

ORAL HISTORY SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

My report last year began with a note about COVID-19 and its impact on the work of the Society. This time last year not many of us, I suspect, were expecting to spend the next twelve months in varying degrees of lockdown. During 2020 a risk assessment of the impact of the pandemic on the Society's business was a standing item at the Officers meetings on 17 March, 15 April, 2 June, 29 June, 24 July, 3 September, 13 and 20 October, and 17 November. Overall, the Society has adjusted well to the challenges posed by the pandemic. The main risks i.e. those associated with the postponement of the annual conference and replacing face-to-face events meetings and discussions using online platforms etc. were discussed at the officers group in April 2020 and considered and actions agreed at a meeting of the Trustees in May 2020 (see minutes). The organisation agreed to run meetings virtually on Zoom and purchased a number of licences to allow committees, groups, etc. to run events, meetings, etc. as they would have in normal circumstances. A digital strategy group was established to explore additional and enhanced ways of communicating. The annual conference, which was to take place in Bournemouth in July 2020 was postponed until 2021, but it was agreed to run a virtual AGM. It was also agreed that training would be piloted remotely in order to ensure ongoing support for participants and financial continuity for trainers. Advice on remote interviewing during Covid was provided on the OHS website. All these actions were considered in terms of costs and subsequently monitored. So, from April onwards, we have held virtual meetings throughout this period and communicated with our members and the wider oral history community via our website, monthly newsletters, and groups.io (below).



The first OHS Trustees Meeting on Zoom, June 2020

It has been an extremely difficult and often painful time for many, including colleagues working as freelancers and in the public, charitable and higher education sectors. In higher education, for example, a number of universities have announced closures and redundancies that have directly impacted on oral historians and threatened our interests and objectives. I have sent a number of letters on behalf of

the Society, and in case of the University of East London, committed us to a number of measures of non- collaboration.

During the course of the year, we also witnessed the murder of George Floyd in the US which provoked widespread debate and soul-searching across educational and cultural institutions as to how we can better address the wider cultural issues raised by his murder. In this regard we are looking closely at our appointments policies and processes and are discussing how we might organise one or more round table discussions on diversity, including one led by prominent Black Asian and Minority Ethnic oral historians and representatives of BAME organisations. The purpose of this would be to reflect on current practices and consider what further we can do as an organisation. These interventions beg an important and overdue discussion of how we engage with such wider issues, campaigns and stakeholders.

Our current financial position to an extent reflects the significant changes brought about by the pandemic. Overall, the Society's accounts ended 2020 just over £5K in surplus on the previous year, bringing our reserves to a total of just under £96K, a fairly secure position given current circumstances. Underneath the headline figures, however, the postponement of the annual conference impacted on both costs and income sides of the balance sheet. The enforced reduction in travel costs was a saving, but the loss of face-to-face training impacted on the returns from our training programme (see below). More worryingly, the year has seen a decline in membership, with both individual and institutional subscriptions down by around 9% and 45% respectively. We attribute this in part to the impact of the pandemic, that is loss of earnings and cutbacks in institutional and project funding. However, these membership trends, though exacerbated by COVID-19, pre-date the pandemic. We recognise the need to address these trends as well as consider alternative ways of generating income. Whilst we can absorb a projected loss of £10K in 2021, we know this is not sustainable in the medium and long term.

The focus of our strategic planning this year has been very much on our digital strategy, building our capacity to meet online via zoom, which has now become the norm not only for our Trustee meetings but also Special Interest Groups (SIGs), the Regional Network, the Training Group, the Journal Editorial Board and indeed for members, as we experimented at last year's AGM. A suite of groups.io email discussion groups has now been rolled out to aid communication and discussion across the Society.

A tremendous amount of work has gone into rebuilding and transforming our website, making navigation much easier, less text-based, and more user-driven. Our commitment to promote debate and discussion amongst members is behind the

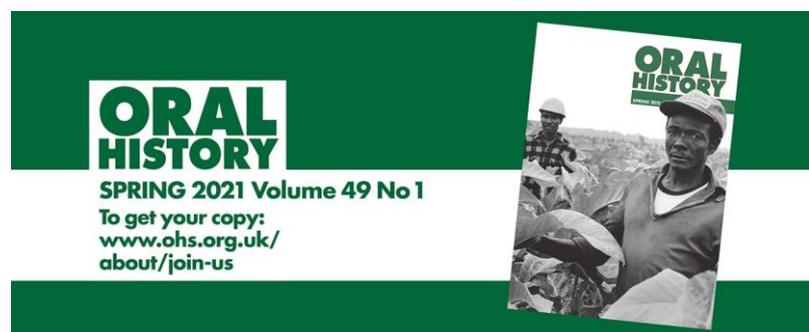


decision to launch a blog on our website and align it more closely with other groups within the organisation. We are particularly grateful to Beth Thomas, Cai Parry-Jones and members of the Digital Strategy Group for their work on the website which was launched in April 2021.

