National Life Stories

When many people think about history, they think about books and documents, castles or stately homes. In fact history is all around us, in our own families and communities, in the living memories and experiences of older people. Everyone has a story to tell about their life which is unique to them. Whilst some people have been involved in momentous historical events, regardless of age or importance we all have interesting life stories to share. Unfortunately, because memories die when people do, if we don’t record what people tell us, that history can be lost forever.

National Life Stories was established in 1987 and its mission is: ‘To record the first-hand experiences of as wide a cross section of society as possible, to preserve the recordings, to make them publicly available and encourage their use’. As an independent charitable trust within the Oral History Section of the British Library, NLS’s key focus and expertise has been oral history fieldwork. For nearly thirty years it has initiated a series of innovative interviewing programmes funded almost entirely from sponsorship, charitable and individual donations and voluntary effort.

Each collection comprises recorded in-depth interviews of a high standard, plus content summaries and, in some cases, transcripts to assist users. Each individual life story interview is several hours long, covering family background, childhood, education, work, leisure and later life. Access is provided via the Sound and Moving Image Catalogue at http://sami.bl.uk and a growing number of interviews are made available for remote web use through British Library Sounds at http://sounds.bl.uk.

Alongside the British Library’s other oral history holdings, which stretch back to the beginning of the twentieth century, NLS’s recordings form a unique and invaluable record of people’s lives in Britain today.

Chair’s Foreword

This year National Life Stories celebrates its thirtieth anniversary. Since 1987 NLS has achieved a great deal, contributing to the evolution of one of the world’s most significant oral history collections at the British Library, now numbering many tens of thousands of audio testimonies in frequent use by all kinds of users. We devote a major part of this year’s Review to looking back at our major projects, highlighting some of the over 2,800 interviews which mark out National Life Stories’ unique methodology.

Few people predicted back in 1987 that there would be a means of sharing and communicating personal experience through a globally-linked network, and that tiny hand-held devices would have the power of the mainframe computers of the 1980s. Technology has transformed not only how we now gather and archive our interviews, but also in how we share them. Back in 1987 a card catalogue was the only finding aid (and a poor one at that), now we can search online interview content summaries and transcripts, locate what we need and listen to the recording, all from a mobile phone anywhere in the world. This has liberated content to ever-growing numbers of users, but it has also perceptibly shifted the relationship with our interviewees and more now request embargoes or partial closure of their interviews. Our challenge is to ensure that we continue to collect life stories ethnically and sensitively, and tailor our online access accordingly.

Recent news of a major grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the British Library’s ‘Save Our Sounds’ initiative will ensure that all the remaining NLS analogue recordings are digitised for online access over the next five years, alongside many other oral history collections both from the BL’s archive and from ten regional centres around the UK. We expect the initiative to be transformative of the UK’s audio heritage and of people’s awareness of the richness of sound resources.

National Life Stories’ challenges ahead will focus again on our new collecting areas: Legal Lives and City Lives Revisited, for which we still seek significant start-up funding. Our electricity project came to a successful conclusion and we now turn to fundraising once more for An Oral History of British Science. Our exhibition at Tate Britain, featuring audio clips from our Artists’ Lives collection, continues until 2018. We’re proud to be working in partnership with Tate, with the Henry Moore Institute, and with the generous support of the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation.

Finally let me thank our donors, trustees and advisors for another successful year, and our staff for their hard work.

Dame Jenny Abramsky
Chair of Trustees
Review of 2016
Rob Perks
Director of National Life Stories

Collections and projects
It has been an auspicious year for Artists’ Lives. Since 1990 the project has been run in association with Tate and to celebrate its maturity, an exhibition – Artists’ Lives: Speaking of the Kasmin Gallery – opened at Tate Britain on 28 November 2016 and will run until 2018, curated by Cathy Courtney and Elena Crippa, ably supported by Cai Parry-Jones. The centrepiece of the gallery is four touchscreens featuring over 260 audio clips with accompanying images from private collections, encouraging visitors to consider the relationship between a dealer, artists and a national institution such as Tate. Extracts from recordings include Richard Smith, Gillian Ayres, Richard Burton (from Architects’ Lives), Anthony Cara, current and former Tate staff as well as Kasmin himself. Born in 1934, Kasmin established the Kasmin Gallery in 1963 and has been involved in London’s art scene for over fifty years. His life story interview was recorded between 2008 and 2017 by Monica Petch and Cathy Courtney. