



**Oral History Society  
Regional Network**

**Annual Report  
2020**

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## OHS Regional Network News

Welcome to the Oral History Society (OHS) **Regional Network Report 2020**. The report also contains a brief update on activities of the OHS committee. Thank you, as always, to all our networkers who have sent in news of all the oral history activity taking place in their regions. All Network Annual Reports are published on the Oral History Society [website](#).

**The OHS Regional Network** currently consists of 42 networkers covering 13 geographical regions across the UK. As experienced practitioners working in diverse fields – museums, libraries, archives, academic institutions, community organisations, and freelance – they provide a point of contact for anyone seeking advice on oral history. The network facilitates sharing of this expertise so that if a networker is unable to answer a public enquiry themselves, they most certainly know someone who can help.

List of networkers on the [OHS website](#).

**Welcomes and Goodbyes:** In the last twelve months there have been some resignations from the regional network from longstanding networkers who have either retired or moved on to new roles in their careers. Goodbye and thank you to John Tanner, Verusca Calabria, Helen Lloyd, Kayleigh Luscombe and Sarah-Joy Maddeaux. (We are recruiting for these areas once again and the adverts will appear in our social media channels and website.)

**Annual Report 2020:** This edition is a compilation of reports sent in by networkers of oral history activity in their regions. By all accounts it's been a difficult twelve months as Covid has imposed new ways of practising oral history interviews. Covid has put pressure on everyone in other ways and news from some regions has quietened.

Some networkers have been recording interviews in the new way and talk about the projects which you might find useful. The Oral History Society has published [Advice on Remote interviewing during Covid-19](#) along with a [YouTube channel](#) which has tutorials on remote interviewing and technologies to help anyone who needs to explore this method.

We would like to thank all Regional Networkers who volunteer to act as a point of contact for anyone seeking information about oral history and respond to inquiries and share their knowledge, expertise and passion for oral history.

Juliana Vandegrift and Padmini Broomfield

**Regional Network Coordinator & Deputy Coordinator  
January 2021**

## **Useful Links:**

- Regional Network Reports: [www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/)
- List of Networkers: [www.ohs.org.uk/about/regional-networkers/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/about/regional-networkers/)
- Remote oral history interviewing during COVID-19: [www.ohs.org.uk/advice/covid-19/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/covid-19/)
- YouTube videos on remote interviewing: [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL95K8m2vHNAUcze9Gc91FMXgp4oz4Z2BD](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL95K8m2vHNAUcze9Gc91FMXgp4oz4Z2BD)
- Guidance on budgeting for oral history contractors: [www.ohs.org.uk/advice/guidance-on-budgeting-for-oral-history-contractors/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/guidance-on-budgeting-for-oral-history-contractors/)
- Data protection for oral history: [www.ohs.org.uk/advice/data-protection/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/data-protection/)
- Training – GDPR: [www.ohs.org.uk/training/introduction-to-the-new-data-protection-legislation-gdpr-for-oral-historians/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/training/introduction-to-the-new-data-protection-legislation-gdpr-for-oral-historians/)
- Oral History for schools and youth groups: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/how-to-do-oral-history/>
- Webpage links to individual network regions on page 27 of this report

## **OHS Virtual Network Group**

### **UPDATE:**

The Oral History Society Virtual Network acts as a forum for networkers and trustees to benefit from the shared expertise and experience represented in the group. Members can share information, post inquiries or initiate discussions on oral history practice and research.

### **Move to new list provider: Groups.io**

As of November 2019, we have moved the OHS Virtual Network to a new host provider called Groups.io. All of our content currently on Yahoo Groups will be copied to the new service and the list of members will automatically be transferred to [oral-history-network@groups.io](mailto:oral-history-network@groups.io).

**\*You won't have to do anything to continue receiving and sending emails via the virtual networks.\***

Networkers are being contacted to inform them of the changes and address any concerns they may have on the transfer.

More information on Groups.io GDPR compliance and privacy policy can be found at: <https://groups.io/static/compliance> .

## Oral History Society News

The OHS Trustees meet four times a year at the British Library. Trustees with specific responsibilities on various working groups and sub-committees occasionally meet between meetings or communicate through conference calls.

### **OHS Strategic Action Plan 2019 – 2021: an update**

Trustees have been busy working on the organisational priorities identified during the Strategy Review in 2018. Various working groups have addressed elements of the Action Plan, including carrying out a Governance Review, developing a Membership Strategy and a Data Policy.

As part of the Communications Strategy a new website is being developed and will be launched in Spring 2021. Trustees leading on these presented an update at Network Annual Event and sought feedback and comments from networkers. (See Network Event report above).

### **SIGs (Special Interest Groups)**

Craig Fees has been appointed SIG Co-ordinator and has been supporting the SIGs in their activities and cross-SIG working.

- **LGBTQ SIG:** has grown its membership to over one hundred oral historians and organised several events and seminars. The LGBTQ SIG partnered with the Creative SIG in a joint event to launch Dr Clare Summerskill's latest publication, 'Creating Verbatim Theatre from Oral Histories'.
- **Migration SIG:** was relaunched at a roundtable event on narratives of migration held at the University of East London Archives.
- **Environment and Climate Change SIG:** has relaunched and in the past year held an AGM, a public event and a training workshop. A new online webinar series launches in January 2021.
- **Psycho-Social Therapies & Care Environments SIG:** no recent activity
- **Creative Oral Histories** - has attracted several new members, held online meetings and events and have initiated a mapping exercise to create a database of projects.

**Share news** of events, activities, projects with the OHS membership via:

- **E-newsletters:** Publicity Officer, Cai Parry-Jones, is always interested in items for the e-newsletters. Contact Cai: [caiparryjones@rhs.org.uk](mailto:caiparryjones@rhs.org.uk)
- **Current British Work**, OH Journal: Send news items to Cynthia Brown [cb@cydfx.net](mailto:cb@cydfx.net)

## Network Annual Event 2020

### **Regional Network Annual Event, 16 – 17 October 2020**

In autumn each year, Regional Networkers from across the UK get together for a programme of business meeting, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshop and public seminar focusing on a theme relevant to oral history.

This year's event on the theme "**Oral history in the Covid-19 era**" was held online via Zoom video conferencing in response to the restrictions on group meetings caused by the ongoing pandemic. The event was modified with a shorter business meeting on Friday evening and a half-day CPD workshop on Saturday morning. 19 networkers attended some or all of the programme.

Full programme on page 25 of this report.

At the Friday **Business meeting** trustees from the Governance and the Digital Strategy groups presented the progress of their ongoing work and invited responses and suggestions from networkers.

Mary Stewart gave an overview of how the digital strategy was working towards improving the Society's communications with its members and the general public. Craig Fees' on-screen demonstration of Groups.io highlighted its many features and benefits as a forum for discussions. Responding to networkers' requests for a simple 'How to' guide, Craig offered to produce a video and a Zoom workshop. Beth Thomas's redesigned website received very positive comments and offers to contribute content, images, blog posts and audio. Mary discussed the OHS Data Management and Privacy Policy in relation to the data collected by networkers in the course of handling public inquiries. As SIG Co-ordinator, Craig gave updates on the activities of the 5 SIGs.

From the discussions that followed it was clear that networkers appreciated the update and having the opportunity to contribute feedback and suggestions. Working group members were also able to draw on the collective expertise and experience of networkers from around the country and different sectors. John Gabriel thanked Craig, Mary and Beth for their contributions and the networkers in supporting and promoting the OHS.

### **CPD workshop: Interviewing in the Covid era**

The half-day workshop focussed on sharing and discussing the methodological, technical and ethical issues around recording oral history interviews under the current circumstances. Three speakers spoke about their experiences of interviewing using different techniques, the challenges they faced and their reflections on whether they would advise or continue to use these.

- Alison Chand (Scotland networker) talked about using the Olympus TP8 in-ear microphone for her telephone interviews for the Rainbows in the Windows project, observing that some interviewees confessed feeling more comfortable and willing to share personal stories over the phone than they would have done in person.
- Steve Kelly (Northwest networker) described using Zoom video conferencing platform for his Granadaland interviews. While he acknowledged the loss of some audio quality, he found interviews easier to arrange with working interviewees more easily available and flexible, while some retired and shielding interviewees welcomed the opportunity to talk to and share their experiences when feeling isolated. It also enabled him to interview those living abroad.
- Andy Clark (Researcher at Newcastle Oral History Unit), described what he called the 'hygiene theatre' of in-person interviewing. Since the elaborate process included disinfecting all equipment, surfaces before and after, social distancing etc, he conducted the interview in his own home so that the onus of following the strict guidelines was down to him rather than the interviewee.

**Online format:** For the first online event we had organised, we were very pleased with how it turned out. It was easier to organise, attracted more attendees, saved everyone a lot of time travelling and the OHS budget, and we did our bit to reduce our carbon footprint!

We invited feedback from participants and it was overwhelmingly positive. Breakout rooms were popular as they offered more opportunity for discussions in small groups, the chat board was hectic as people added comments or provided relevant information, some stayed back for post-session networking. Some were able to attend only because it was online and they could pop in and out to fit in around family commitments. There was also an interest in holding regular or ad hoc short online meetings during the year for mutual support/advice and sharing of experiences. We will be looking into this.

We will be compiling our experience and the feedback (from the network event and other conferences we have attended) for Polly who is exploring the potential for online sessions for next year's conference.

## Reports from the Regions

### EAST MIDLANDS

#### **Leicestershire & Rutland (Cynthia Brown & Colin Hyde, Helen Foster)**

New oral history work in Leicestershire and Rutland has been curtailed due to the pandemic, but oral history was a key element of '**Poshak Puralekh**', a project run by the Centre for Indian Classical Dance in Leicester to celebrate the rich history of Indian dance and costume. The Centre was established in Leicester in 1981 with a view to promoting knowledge, understanding and appreciation of Indian dance and culture, and has trained hundreds of students in dance over the years. The Centre holds an archive of about 300 costumes, most of them handmade from intricate Indian silk. The '**Poshak Puralekh**' collection has now been deposited in the East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA).

**Leicester's De Montfort Hall** has been calling for written and spoken memories of the city's foremost concert venue during the corona virus lockdown: 'Our doors may be closed and the stage lights dark but we are shining a light on the past with memories of happier times. Now is the time to celebrate our history and take a look back at your best-ever events, concerts and artists. What are your favourite memories? Hanging around the stage door waiting to see your teen crush? Seeing David Bowie in the seventies? Kasabian when they were just starting out? Your first panto? Or chilling in our gardens at Summer Sundae watching Amy Winehouse?' Some of the stories and highlights of the Hall's archives have been shared on its Twitter, Instagram and Facebook pages.

**The Midlands Hub at the University of Leicester** continues to preserve a wide range of oral history collections from across the Midlands. Collections currently being worked on include: from Birmingham Library, Carl Chinn's oral history collection; a mix of sound and interviews from Banner Theatre; soundtracks from Phillip Donnellan's 'Six Men' film series; from Coventry Archives, a collection of car workers' memories and a collection called 'Attitudes to Authority'; Derbyshire Museum Service Oral History Archive; oral histories of Redditch from Forge Needle Museum; Nottingham County Council Oral History Project; oral histories of Shropshire generally and Telford in particular from Shropshire Archives; memories of World War II from Worcestershire Archives. As well as these, we have recently taken in collections from Derby Local Studies and Family History Library, Staffordshire Archives, and Walsall Leather Museum.

A wealth of material has come into the archive from the **Textile Tales** project, led by Nottingham Trent University in partnership with a number of regional museums. This project has created over fifty interviews with people involved in

the East Midlands textiles industry during its period of decline from 1980 to 2005.

**EMOHA's Silent Archive project**, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, continues to find Covid-compliant ways of collecting oral testimonies about menopause from women across the region. Material is coming to us in a range of recorded spoken forms; interviews, facilitated conversations and personal diaries. Creative writing workshops, inspired by oral histories, are running in parallel with the project, delivered in partnership with Writing East Midlands.

