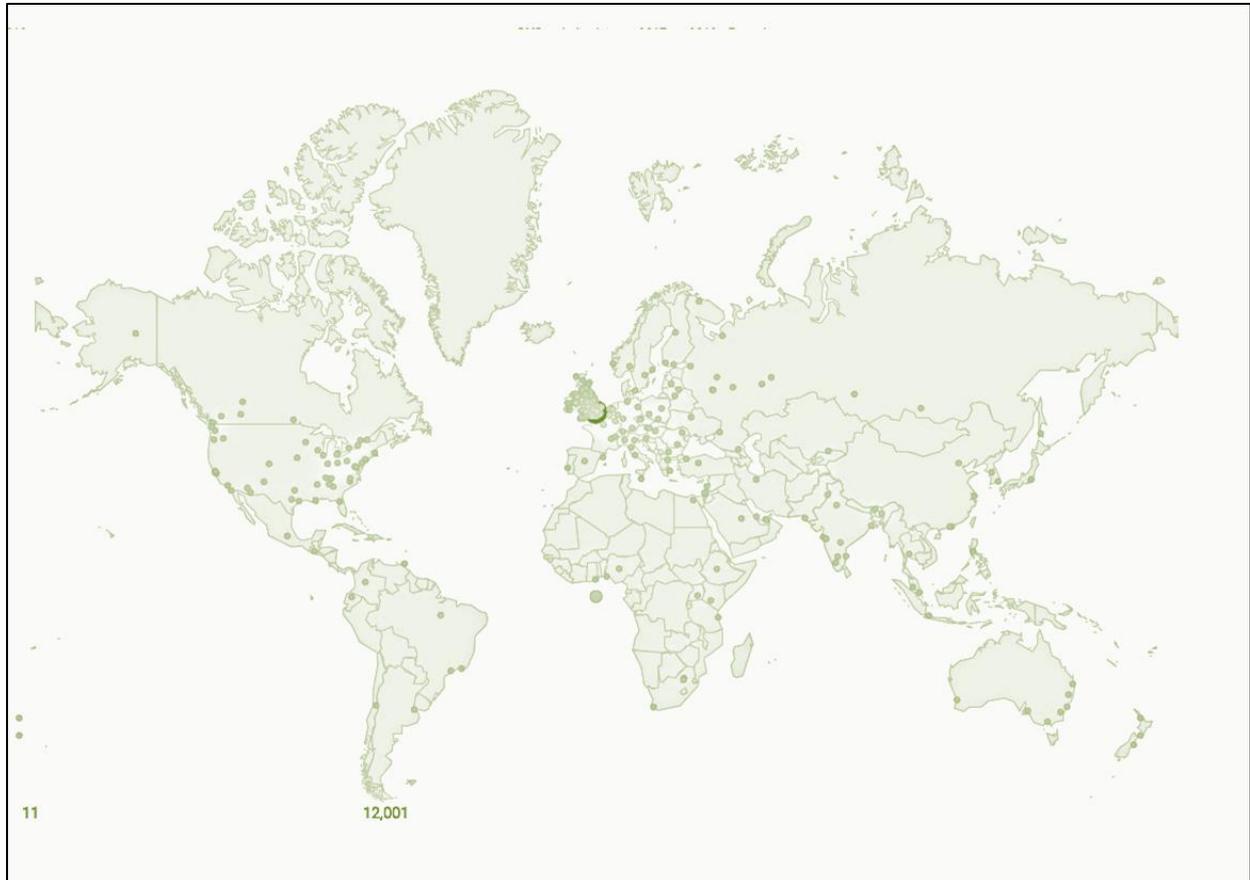
Schools: A new addition to the website in 2018 is a guide to oral history for schools, written by Helen Lloyd and Julia Letts. The pages aim to support development and delivery of oral history in schools and includes advice on getting started, equipment, costs and funding, training, ethics and copyright. See: <http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/how-to-do-oral-history/>

Journal pages: Liz Ison has now finished uploading abstracts and titles of back issues to the journal search page. This proved a huge task but the result is a searchable directory of *Oral History* from the most recent publication back to the first issue in 1972, which featured an article by George Ewart Evans. See: <http://www.ohs.org.uk/journal/journal-search/>

Mobile device compatibility: To address a longstanding issue with mobile device compatibility, a Masters level student from the School of Computing and Digital Media at London Metropolitan University is working with the OHS on improvements.