Many of our SIGs have held some exciting and well-attended events despite the constraints of lockdown. Particularly striking were the series of talks and events organised by our relatively new Creative Practice SIG, the impressive seminar series run by our LGBTQ SIG and the growing attendance and social media interest in our newly-created Higher Education SIG. Many thanks are due to Craig Fees for his role supporting and encouraging SIG activities as well as his work promoting wider participation in the Society through groups.io

Our Regional Network held its annual event on zoom, choosing as its focus oral history during COVID, which included presentations on our new digital strategy and this was followed by a workshop on the technical as well as ethical and methodological issues associated with remote interviewing. The latter has proved to be an important focus of debate and has been raised in the Committee and the Higher Education SIG, where we are hoping to pursue the issue. In common with other events, feedback from the Regional Network attendees highlighted the benefits of online meetings from the point of view of costs, accessibility and helping to reverse climate change.

Despite lockdown, the Journal Editorial Board and team were able to continue to work remotely during the pandemic and both issues of the *Oral History* journal for autumn 2020 and spring



2021 were published. The latter was the largest issue to date, running to 142 pages and included an excellent mix of articles as well as the hugely informative and interesting sections on current British and International work. We are looking forward to strengthening the links between the Journal and our website, which will include blogs from current British work and online book and media reviews. This

will help grow our national and international profile.

Our joint training programme with National Life Stories and the British Library was initially badly impacted by COVID-19, but, led by Camille Johnston, the training team quickly reversioned almost all the courses for online delivery via Zoom over two half-days and with fewer attendees. The trainers held several Zoom meetings to share knowledge and skills around remote interviewing technology and online teaching. By the end of 2020 a remarkable 60 courses had been held involving 480 people, including 35 courses tailored for individual projects. One silver lining of the pandemic has been that online training has attracted many more international participants (8%) and has also enabled people to attend from more geographically remote parts of the UK who might not otherwise have had the funding to do so.



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Over the last twelve months we have strengthened our links with the Historical Association and school teachers. Julia Letts ran a seminar for the HA on oral history in schools as a result of which the HA have agreed in principle to include oral history in their initial teacher training programme. The current plan is for the OHS to fund two films to be used in teacher training. This is a really important stepping stone in terms of embedding oral history in teacher education and we are indebted to Julia Letts, Kate Melvin and Helen Lloyd for their efforts and success in this area of our work.

As mentioned above our annual conference on the Media, planned for 2020 was postponed until 2021 due to COVID-19, but thanks to Polly Owen's hard work behind the scenes we are now eagerly looking forward to our first online conference in July! There is an exciting range of presentations and some outstanding plenary



speakers, for which thanks are due to Fiona Cosson and the organising group. We will learn from our experience of this year's conference for next year, which will be on the theme of 'Home' (agreed, coincidentally, prior to lockdown) which could see an

virtual element running alongside what for most of us will be a welcome return to a face-to-face event, at least we hope!

Over the course of the year, we have said goodbye to a number of trustees. Robert Wilkinson joined the committee in 1984 and made an enormously important all-

round contribution to the development of the Society, not least as longstanding treasurer. Rob's successor as Treasurer for the last five years, Nick Chalmers, also retired and we will always be indebted to him for bringing clarity and common sense to our discussions on finance. We shall also miss Shelley Trower, who joined the Committee in 2008 and played an important role in the HE Group and sat on the organising groups of a number of conferences. Finally, we have said goodbye to Sarah Ellis, who worked so effectively on the OHS archive at the BL and as our data protection officer, and who left us after only two years on the Committee. Our thanks and best wishes go to them all. And our condolences go to the families and friends of former Welsh MP, human rights activist and oral historian, Hywel Francis, who sadly died last year. In terms of new Committee members, we were delighted to have welcomed Titi Faluyi as our new Treasurer and we hope to fill two further vacancies in the coming months. Finally, I cannot conclude without expressing my thanks to our part-time staff and my enormous appreciation for the brilliant (voluntary) effort of our Officers, Committee, SIGs, Regional Networkers and to our wider membership for their contribution to the Oral History Society and movement during what has been a challenging year.