EMOHA continues to support oral history work across the East Midlands. In Lincolnshire, South Holland Heritage are looking to develop work around the Spalding Flower Parade. Leicestershire Heritage and Libraries Participation Team are planning to record people's stories of Loughborough Market and Fair to mark 800 years since it was granted a charter by Henry III.

The Friends of Bennerley Viaduct are also planning some oral history work to support a wider project set up to celebrate this Grade 2\* listed viaduct, the longest wrought iron viaduct in the country, spanning the River Erewash between Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

In Nottinghamshire, Mansfield Townscape Heritage are running a community participation programme to gather oral histories as part of a five-year project to refurbish historic properties in the town.

## LONDON

### London (Sarah Gudgin)

For many, the beginning of any year holds a sense of expectation and anticipation and the start of 2020 seemed no different to any other. I was looking forward to working on a number of heritage projects and carrying out oral history interviews. I had also joined the team of OHS trainers at the British Library and I was preparing to run OHS/BL oral history training sessions.

However, when COVID-19 hit us, all these activities were suddenly disrupted or ceased, meaning all of my work and income ground to a complete halt, including group reminiscence work with people with dementia.

Fortunately after many months in lockdown, **Islington's Pride**, one of the projects which I was due to work on got back in touch again. The project had obtained an extension from National Lottery Heritage Fund which meant that I was able to resume some interviewing work when the restrictions began to ease in August. This project is creating an archive focusing on the London Borough of Islington's LGBT+ heritage. With much of this heritage on the brink of being lost,

the project has used education, outreach, preservation and exploration to preserve Islington's LGBT+ history. For the oral history element of the project, I am recording the memories of 20 LGBTQ+ people who have lived and worked in the local area, talking about continuity and change in their lives and everyday experiences.

Since starting back, some of these interviews have been done via remote recording and for a short period, others were carried out face to face as socially distanced interviews. However if you had said to me at the beginning of 2020, that I'd be conducting interviews wearing a face mask and a full Perspex visor, carrying out risk assessments, using hand sanitiser, keeping the windows wide open and disinfecting equipment after use, I would probably have laughed at you!

When work restarted, it was immensely satisfying to step outside of my home bubble once more, to connect with new people, virtually and in person and to engage with their remarkable and inspiring stories. Many interviewees reflected on past struggles to gain LGBT+ rights, as well as the recent struggles of the Black Lives Matter protests. Some drew parallels between the horrors of the AIDs pandemic and its devastating effects on the community with the awful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the deaths that this has caused. These poignant interviews have made me more conscious of the importance of our work, especially in such uncertain times and to appreciate what a rare privilege it is to be able to sit with someone and to record their life story, something I never tire of. So far, I have completed 10 oral histories and will be recording another 10 for the project. These will be deposited, along with other materials which have been collected, as the Islington's Pride Special Collection at Islington Local Heritage Centre. Extracts from the interviews will be used as part of a digital landscape to create an interactive map using QR codes, which will detail LGBTQ+ heritage in the Borough of Islington.

In these uncertain times, we have all had to learn to adapt the ways that we work and find alternative ways to meet, learning to navigate new platforms such as Zoom and Teams and to find new ways to work. Whilst some oral history work has still not been able to resume, others projects are finding ways to carry on. I was recently approached by the South London Gallery to complete 8 oral histories on the **changing face of the Peckham Rye** neighbourhood. Thanks to advice from the BL and OHS on remote interviews as well as their Covid19 guidance, I am able to start this project, which was originally meant to be carried out by volunteers.

Another positive development has been the formation of the **Creative Oral History Special Interest Group**, which followed on from the success of the last Regional Network event, on the theme of Oral History and Creative Practice, held (in person) at the British Library in Nov 2019. The SIG was set up shortly after this event with a small group of core members and we had an in person launch meeting in February this year at University of Greenwich, where we agreed our

roles and the group's main aims. This was followed by an open meeting and a fascinating show and tell session, with a wide variety of talks about creative oral history projects. The COH-SIG now has 11 core members and 22+ in the wider membership. We have also embraced the opportunity to meet online via Zoom, which has benefitted us since it has enabled participants from around the UK to take part in our meetings more easily. We are currently researching content for an online project, mapping creative oral history projects past and present using History Pin, which will be embedded in the fabulous new OHS website which Beth Thomas has done a fantastic job of developing. We would really like to hear from anyone who can contribute content for the map, especially about projects outside of the London area which we are still searching for. The COH-SIG is planning more online events, including a joint book launch with the LGBTQ+SIG in November and our online Christmas gathering on 3<sup>rd</sup> December (information can be found on the OHS SIG webpages). I'd like to extend our gratitude to Craig Fees for his support and mentoring of the SIG groups.

In terms of the London region's oral history projects, I had not received any enquiries this year until November, when a couple of groups got in touch wanting advice. I hope this is a positive if tentative sign that oral history work will be carrying on.

Reflecting back over this extraordinary period, we have learned that we need to be able to respond and change with the times. I take inspiration from Charles Darwin who said, "It is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself." As oral historians, we must stay safe, but we must also continue to think of innovative ways to sustain our work in order to preserve the past for the future. In due course, we can and will emerge from the difficulties of this year and it too will be history.

### **European Reminiscence Network (Pam Schweitzer)**

This has been a relatively quiet year, since projects which were to take place have had to be shelved because of Covid-19. Opportunities for new Europe-wide reminiscence projects with EU funding are no longer open to us post-Brexit.

The "**Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today**" (RYCT) project involving Reminiscence in Dementia Care, was due to be running in Westminster, Camden and Greenwich, with funding in place to start in March and June 2020 and January 2021. RYCT is a very hands-on intervention, in which families living with dementia attend 12 weekly sessions in which they use arts and reminiscence to re-visit key moments in their lives. During these sessions the central relationships are strengthened through creative exploration of the past together, and new friendships and informal mutual support groups are formed between participating families. The sessions are also supported by volunteers (usually ex-

carers themselves) and apprentices trained in reminiscence arts by the European Reminiscence Network.