Audio Visual materials: Julian Simpson is working on audio content for the website. Plans are being considered to produce a small number of professional quality video interviews with oral historians. These videos could include: member projects, raising awareness of themes and promotional content for conferences etc.

Usage stats: The most popular pages continue to be: vacancies, training, conferences, journal and ethical and legal. Stats on users tell us that 59.3% of visitors to the website do so via a Google search. 24.7% visit the site directly and the remainder are redirected from a variety of sources including social media. The website has a global reach, as illustrated below by Google analytics tracking of activity April 2017-May 2018:



Contact Us page: During the period May 17- April 18, 102 people have contacted the OHS for advice via the general enquiry page: <http://www.ohs.org.uk/contact/> Enquiries are mostly from the UK, with two from the USA and one each from Belgium, UAE, Australia, India and Italy. Questions are answered by a Society Trustee or Regional Networker.

OHS members are encouraged to contribute news and event information to the website, as well as thoughts and ideas about content. Please contact Michelle Winslow: [m.winslow@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:m.winslow@sheffield.ac.uk)

**The Oral History Society website is coordinated and managed by Michelle Winslow and Eleanor Lowe.**

## **Training Report**

The Oral History Society/British Library training team taught 94 courses to 846 attendees in 2017 - a record for the group. These comprised 17 'Introduction to oral history' courses, 70 tailored courses, 2 'Transcript to Script', 1 'Lives in Focus' courses, 1 'Introduction to Digital Editing' course and 1 'Developing your oral history skills' course. The 'Archival management of oral history collections' - in conjunction with the Archives and Records Association (ARA), has continued to meet a clear need in the archival community - with 2 courses in 2017. 'Introduction' courses took place in London, Sheffield and Worcester. Roger Kitchen ran two of the re-vamped 'Introduction to Digital Editing' courses (one tailored) – with very favourable feedback.

Scores on the feedback forms for introductory and tailored courses remained typically high, with a combined average approval rating of 4.8 out of 5. Doctoral research students and community history projects were key constituent groups for the courses, the latter generally requesting tailored training. Attendees came from across the UK - with a majority in London, North West and Yorkshire. Continuing the pattern from previous years, there was little attendance from areas which had other strong training providers - such as Scotland, North East and East Midlands.

We continued to provide training for the National Trust, funded by the Laurie Magnus Training Bursary scheme, running 7 courses in 2017. Feedback on the content and delivery of the courses has been excellent. Following an evaluation of the scheme in 2018 the scheduling and follow up for these courses will be tweaked to meet the needs of projects within the National Trust.

The team would like to thank Charlie Morgan who has administered the training programme with aplomb since he started as NLS Archive and Administrative Assistant in June 2017, and Eleanor Lowe his predecessor in this role.

### **Mary Stewart with Charlie Morgan**

#### ***On behalf of the OHS/British Library Training Liaison Committee:***

Cynthia Brown, Anna Bryson, Rib Davis, Craig Fees, Roger Kitchen, Julia Letts, Ros Livshin, Sarah Lowry, Rob Perks, Kate Richardson, Graham Smith, Mary Stewart, Beth Thomas and Michelle Winslow

## **Higher Education Group Report**

The OHS Higher Education 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.

In a recent working paper (March 2016), the group prioritised activities designed to: a) meet the educational needs of postgraduates; b) ensure that oral history is taught to the highest standard and in a sustainable way; and c) enhance the status of oral history in HEIs.

Following a symposium on teaching oral history in higher education held in December 2016 (which focused on discussing the needs of students and teachers at undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD levels) and feedback from PhD students at OHS conferences, we circulated a questionnaire to collect information about doctoral students' experience of supervision.