John Gabriel
Chair, Oral History Society

Regional Network Report

The [OHS Regional Network](#) currently consists of 41 networkers, covering 12 geographical regions across the UK, who volunteer to act as a point of contact and provide advice on oral history. All networkers are experienced practitioners working in diverse sectors – museums, libraries, archives, academic institutions, community organisations, and as freelancers. This broad range of expertise creates a collective knowledge bank of the different aspects of oral history that is generously shared in response to inquiries.

Networkers near you: The recently redesigned OHS website has an [interactive map](#) of the regions where you can find details of the networkers representing your area and activities near you. Networkers are recruited through an open call for applications whenever there is a vacancy. We try to ensure that the network represents a good geographical spread across the UK as well as a wide range of expertise, such practitioners of oral history in academic, heritage, community or digital contexts.

We welcome *new networkers* appointed during the past year: Siobhan Stevenson (West Midlands) and Clare Jenkins (Yorkshire). Long-serving networkers Kath Smith (North East), John Tanner (Yorkshire) and Kayleigh

Luscombe (South West) resigned during the year. We will miss them all and wish them well for the future.

The Annual Report 2020, brings together reports sent in by networkers highlighting the oral history projects taking place across the country. Despite the severe reduction in activity during the Covid-19 pandemic, the report contains some fascinating projects and the many creative ways the material has been disseminated. Networkers also reflect on how the lockdowns and continuing restrictions impacted on their work, how everybody had to quickly experiment and find new and workable ways to conduct interviews online. All Regional [Network Annual Reports of past years](#) are published on the website and are great resource if you are looking for projects in your region or subject of interest. If you would like to share news of your projects in the next report, please contact your regional networker.

The *Annual Network Event 2021* was held online for the first time with 19 networkers meeting via Zoom video conferencing in October 2020. The annual event, which includes a Business Meeting and a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshop, is an opportunity for networkers to meet, share and learn from each other. Networkers received updates from trustees implementing various aspects of the OHS Strategy Review, including the Digital Strategy and new website, and the online discussion forum, Groups.io, which facilitates better communication within the OHS. The CPD workshop focussed on sharing and discussing the methodological, technical and ethical issues around recording oral history interviews under the current circumstances. The speakers shared their tips and experiences of interviewing remotely using the telephone kit, Zoom video conferencing and socially-distanced face-to-face interviewing. Feedback on the online format was overwhelmingly positive. Networkers missed the in-person contact and socialising, but recognised that while it was unusual and limiting in some ways, it had its advantages and opened up opportunities to hold more regular meetings during the year.

We would like to thank all [Regional Networkers](#) who volunteer and give their time so generously to respond to inquiries and share their knowledge, expertise and passion for oral history.

Juliana Vandegrift and Padmini Broomfield

Regional Network Coordinator & Deputy Coordinator

Oral History Journal Report

Since our last report, written in April 2020, we have made some changes to the editorial group, successfully appointing four new editors.

Fiona Cosson having resigned from the Public History editor role in 2019, her post was advertised. Two candidates short-listed by the interview panel were offered a job share and the editorial group were delighted that Abi Hunt (University of Lincoln) and George Severs (Selwyn College, Cambridge) accepted. Since they were appointed they have produced a proposal for the development of Public History in the journal including, for example, encouraging students to write blogs and podcasts to be published on the Oral History Society (OHS) website.

In mid-2020 Anindya Raychaudhuri had let the group know that he would no longer be able to continue as Reviews editor. The editorial group was sorry to see him go, having much appreciated the range of reviews and reviewers he had succeeded in publishing in recent years. Again, an advert was placed and short-listed candidates were interviewed and once again, two were invited to accept the post as a job-share. The journal's two new review editors, appointed in November 2020, are Isabel Machado (University of Memphis) and Fearghus Roulston (University of Brighton). They have joined the journal with ideas to expand the reviews section, while linking it directly to the OHS website with online reviews and themed essay-styled journal pieces.