Under Covid-19, these meetings and training sessions could not happen, so we have been exploring ways to maintain contact with families through telephone calls and correspondence. We have also offered to **run virtual sessions** and are continuing to explore the issues arising. It has proved quite problematical engaging older people reluctant as many are to try opening the computer or tablet (even assuming they have access to these) and attending Zoom sessions from home. Some have been afraid of the medium and just found it too stressful.

Those being cared for by younger relatives, rather than elderly spouses, have more readily agreed to join in the experiment and have felt there was plenty of scope for trying out creative ways of exploring memories without having to leave the house. These carers have been encouraged to gather stimulus materials at home between sessions. So they might conduct a targeted search through photos and memorabilia at home or on the Internet which connect to the week's chosen theme, or they might find and play extracts from favourite films available on-line, or even make a drawing of a memory shared. This 'homework' helps family carers to use reminiscence proactively, stimulating their relative to communicate and broadening their own horizons concerning what it is still possible to do. Participants were also happy to be able to maintain the friendships which had developed in the 'live' groups established before Covid-19 through these Zoom sessions. Now we want to explore further and try this approach with families who have not attended any reminiscence sessions before and see how Zoom can support them in the future.

The main advantage of working in this way, is that participants who face huge problems in leaving their homes, can be 'present' in a stimulating event which supports their confidence and sense of identity. This is an on-going experiment which is being explored across the European Reminiscence Network. An ERN conference will be held in October 2021 in Amsterdam to share results.

Work on the **Reminiscence Theatre Archive** at the University of Greenwich is an ongoing project. Students at the university are involved in drama work arising from the archive, and history students are involved in digitising the interviews. Much of this archive is now available on-line at [www.reminiscencetheatrearchive.org.uk](http://www.reminiscencetheatrearchive.org.uk)

At a personal level, it has been good participating in the establishment of the Creative Oral History Special Interest Group. The meetings have been lively and offer a valuable opportunity for an exchange of experience

### North West Region (Rosalyn Livshin)

#### Greater Manchester

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust has continued to run its flagship programme, **Coming in From the Cold** (financed by the NLHF). This supports community heritage projects to record and share their oral histories. Despite restrictions imposed by Covid-19, they aim to complete this phase of the three-year programme by March 2021, having worked with over 50 different projects and taken in at least 30 new archive collections. In May of this year, Coming in From the Cold was highly commended at the University of Manchester's Social Responsibility awards for its outstanding contribution to community engagement and shortlisted for a Manchester Culture award.

During the first national lockdown, the AIUET also launched an initiative to record and share the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people living through the pandemic. The campaign (financed by Resourcing Racial Justice) continues. For further information visit their website: [racearchive.org.uk/covid-19](http://racearchive.org.uk/covid-19) or search #AllStoriesAreImportant on social media.

Other projects have experienced delays in their start or completion due to Covid. **The Withington Baths project** aims to record the memories of those who frequented the baths or worked in the baths as part of a wider restoration project. The baths were opened in 1913 and were the first Baths in Manchester and possibly the country to allow men and women to swim together in the same pool at the same time. The Baths was the last remaining Edwardian pool in Manchester. The Baths closed in 2013 but have been rescued by a local community group Love Withington Baths and turned into a community baths, hub and leisure centre. The group received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to conduct an Oral History Project but this has been put on hold.

The Manchester Nile Valley Conservation and Education Network received funding for their **Kitara Tales Project** aimed at recording and sharing the oral histories of Ugandan migrants now living in Greater Manchester, focusing on their cultural heritage and traditions. It is unknown at this stage how far the project has proceeded.

**The Warrington Wire Project** received funding for a project to record and catalogue Warrington's rich wire heritage. Whilst wire production dominated Warrington's employment structure for over a hundred years, it was discovered that many residents were unaware of its significance even though the local rugby team is known as The Wire. This project aims to redress this by collecting oral histories, extending Warrington's archives, and interpreting and representing the stories collected to new audiences. The project has made a start before Covid and is hoping to continue remotely for the moment.

A project which has been delayed but waiting to start remotely has been suggested by the **Together Trust**. This project is part of the charity's 150 celebration. The charity will be working with care leavers, who were either housed in a residential home or under the fostering service, to conduct the training and the recordings. They will be regaining contact with care leavers as part of the project.

**Stephen Kelly** writes: Little activity in the northwest has been reported since Covid and lockdown. But it is assumed that some projects will be continuing while others will have been put on hold until face to face interviewing can resume as normal. However one project that has continued and is worth reporting on is the **Granadaland project** with which I am involved. This project focuses on recording interviews with former members of Granada Television.

Initially the various lockdowns allowed time to reflect and work on the website ([www.granadaland.org](http://www.granadaland.org)) but we soon discovered that a number of important people who we had wished to interview were suddenly available with time on their hands. Most of these people were not in our catchment area but based abroad. For example, Lee Child, the writer, lives in America and while he had long ago agreed to an interview pinning him down had proved impossible. But suddenly Zoom offered us the opportunity. And so a Zoom interview was carried out with him at his home in America.

It is worth saying from the outset that internet interviews, whether with Zoom or other providers, may not be possible or suitable for some people. But with our project the vast majority of interviewees were familiar with computer technology. As a consequence we carried out further interviews including with the film director Paul Greengrass and the producer of *The Crown*, Andy Harries, both of whom are normally based in Hollywood with tight schedules. In all we carried out about a dozen Zoom interviews and all successfully. Most of the interviews lasted for at least two hours and with three of the interviewees there was a request on their part to do a follow up interview. One of the advantages of Zoom was that it allowed for this luxury, which might otherwise have not been possible. It also allowed for flexibility in scheduling with some of the interviews taking place in the evening.