So far, twelve PhD students at different stages in their doctoral research have completed the questionnaire. Two thirds of respondents had some experience of oral history prior to embarking on their doctoral research. Four had none. In three cases, neither student nor supervisor had previous experience of using oral history in research. Seven respondents had attended some training (mostly the OHS basic training). Six said that they would like more training. The areas in which respondents said they would like more training include: analysing oral history, ethics, interviewing, archiving, transcription, contextualisation and museum display.

In 2017, the OHS was invited to nominate academics for membership for the REF2021 panels. The HE group made four nominations and Lynn Abrams was selected for UoA 28 (History).

The HE group collaborated with the Institute for Historical Research in presenting a seventh Oral History Spring School (April 2018) and seventh series of Thursday evening seminars. The Spring School was highly successful: with all places filled, lively participation and very positive feedback. The programme was also organised and taught by Joanna Bornat, Jenny Harding, Joel Morley and Paul Thompson. The seminar series, organised by Anne Gulland, Jenny Harding and Joel Morley, included an interesting range of papers and was generally well attended. We are now thinking ahead to developing programmes for a 2019 Spring School and 2018/19 seminar series.

### **The HE Group:**

Angela Bartie (University of Edinburgh)

Joanna Bornat (The Open University)

Fiona Cosson (Bournemouth University)

Jenny Harding (London Metropolitan University)

Graham Smith (Newcastle University)

Amy Tooth-Murphy (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Shelley Trower (University of Roehampton)

Michelle Winslow (University of Sheffield)

## **Schools Group**

A Schools Group seminar was held in September 2017 at the British Library and was attended by both oral historians and teachers and educators, all of whom were highly experienced in running oral history projects with young people. The day was extremely valuable in providing an opportunity for the exchanging of ideas and experiences. On the basis of the discussions held, a set of website resources has now been developed to encourage and support educators who are hoping to run projects with young people. An on-line group of interested parties now exists which will be expanded and which serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas and exploration of new thought, pushing the boundaries of the concept of 'oral history in schools'. Over the next year, the group will fundraise for a number of projects such as supporting a bursary scheme for teachers to attend an oral history training, the development of an accredited 'Heritage award' in schools and/or developing further resource materials for teachers. The OHS will also be pushing to work more closely with the HLF to develop a 'Schools' oral history strand in their grants programme as well as possibly developing an oral history training component with the Institute of Education within the PGCE.

**Kate Melvin**

## **Publicity Report**

Since starting the role of publicity officer in January 2018, my focus has been on improving the way the OHS interacts with followers on Social Media, particularly Twitter and Facebook (the former especially).

The approach I've adopted on Twitter has been to share and promote the work and activities of both the society and Oral Historians/ Oral History Projects across the UK and also abroad. Examples include retweeting the work of HLF community projects, promoting our forthcoming conference, seminars, training, the membership consultation questionnaire, as well as benefits of OHS membership. Tweets driven by us from the OHS account are typically sent more than once for a set period of time to ensure that they reach as many people as possible. I update the OHS account's Twitter banner on a regular basis, to reflect current OHS activity, and I have encouraged OHS Trustees who use Twitter for professional reasons to feature the @OralHistorySoc handle in their Twitter Bios to help promote the Society.

Monday appears to be the most popular day to tweet by far. This makes sense as it's the start of the working week and people are arguably more engaged after the weekend. 'Impressions' (i.e. the total number of times a tweet has been seen on a Twitter account's timeline) tend to be between 1,000-4,000 on Mondays in comparison to the 100s on other days. I suggest that the OHS ensures that it tweets important events and news on Mondays.

Number of followers we have on Twitter has risen from approximately 4,800 in January to 5,232 at the end of April, meaning that we are roughly gaining 100 new followers per month. Based on this growth, we could potentially be looking at 1,000 new followers by the end of the year. How this will translate in terms of new members is difficult to ascertain, but would be interesting to see if there is a correlation.

Facebook activity remains stable and the OHS currently has 2,598 people following its Facebook page.