Needless to say, all editorial group meetings, including short-listing and interviewing, have been conducted by Zoom since early 2020. The editors have yet to decide whether to change back to pre-2020 arrangement, accepting that including Isabel Machado will necessarily mean a combination of virtual and face to face meetings. However it's worth noting that Zoom meetings have led to savings to the journal's budget.

Autumn 2021, 49/2 will be a special issue jointly edited by Lindsey Dodd and Anindya Raychaudhuri, taking the theme 'Power and the Archive'. With commissioned articles drawing on inter-disciplinary perspectives and an international spread, it promises to be enriching and innovative. Ideas for a health issue taking in the impact of Covid are slowly forming and may well make for a special issue in 2022. In the meantime, submissions continue to arrive and those which are accepted for publication continue to make up journal issues ranging over a variety of topics.

The various sections of the journal have been flourishing including news of innovative and outstanding projects within the UK and abroad and collated and curated by Cynthia Brown and Siobhan Warrington respectively. The Learning Section, edited by Kate Melvin, is attracting pieces written by working teachers as

well as members of professional bodies, such as the Historical Association, committed to promoting the teaching of oral history in schools.

Members of the editorial group have contributed to the redesigned Oral History Society website and welcome its lively and up-to-date style. Readers sometimes question the journal's inclusiveness faced with oral historians' range of activity within academe and without. Working with the website the group feels that it now has an opportunity to provide a platform for online blogs to would-be contributors who seek to offer guidance on practical topics and also to encourage debate and interaction. At the same time, the group feels that the journal's primary focus should continue to be academic debate and discussion maintaining its position as the only independent oral history journal and promoting innovative and creative developments in the field.

The group looks forward to the next twelve months as we work with authors, soliciting articles and debating oral history amongst ourselves, with the excellent support of Liz Ison journal administrator, Rachel Norridge copy editor and long-running inspiration from designers Andy and Denise at Smith+Bell.

Editorial group:

Joanna Bornat
Cynthia Brown
Lindsey Dodd
Jenny Harding
Abi Hunt
Isabel Machado
Kate Melvin
Heather Norris Nicholson
Sean O'Connell
Rob Perks
Fearghus Roulstone
George Severs
Christine Wall
Siobhan Warrington

Website and Digital Strategy Report

Since its creation over twenty years ago, the OHS website has grown to be central to how we operate and communicate as a Society. This had put increasing stresses on its design, layout and functionality. It is however just one element in what is now an interlinked structure of digital communications within the OHS, all of which was brought into sharp focus by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was fortuitously timely that the OHS had decided in May 2020 to create a Digital Strategy Group. Its remit was to deliver 3 key recommendations of the Governance Report produced a few months previously in March:

- To set up and promote OHS Zoom accounts for meeting on-line
- To set up a multi-layered online discussion community for members and groups within the membership, via groups.io
- To investigate how to improve and maintain the Society's website in order to better reflect the needs and voices of users and promote the benefits of membership of the Society.

The Digital Strategy Group was co-chaired by Beth Thomas and Cai Parry-Jones and included Michelle Winslow, Craig Fees, Mary Stewart and Eleanor Lowe.

Progress made:

Online meetings via the OHS's three Zoom Pro accounts have become the norm and have facilitated the AGM, trustee, Regional Network and other Society meetings, an online training programme, and the input of a range of internal stakeholders into the website strategy. SIGs in particular have made excellent use of the OHS Zoom accounts and have used Zoom meetings creatively and effectively.

Groups.io discussion groups were first rolled out to the Trustees, Regional Networkers, other working groups and SIG leads. An online discussion group is now available to all current members who hopefully will realise its potential as a source of support, ideas and advice.

The website has been completely overhauled and restructured. We would like to thank all those who contributed their ideas and encouragement for its development and improvement. We now have a website that is under more creative control from the OHS, having been created in-house. It includes a blog with input from across the whole spectrum of members as well as sections for each SIG and network region. Its navigational structure is driven by the needs of users and its content less dense and text-heavy. Most importantly, it includes sound and video, with links to the OHS' growing YouTube channel.

The new website was launched in April 2021. We are now working on a website management structure that devolves responsibilities for content and provides opportunities for more members to get involved. Another priority is looking at ways of using the website to provide more benefits for members and promote membership of the OHS.