Zoom also presented no technical problems and was easy to use although without a subscription interviewing time is usually restricted to around 45 minutes. This can easily be overcome by immediately booking a new session five minutes later. The sound quality was generally very good though not always up to broadcast quality as interviewees tend to move backwards and forwards as they talk. The interviews could also, with permission of the interviewee, be recorded in video as well as audio. Although video was not pertinent to our project it might be very useful for some. In all cases the interviewees were in their own homes and relaxed. One was in his Spanish villa, another on a ranch in Laramie! Interviews were also less intrusive with no moving of furniture, making

cups of tea or searching for electricity points. Once completed the interviews are automatically uploaded onto the desktop and with the press of a key placed in dropbox and on its way to our transcriber. Zoom also meant that no travel costs were incurred. If only we had thought of it beforehand we could have saved a considerable amount of money that went in travel expenses to far points of the UK.

Of course, there are also negatives. Interviewees needed to have computers and be familiar with the use of Zoom, plus you also require a good internet connection. You also need to be aware that incoming emails 'ping' and are recorded and that particular facility needs to be switched off. And with some projects there may well be security issues. Sadly it also means that you cannot look at photographs or other memorabilia which for some projects can be vital. But on the whole, for our project at least, the lockdown and the use of a Zoom was a huge boost, enabling us to record at least a dozen major interviews which otherwise would never have happened given time constraints, costs and logistical issues. It is certainly something to be seriously considered for future projects and is one of the few positives to have come out of Covid.

## **SOUTH EAST**

### **South East Region (Padmini Broomfield)**

Unlike in previous years, there is less to report this time. Inevitably, the Covid-19 pandemic has stalled new projects, while others have been severely delayed due to the lockdowns.

Things had been quiet even before the pandemic. A couple of training workshops, and a small project supporting volunteers at St Barbe Museum to record memories of the **Wellworthy factory** in Lymington for an [exhibition](#) marking the company's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Apart from that there were a few inquiries relating to funding applications or ethical issues encountered by projects.

So I had been looking forward to recording interviews for the [Mayflower 400](#) Southampton project to capture migration stories. After a long delay, I finally started in October and recorded a few in person and remote interviews. Both options came with complicated and unsatisfactory arrangements, and while the content collected was fascinating, audio quality was compromised. The in-person interviews were recorded in a very large office following strict Covid-19 guidelines. After a couple of false starts, the interviews over the Zoom video app (connected to my Zoom digital recorder) went well, mainly since the interviewees were very familiar and comfortable with the platform. I was heartened to find that they did not seem fazed or constrained by the format of speaking over a screen. These were the longest interviews, recorded over a couple of sessions each, and covered detailed memories of their home countries, reasons for migrating and experiences of arriving and settling in Southampton.

The ongoing restrictions means that I will record the remaining interviews remotely. The interviews will inspire various outputs such as short films made by young people, community choirs and educational resources.

Mayflower 400 Southampton website: <https://mayflower400southampton.co.uk/>

I recently delivered my first online training workshop for volunteers at the [Her Salisbury Story](#) project led by the Salisbury Sorooptimists. The usual full-day workshop was split into 3 shorter sessions to take into account online delivery and volunteers' availability. Again, working with a group already used to and very confident using Zoom meetings made things easier, but I had to be very aware of varying the pace, breakout rooms, discussions etc to counteract Zoom fatigue. The need to cover aspects of remote interviewing (for the immediate term) as well as in-person recording (for when it is declared safe to do so) takes longer. Feedback from participants after the final session will help me modify content and delivery for further online delivery.

Both these online experiences – remote interviewing and training – highlight various issues we are all currently grappling with. For example, the digital exclusion when interviewees or potential trainees lack equipment, internet connectivity or confidence in working online and could get left out. Or the concerns around how to deal with sensitive or traumatic memories shared over a screen and how we could respond. It was therefore really helpful to hear from and discuss with other oral history practitioners during workshops at our Regional Network Annual Event and at the University of Newcastle's Oral History Unit.

News of other projects in the South East region:

**Esther Gill writes: Unlocking Our Sound Heritage** at The Keep in Brighton continues to digitise, catalogue and clear rights on oral history collections from across the south east. This year we have worked on oral histories held at The Keep from the Lewes U3A (UTK002), the Ashdown Forest (UTK003) and we are now working on Southampton Oral History Unit's interviews. One of the first collections to be preserved is the Black History collection (UTK010). We are hoping that some of the interviews will be cleared to go on the new British Library sound heritage website, launching 2021.

More information on the project can be found at [keep-sounds.com](http://keep-sounds.com), on Twitter @KeepSounds or please do get in touch with [esther.gill@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:esther.gill@sussex.ac.uk).

(All references relate to the collection number on the British Library's Sound and Moving Image catalogue: [sami.bl.uk](http://sami.bl.uk))

**Lisa Kerley:** I am working on a NLHF intergenerational project to explore and record memories of **carnival tradition on the Isle of Wight** (partnership between Carisbrooke Castle Museum and [The New Carnival Company](#)) which has

been postponed. We can't continue with our workshops and interviews as the older people we were working with are too vulnerable and schools are restricting visitors. We hope to be able to continue next year. I am training 10 volunteers in basic interviewing techniques as part of this and may need to reconsider how this is delivered.

I am doing another project which is not oral history but it is **life story work through reminiscence** to help people who face isolation at the current time. I have funding from a local housing association to work with 20 residents, in their sheltered accommodation, creating reminiscence booklets for them which they will receive in the post monthly. We will then reminiscence over the phone together, the idea is that they will use the booklets to document some of their life story. We may do some Zoom meetings depending on if they have the technology available to them.

## SOUTH WEST

### South West Region (Garry Tregidga)

For 2019-2020 Oral History featured prominently in the **Eglosyow Morek Kernow (Cornish Maritime Churches)** project that was funded through the Young Roots scheme of the former Heritage Lottery. A team of young volunteers instructed by the Institute of Cornish Studies, University of Exeter, recorded a series of 30 audio and film interviews with coastal communities in relation to local parish churches.