I have also been focusing on how the Society directly communicates and updates members on Oral History-related news and events via the newsletter. The newsletter continues to be sent to subscribers via MailChimp and I have adopted a policy of sending out a newsletter at least once a month. We have occasionally sent out additional newsletters to report on last minute event cancellations and/or updates. The newsletter has been streamlined for consistency (focusing particularly on Oral History-related news in the UK, OHS-related seminars, OHS training, OHS Journal and the OHS conference). I have been communicating with OHS Trustees and Committee Members to encourage them to send me any news they would like me to share via the newsletter. The newsletter is currently sent to 1356 different email addresses, of which 513 belong to OHS members.

**Cai Parry-Jones**

## **Membership Report**

It is becoming clear that our membership is declining, albeit slowly. This does not, however, reflect a decline either in interest in the oral history society or in its activities. In fact, the reverse is true. Over the past year, there has been an increasing interest in the Special Interest Groups, a number of which are growing apace. Our loyal subscribers also remain and the benefits offered still attract new members particularly those who are joining for support and information while they are carrying out a particular project. It is nonetheless not a time to be complacent and at the recent OHS strategy weekend various actions were discussed. Over the coming months, we will be launching a national publicity campaign, expanding the e-newsletter, work more closely with HLF and the MA as well exploring new possible benefits. We will also be looking at new ways to increase participation in the society's activities both nationally and at a local level.

**Kate Melvin**

## **SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS:**

### **Environment and climate change SIG**

The Special Interest Group on Environment and Climate Change had its annual meeting on 12 October 2018, attended by eight members. This meeting was followed by a well-attended IHR seminar given by the group's secretary, Rebecca Pearce, 'Building resilience through shuttle work: the positive contribution oral testimony can make to climate risk assessments'.

Rebecca Pearce volunteered to continue as Secretary. Among various discussions, the main plan taken forward was a panel for the conference in Belfast. A panel was proposed from which one paper was accepted in full; the others were given 5 minute slots.

However, it has since been found that quite a few group members are not members of the OHS, so the Secretary is following that up. The next meeting will be at the Belfast conference.

Padmini also set up a Twitter account which is quite active and has started to grow (currently 77 followers).

### **Shelley Trower and Padmini Broomfield**

### **Migration SIG**

As the new (probably temporary) Trustee liaison, I talked with the Migration SIG organiser, Paul Dudman, in February. He had organised a panel proposal for the conference but as 5 minute slots were given they have decided against participating this year. The proposers did not feel able to present their work adequately in this allotted time. Paul was thinking of arranging another meeting in Refugee Week in June but that proved a busy time for people, so activities are currently postponed.

### **Shelley Trower**

### **LGBTQ SIG**

The Oral History Society Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Special Interest Group had a very busy year in 2017, building upon the energy and interest which had been displayed since their inception in October 2016. The group was formed to bring together members of the Oral History Society who are working with LGBTQ participants, or communities, and who are interested in the various issues and practice involved in this work.

On September 15<sup>th</sup> 2017, the group became much more visible to the wider OHS membership by offering a panel around the conference's themes of belief and non-belief. The panel included four papers which considered religion and its place in LGBTQ lives. Subsequently, most of the participants at the conference dinner that night found themselves leaving with one of the group's new promotional postcards!

Then, in conjunction with the London Metropolitan Archives, the SIG was given the opportunity to programme the 15th annual LGBTQ History and Archives conference, which took place on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> December. Talking Back! was designed to explore the powerful histories expressed through oral recordings. Also ways of collecting and sharing heritage, in community settings, while examining how marginalised histories can be brought into sharp focus through effective oral history practice.

In the last 12 months, membership has more than doubled to twenty-five active members and, looking forward to for 2018 (and beyond), the group are currently collating articles for a proposed LGBT+ special edition of the OHS journal, exploring related regional links and networks and planning a skills sharing workshop to take place later in the year.

The group welcomes enquiries and new members and can be contacted via Clare Summerskill ([claresummerskill@gmail.com](mailto:claresummerskill@gmail.com)) or Alan Butler ([alan.butler@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:alan.butler@plymouth.ac.uk)) and Amy Tooth Murphy continues in her role as OHS Trustee Liaison for the LGBTQ SIG.

**Amy Tooth Murphy**