Usage Stats:

Since launching on April 9, the website has had over 18,000 users, 68% of them from the UK. There have been over 72,000 page views. The most popular pages so far have been

those relating to the conference (understandably), advice for beginners, legal and ethical advice, the journal, recording during Covid-19, opportunities and training courses. Most visits are during weekdays, with far fewer visiting on weekends.

Digital Strategy Group

Training Report

Our joint training programme with National Life Stories and the British Library was initially badly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but, led by Camille Johnston, the training team quickly re-versioned almost all the courses for online delivery. Courses were led by Zoom video call over two half-day sessions, with slightly fewer attendees per course than for in-person training. In preparation for running online training, the training group held several Zoom meetings to share knowledge and skills around remote interviewing technology and online teaching. These meetings have resulted in a series of short videos demonstrating the pros and cons of various remote recording techniques, which can be viewed on the OHS YouTube channel.

By the end of 2020 a remarkable 60 courses had been held involving 480 people, including 35 courses tailored for individual projects. One silver lining of the pandemic has been that online training has attracted many more international participants (8%) and has also enabled people to attend from more geographically remote parts of the UK who might not otherwise have had the funding to do so. One course participant commented, 'I hope OHS/BL continue to offer training via Zoom - even when it is safe to run everything in person. It has the added benefit of allowing non-UK based people to attend.' The training group will continue to offer some courses online when in-person training resumes.

Training courses delivered in 2020, including both in-person and online delivery, comprised 16 'Introduction to Oral History' courses, 35 tailored training courses, 2 'Archival management of Oral History Collections' courses, 1 'Digital Editing' course, 2 'Transcript to Script' courses, 2 'Designing and Planning your Oral History Project' courses, and 2 'Developing your Oral History Skills' advanced workshops. For the introductory course, the majority of training was delivered online with only 3 courses delivered in person (at the British Library and the Black Country Living Museum).

Training participants were supportive while trainers made the transition to the online teaching environment. One attendee commented: 'I know this was the first time this training has been delivered online but I honestly did not feel like I missed anything by not doing it in person, it was very interactive, I felt we bonded well as a group and were all able to share our different ideas and expertise, this has been a real highlight of lockdown for me!' Another participant highlighted trainers' use of online

teaching techniques, ‘Amazing adaptability using breakout groups on Zoom and keeping things fresh.’

The training team would like to thank Camille Johnston (NLS Assistant Archivist and Administrator), who this year, in addition to her usual efficiency and good cheer, has provided outstanding vision and support as we developed our online training programme. Craig Fees, a long standing member of the training group, announced his retirement from the training group in summer 2021. Countless trainees can thank Craig for his thoughtful and discursive training sessions, and the members of the training group will greatly miss his insightful and wise contributions.

In 2021 the group has met to discuss how to approach the return to face-to-face training, and develop our online offer further. As this report covers courses and events in 2020, we shall report on this activity in detail next year.

Camille Johnston and Mary Stewart

On behalf of the Oral History Society/National Life Stories at the British Library Training Liaison Group:

Cynthia Brown, Anna Bryson, Alison Chand, Rib Davis, Craig Fees, Sarah Gudgin, Roger Kitchen, Julia Letts, Ros Livshin, Sarah Lowry, Rob Perks, Kate Richardson, Rosa Schling, Graham Smith, Sam Smith, Mary Stewart, Beth Thomas, Michelle Winslow.

NLS at the British Library: Camille Johnston, Charlie Morgan, Rob Perks and Mary Stewart

Publicity Report

In line with the OHS’s 2019-2021 Strategy, the Society continues to publicise OHS activity and events, and UK Oral History activity more generally, to OHS members via its three main digital channels: Twitter (@OralHistorySoc), Mailchimp (e-monthly newsletter) and the OHS’s Facebook page.

In January 2021, the Society’s e-newsletter was rebranded to be more succinct, aesthetically pleasing and less text heavy. The Society also launched a YouTube channel in 2020, which now includes a growing number of videos relating to online OHS events, recording equipment tips, guidance on recording remote interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic and OHS members’ projects.