In addition, the Institute worked with the Luxulyan Old Cornwall Society to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **anti-nuclear power campaign in 1980/82**. In February 2020 a community workshop in mid-Cornwall brought together local residents, activists and a retired policeman to talk about the protests and a series of interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

The disruption caused by Covid 19 naturally brought fieldwork research to a close. It has been an opportunity, however, to review the long-term strategy of Cornish Oral History at the community level ([www.cornishstory.com/cava/](http://www.cornishstory.com/cava/)). Cornish Story, a community education organisation will work in association with the Institute of Cornish Studies, to initiate future projects and provide training in fieldwork research.

In 2021 there will be a regular programme of podcasts from the Cornish Story base at the Rescorla Centre near St Austell, exploring the synergy of music and oral history with a new collection of audio recordings currently being established entitled Lev (Cornish for 'voice'). For further information on these various activities please contact Garry Tregidga ([G.H.Tregidga@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:G.H.Tregidga@exeter.ac.uk))

## WEST MIDLANDS

### **West Midlands area (Julia Letts)**

Listed below are some of the projects I've been involved in during the past 12 months.

**The Art of Isolation – Worcester City Museum and Art Gallery.** A commission of five short films made from oral history recordings of experiences during lockdown (recorded by Julia Letts and illustrated/ animated by artist Sarah Millin). <https://www.museumsworcestershire.org.uk/collections/from-the-art-gallery-with-love/the-art-of-isolation/>

**I Dig Canals** – A project looking at the role of women in the restoration of the canal network in the West Midlands and the Black Country. Run by Alarum Theatre and resulting in oral histories, archive research, podcasts, a film, a play and a book. <https://alarumtheatre.co.uk/current-show/i-dig-canals/>

**Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford** – A collection of audio stories about the life and faith journeys of members of the congregation of the Wesley Memorial Church in Oxford. The recordings were collected by volunteers in the church's heritage group. Extracts have been edited for the website and a podcast made. <https://www.wesleysoxford.org.uk/category/people/personal-stories>

**Sea Mills 100** – An NLHF funded project to commemorate 100 years of Sea Mills, a community along the River Avon in Bristol. Alongside many other activities, the Sea Mills 100 volunteers recorded interviews with local residents, researched local archives, created a museum in a phone box, held events, documented lockdown, interacted with the local school and created podcasts. <http://seamills100.co.uk/>

**Destination Lydney Harbour** – Creation of oral history recordings and an audio introduction in the Visitor's Centre, created in a former storage shed at Lydney Docks, Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire.

**Severn Valley Lives in the Landscape** - Volunteers recorded a collection of oral history interviews from those who had worked or lived on the site of Severn Valley Country Park, once a coal mine. These are on the website and in an interactive display in the Visitor's Centre. <http://www.shropshiresgreatoutdoors.co.uk/lives-in-the-landscape/>

**Falling Sands Viaduct - Severn Valley Railway:** A collection of oral history recordings with some of the original founder and volunteers on the Severn Valley Railway, collected by volunteers as part of the Falling Sands Viaduct heritage project. Extracts and podcasts on website. <https://www.fallingsandsviaduct.org.uk/remembering-the-severn-valley>

**Market Gardening Memories – The Hive, Worcestershire:** A collection of 15 oral histories recorded by volunteers on market gardening in the Vale of Evesham. Clips from the interviews were used in the project exhibition, app and resource packs. <https://www.explorethepast.co.uk/2020/04/market-gardening-heritage-recording-memories/>

**Museum of Carpet – New Talks for New Audiences:** An NLHF funded project to make use of existing oral history recordings in the archives of the Museum of Carpet to create new illustrated talks and digital media.  
<https://museumofcarpet.org/>

**The Story of Hardwick Green Meadows –** The culmination of an oral history project in South West Worcestershire (Hardwick, Pendock, Corse Lawn) coordinated by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, as part of a wider NLHF heritage project. Volunteers helped produce and voice an audio story containing extracts from 20 interviews. <https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/blog/hardwick-green-meadows/hardwick-green-meadows-project-final-thoughts>

**Brine Memories – Save Our Brine Baths:** An NLHF project to collect and share the memories of those that worked in or used the saltwater baths in Droitwich Spa. Project on hold due to Covid 19, but will result in oral history interviews, a school project, memory boxes and an interactive exhibition.

**Collecting, Using and Sharing Memories – Oral History in the Classroom:** An Historical Association Webinar run in partnership with the Oral History Society and presented by Julia Letts for primary and secondary school teachers.

## **Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service at the Hive (WAAS) (Maggie Tohill)**

### **The Hive**

I have continued to work on an externally funded archive cataloguing project this year, so things were already less busy for me on the oral history front before the Covid pandemic struck. I have been able to continue to give advice to local groups and organisations who are thinking of undertaking projects, including Covid related ones, answer enquiries about our audio holdings and deal with potential deposits.

In February the Hive hosted the exhibition for the **Moving to the City** migration project which our outreach staff had previously worked on.  
<https://www.explorethepast.co.uk/2020/02/moving-to-the-city/>

The **Market Gardening Heritage** project reported on last year continued into this year. I undertook some summarising training with the volunteers so that they could produce detailed summaries of each interview and highlight potential

snippets to use in the project exhibition, resource pack and on our webpages. My fellow West Midlands networker Julia Letts undertook the sound editing work for the project to create the actual soundbites. Some have already been shared on twitter and in a blog post.

<https://www.explorethepast.co.uk/2020/04/market-gardening-heritage-recording-memories/>

Several **World War II anniversaries** took place during lockdown, so I spent some time delving into our World War II oral history collection looking for suitable soundbites for our outreach team to use in various activities and share on social media. See <https://www.explorethepast.co.uk/2020/05/remembering-ve-day-75th-anniversary/> and <https://www.explorethepast.co.uk/2020/05/remembering-the-dunkirk-evacuations-2/>

We also had some general media interest with Channel 5 opting to use one of our soundbites in their 'VE Day: The Lost Films' programme.

For **VJ Day 75** we worked with the Mercian Regiment Museum and Worcester Cathedral to produce an online exhibition using images, newspapers, film and clips from our oral history interviews to explore Worcestershire connections to the war in the Far East. See <https://www.explorethepast.co.uk/vj-day-75/> During lockdown and for a long time after much of the external project work and training usually undertaken by staff was curtailed. Working from home, however, did give us the opportunity to continue some transcribing and summarising work relating to earlier projects and gave staff who wouldn't normally undertake oral history work a chance to be involved. One member of staff for instance was inspired to write a cinema trail based on the interview she was working on. See <https://www.explorethepast.co.uk/2020/07/follow-in-the-footsteps-of-claude-bernard-leake-to-worcesters-cinemas/>

## YORKSHIRE

### South Yorkshire (Sam Smith & Michelle Winslow)

This is a limited report due to the Covid-19 situation, oral history training and projects planned at Rotherham Museum and Archives and Elsecar Heritage Centre have been postponed, but some oral history activity continues in South Yorkshire.

A Sheffield based group is conducting an oral history of a climbing and mountaineering club for women called the **Pinnacle Club**. They have achieved some socially distanced face to face interviews in recent months and are arranging more to be carried out remotely. The group are creating a multimedia archive for their centenary in 2021 and oral histories will be archived with the British Library.

The **oral history in palliative care project** at the Northern General Hospital, Sheffield, had to cease interviewing in March due to Covid-19. Attempts to interview remotely have not been successful, not least because NHS staff are needed to support participants and capacity for this is very limited. However the project team have resumed work to prepare interviews for the University of Sheffield's Special Collections Archive. 100 interviews are currently available for teaching and research and the aim is to make the majority of the collection available. Discussions with the archive about sensitivity issues are in progress. Several clips from interviews in the archive have been used in a display at Weston Park Museum as part of a new "Sheffield Stories" exhibition, which launched in March.

## WALES

### Wales (Beth Thomas & Emily Hewitt)

It has been a difficult year to keep abreast of what's been going on in terms of oral history in Wales. It has also been a challenge for projects that have had their fieldwork curtailed by lockdowns.

Following on from their successful project recording the experiences of women factory workers in the post-war years, Women's Archive Wales have embarked on another oral history project. **Setting the Record Straight:** safeguarding the records and voices of women in Welsh politics aims to capture the voices and papers of the current and former female Members of the Senedd (previously known as Assembly Members, AMs) elected to our national parliament during its first twenty years. From the beginning, the Senedd has exceeded the proportion of women among its Members compared to other similar legislative Assemblies and Parliaments. Following the elections of 2003, the Senedd achieved the status as the first legislature to achieve a gender balance. Despite the challenges of lockdown, WAW has succeeded in undertaking video interviews with 37 female politicians so far. Their stories relate how they became engaged in politics, what difficulties they encountered, their particular political interests, the campaigns they championed and why. Project information and clips of interviews are available at: [https://senedd.wales/en/abthome/about\\_us-commission\\_assembly\\_administration/abt-presiding-officer/Pages/Setting-the-Record-Straight-project.aspx](https://senedd.wales/en/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/abt-presiding-officer/Pages/Setting-the-Record-Straight-project.aspx)

With AHRC funding, Cardiff University have partnered with St Fagans National Museum of History to undertake research into the experiences of two groups of people at different stages of being **refugees in Wales**. Sri Lankan Tamil refugees arrived in waves between the 1980s and 2010, when civil war ended in Sri Lanka. Syrian asylum seekers have been claiming refugee status since the start of the civil war in 2011. Both groups are well represented in Wales. The oral history recordings will be archived at St Fagans and will be made publicly

available, with the permission of interviewees, as a learning resource for present and future generations. The project aims to raise awareness and support refugees in their struggle to thrive and belong. Covid-19 and the inability to meet face-to-face has been a huge challenge to project fieldwork but progress is being made. The project's trilingual website (English, Welsh and Arabic) is at <https://museum.wales/refugee-wales/>

In a year that has seen Black Lives Matter become a global movement, it is good to note two oral history projects in Wales that have worked hard to record the contribution of the Windrush Generation to Welsh life.

Using the arrival of the Empire Windrush ship at Tilbury in June 1948 as their starting point, young people at Pentrehafod School, Swansea worked with older people of West Indian heritage living in Wales to learn about the experiences of subsequent '**Windrush generations**'. Led by the African Community Centre in Swansea, they learned about the significance of the Empire Windrush, subsequent migration from the Caribbean as well as the life stories of people with West Indian heritage living in Wales today.

The ***Voices of Swansea University, 1920-2020*** oral history project has now been completed, featuring 89 interviews with previous staff and students of Swansea University. The project was conducted by University historian Dr Sam Blaxland, as part of research for his book *Swansea University: Campus and Community in a Post-War World, 1945-2020* (University of Wales Press), which was published in the summer of 2020 to mark the University's centenary. As part of his research, Sam interviewed individuals from a huge range of time periods, subject areas, and job roles, including students, academic staff and non-academic staff like technicians and secretaries. The interviews have been deposited at the Richard Burton Archives at the University. A selection of edited clips of the interviews are featured in *Swansea University: Making Waves Since 1920*, an exhibition about the history of the University. The exhibition is hosted at the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea, and due to run until August 2021.

## SCOTLAND

### **Scottish Oral History Centre, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow (Dr. Alison Chand)**

This year I have dealt with the following queries:

January 2020 – Sian Loftus

Contacted me on behalf of Aberdeen City Heritage Trust – Sian was looking to tender for a consultant for a project involving recording memories of the granite industry in Aberdeen and wanted advice on recording equipment.

January 2020 – Catherine Stratford

2021 will be the 150th anniversary of the founding of George Watson's Ladies College in George Square, Edinburgh. The school amalgamated with George Watson's Boys College in 1974. Catherine is involved in planning a number of projects to mark the event. She would like to create an oral history of the memories of the women who attended George Square. The History Club at the current school, aged between 12 and 15 years old, would be undertaking the interviews. Whilst Catherine can introduce the pupils to the history of the Ladies College and the context of these women's lives, growing up in the 1930s–1970s, she was looking for some advice and training as to how to undertake a successful oral history project. I advised her on some suitable training courses.