Twitter Stats: The Society’s Twitter following continues to grow. The OHS currently has 7,488 followers on Twitter (as of 30 July 2021). 12 months ago, the Society had 6,731 followers. The OHS has gained an average of 63 followers a month for the 2020-21 period (this is a slight increase from last year’s figures of 62 new followers per month and it falls within our strategic target of 50-100 new followers per month). The most popular subject matters on the OHS’ Twitter account, like the website,

continue to be: Oral History vacancies, *Oral History* journal, OHS training and the Annual OHS Conference. The Society's tweets on remote interviewing guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic were also among the more popular tweets for the 2020-21 period.

Facebook Stats: Facebook activity remains stable and the OHS currently has 3,580 followers on its Facebook page (up by 261 from 2019-20 period). This increase is slightly higher than the 2018-19 period (by 22 followers) but half of that achieved in the 2017-2018 period (+ 482 people). The reasons for this are down to the OHS adopting Twitter as its main Social Media platform (as stated in the OHS 2019-2020 Communications Strategy). For the 2021-22 period, the Society's publicity officer will continue to use Twitter as the Society's main 'Social Media Voice' but will look to increase content on the Society's Facebook page to increase traffic and online engagement.

Newsletter Stats: The Society continues to use MailChimp as its e-newsletter provider. The newsletter is currently sent to 1,643 subscribers. This is an increase of 81 subscribers from the 2020-21 period, but 45 less subscribers compared to the 2018-19 period (126 subscribers). Our newsletter subscribers are mostly British (75%). Stats on newsletter subscribers tells us that roughly 64% continue to access the newsletter via desktop and 36% via mobile (no changes since 2019-20 period). The average open rate of our newsletters for the 2020-21 period was 44%. This is a 6% rise from last year and our open rate is 22% higher than the industry average. The increase in the open rate is likely down to the redesign of the newsletter in January 2021 as the open rate percentages are, so far, higher in 2021 than in 2020.

OHS members are encouraged to contribute news and event information to the Publicity Officer. Please contact Cai Parry-Jones: caiparryjones@ohs.org.uk.

Cai Parry-Jones

Membership Report

Membership in the Oral History Society (OHS) in the period 2020-2021 has held steady over the past year, although we are starting to see a slight decline in membership, likely as a consequence of the challenges and pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many organisations, the OHS has faced increasing and new challenges in the current climate. Despite this, interest in oral history remains popular as people across the world have learned to navigate the 'new normal' and develop new ways of undertaking oral history research. The OHS has still been attracting a steady flow of new members, and many of our loyal subscribers have continued to support us over the past year. As we have developed new ways of engaging with members through a new blog website and Groups.io, engagement with membership has been fruitful and enriching. As of May 2021, membership totalled

767 members, a decline on previous years but we remain hopeful our membership base will see recovery.

Over the past year, membership numbers have been observed closely to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the OHS. Further analysis has taken place to understand *why* membership declines and increases and we have been considering what benefits we currently offer to members and how we can develop these to meet member expectations.

Although the COVID-19 outbreak has certainly proven a challenge to everyone and may shift OHS membership strategy and continue to impact membership it will and has certainly prompted new discussions in the field of Oral History. If any members (or non-members!) of the OHS wish to discuss benefits of joining the OHS, their experience of being with us, reflect upon COVID-19's impact on the OHS, or provide feedback on our membership offers, please don't hesitate to contact Emily Gibbs: emily.gibbs@hotmail.co.uk.

Emily Gibbs

Schools Group

Following the success and the increasing use of the Schools Resources on the website, the OHS has been working closely with the Historical Association (HA). This resulted in the production of a webinar, run by Julia Letts, to explore the use of oral history in the classroom. It was aired as part of the on-going sessions that the HA hold for both secondary and primary school teachers. The HA have now asked the OHS to produce two 25 minutes training films for primary and secondary school teachers. The former would focus on memory collection and the latter would concentrate on how oral history could enhance topics on the curriculum. The films would be accompanied by a training manual and links. It is also possible that oral history will be included in the HITT (History in Initial Teacher Training Programme) next year. Both the OHS and oral history will undoubtedly benefit from this level of exposure but, more importantly, it represents a milestone in the journey and growth of oral history, enabling the concept and methodologies to be implanted in young minds at an early stage.

<https://www.ohs.org.uk/information-for/schools/>

Kate Melvin

Special Interest Groups Report

Special Interest Groups are a tool available to Oral History Society members, initiated and created by members to meet, discuss, and develop programmes and

activities around common themes and interests. Their activities and insights feed back into and influence the work and development of the Oral History Society, an integral part of its vibrancy and creative growth. The Trustees are immensely grateful for all of the time, care and enthusiasm SIG Officers and members bring to the Society and to the present and future of oral history

There are currently five Special Interest Groups:

- **Creative Oral History**, for those interested in creative uses of life stories and oral history
- **Environment and Climate Change**, exploring the contributions and roles that oral historians can play in response to the growing environmental crisis
- **Higher Education**, bringing together students, academics, and other members of the oral History Society interested in the role, issues, support and development of oral history in research and teaching throughout higher education, particularly in the UK.
- **LGBTQ**, based on the fact that oral history is one of the most exciting methods for recording, preserving, and celebrating the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people.
- **Migration**, which asks the crucial question: ‘Can we as oral historians play a part in giving a voice to those seeking refuge, and in doing so, help to challenge the existing media and political discourses associated with them?’

Five exciting Special Interest Groups, each of which is open to every member of the Oral History Society. Each is supported by an annual budget built into the Society’s budget; each has a dedicated Groups.io email discussion group to facilitate networking, and a dedicated webpage; and each has access to a Zoom Pro account, available to all SIGs. To learn how a SIG can be initiated, please see the Oral History Society website: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/special-interests/>

Describing all the SIG activity over the past year would take a much longer report, but I will try to indicate some. But first, I would like to highlight the Migration SIG in particular, as its enthusiastic founding Chair, Paul Dudman, is actively seeking others to help in the development of the SIG as officers, and as members. The easiest way is to join the Migration SIG groups.io email discussion group, and begin to share ideas and networking.

I would also like to thank the recently retired OHS Treasurer, Nick Chalmers, our current Treasurer Titi Faluyi, and the multi-talented Polly Owen for all the work they put in, especially towards the end of last year, to help to make the SIG finances and budgeting understandable and straightforward. The aim of Trustees is to make the work of the SIGs as straightforward and friction-free for officers and members as possible, and this was a significant contribution.

As this year has been entirely encompassed by the pandemic, the online world and the use of the SIGs Zoom Pro accounts stand out.

There was the Creative Oral History SIG's Christmas party, for example, displaying members' work, presentations and show and tells; and earlier in the year the exciting joint meeting, with the LGBTQ SIG, to launch Clare Summerskill's book, "Creating Verbatim Theatre from Oral Histories". Separately, the LGBTQ SIG has run a regular series of meetings, sharing and developing work from around the country, in seminars and tastings; and in their May Online event, involving presentations from London Metropolitan Archives, the V&A Museum, and the National Museum of Wales, explored 'Hearing LGBTQ Voices in Museums and the Archives'. In their June Summer Gathering, 'Bringing Stories to Life, Oral History and Creative Expression', the Creatives showcased creative oral history work from the practices of theatre and film, addressing reminiscence theatre, places and memories, and LGBTQ perspectives. The Environment and Climate Change SIG have initiated a series of webinars, beginning with contributions from North America and the UK, reviewing established, ongoing and prospective projects, and networking generally; and, with grateful thanks to Beth Thomas's work on the website, have initiated and developed the mapping of Environmental and Climate Change Oral History work around the world.

In Higher Education, a pilot study forged by Higher Education SIG members Verusca Calabria and Jenny Harding is identifying and building up a database on oral history programmes and PhDs around the UK, to investigate the extent to which oral history is practised and the diversity of contexts and ways in which it is being used in Higher Education Institutions in Britain. PhD student and SIG member Martha Beard identified the need for "Corridor Conversations", online spaces where members can discuss and share the questions and issues that arise in Higher Education research; the Nottingham Trent University online seminars organised by Chris Reynolds and Verusca Calabria have been very successful, and will resume with the new year; and issues such as university ethical review procedures, initiated by Amy Tooth-Murphy, are raised and discussed.

This is scratching the surface. The work of the SIG members eventuated in a special LGBTQ issue of the Journal. There is the possibility of a new Schools SIG. Groups.io gives the possibility of sub-Forums, in which special interest networks can be developed, before making the leap into full-blown SIGdom. And generally, the creativity and enthusiasm of the members, coming together around their shared interests, is leading oral history and the Society in exciting directions.

Thank you very much to all the officers and members who are making all of this, and more possible.

Craig Fees, with help and input from the SIGs

August 2021 (compiled by Rob Perks)