March 2020 – Lucy Sewell

Lucy was looking for WWII veterans to share their memories of VE Day in Scotland for its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I advised her to contact Glasgow Museums and have a look at the 2000 Glasgow Lives Project, and to contact Mary Stewart at the British Library for information on the British Library oral history collections.

August 2020 – Karen Oakley

Karen is working on a project involving recording people's stories of Gaelic songs and music, particularly around Ardnamurchan, with a plan to interview in Gaelic. She sent an email with a question about whether it's acceptable to approach interviewees rather than wait for them to reply to adverts – I replied that yes, this is okay.

In my own work this year, I have been awarded a British Academy/Leverhulme small research grant to continue interviewing that I have been doing throughout the year for a project entitled '**Rainbows in the Windows: An Oral History of Young Families in Britain during the Covid-19 Pandemic**'. I have completed around 80 remote oral history interviews so far this year.

In addition to this, I have carried out some interviews for the **NHS at 70 project**, and have continued my oral history teaching and training work with the Scottish Oral History Centre at the University of Strathclyde, the University of the Highlands and Islands and the British Library/Oral History Society.

October 2020 – Alli Beddoes

Alli was looking for input into a funding bid for the Lighthouse Brighton on oral history collections in Scotland that might be relevant to a project she is putting together for Festival UK 2022.

## 2021 ORAL HISTORY SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Oral History Conference 2020 was postponed to July 2021 and is now going to be a virtual online conference hosted by Bournemouth University.

### **Oral History and Media**

**Venue:** Online

**Date:** Friday 9th and Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Oral history and the media have an important but complex relationship. The media has long been a significant producer of, and outlet for, oral history. Since the 1980s, there has been growing use of oral history in TV and radio documentaries and storytelling, with oral histories now forming an important and popular dimension of history and factual programming and broadcasting. This conference aims to consider the relationship between oral history and the media, both historically and today, by exploring similarities, differences, opportunities and challenges between media practices and oral history practices, from interviewing to editing, audiences to ethics.

### **More information and Call for Papers:**

<https://www.ohs.org.uk/conferences/conference-2021/>

Email conference administrator, Polly Owen at [polly.owen@ohs.org.uk](mailto:polly.owen@ohs.org.uk)

## REGIONAL NETWORK ANNUAL EVENT 2020

### Programme

**Date** Friday 16<sup>th</sup> - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2020

**Theme** Oral History in the Covid era

**Location** Online via Zoom

### Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019

Regional Network Business Meeting 17:30 – 19:00		
<b>1</b>	Apologies	
<b>2</b>	Minutes of the last meeting	All
<b>3</b>	<b>Updates: from Network Coordinators</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networkers: new, resigned, vacancies</li> <li>• Trustees: changes, vacancies</li> <li>• Regional Network Meeting 2021</li> <li>• Training and CPD</li> </ul>	Juliana and Padmini
<b>4</b>	<b>Updates: OHS Activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Interest Groups</li> <li>• OHS Annual Conference 2021</li> </ul>	Craig Juliana & Padmini
<b>5</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Digital Strategy Group update and feedback</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groups.io: what it is and how it works</li> <li>• New OHS website in development: demo</li> <li>• RN: what content networkers would like to see</li> <li>• OHS blog: how RN can get involved</li> </ul>	Craig and Beth
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Data Management and privacy policy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fielding enquiries: what methods work best? Would a shared account for each region be helpful</li> <li>• Managing GDPR for enquiries and storage on G suite</li> </ul>	Mary
<b>6</b>	Issues for discussion: raised by networkers before or during meeting	
<b>7</b>	Networker Updates	
<b>8</b>	Any other business	
<b>19:00</b>	Meeting ends	
-	Optional: Networking (Bring your own wine!)	

## Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2020

	<p>Networkers CPD Event 10:00 – 13:00</p>
<b>10:00</b>	Welcome
<b>10:15</b>	<p><b>SESSION 1: Interviewing in the COVID era:</b> Short presentations from 3 speakers on their experiences of remote interviewing in the Covid era using different methods</p>
	<p><b>Speakers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Alison Chand:</b> Telephone</li> <li>• <b>Andy Clark:</b> In-person</li> <li>• <b>Steve Kelly:</b> Online using Zoom meeting platform</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Breakout Room discussions</b> Networkers split into smaller groups to discuss issues raised by speakers and/or share their own experiences or concerns <b>Re-group</b> to share key points discussed</p>
<b>11:15</b>	<p><b>Coffee and networking</b> We will keep Zoom running. Get a drink and return for informal chat or take a complete break and join us for next session.</p>
<b>11:30</b>	<p><b>SESSION 2: Oral History in the COVID era</b> <b>Breakout Rooms:</b> An opportunity to discuss in small groups other topics related to our work in the current situation. These could include: e.g. training content and delivery; issues/challenges/ethics of projects collecting COVID-related material, challenges of recording a contemporary event ... <b>Re-convene</b> to share key points</p>
<b>12:45</b>	<b>Final round-up</b>
<b>13:00</b> – <b>14:30</b>	<p><b>Networking</b> We will keep Zoom running for anyone who wants to stay behind for a chat. For a change we won't all have to dash off for trains!</p>

## Regional Network Webpages

**Oral History Society:** <https://www.ohs.org.uk/>

**Regional Network Reports:** <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/>

### Regions:

East of England: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/east-england/>

East Midlands: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/east-midlands/>

London: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/london/>

North East: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/north-east/>

Northern Ireland: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/northern-ireland/>

North West: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/north-west/>

Scotland: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/scotland/>

South East: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/south-east/>

South West: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/south-west/>

Wales: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/wales/>

West Midlands: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/west-midlands/>

Yorkshire: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/regional-network/yorkshire/>

**List of Networkers:** <https://www.ohs.org.uk/about/regional-networkers/>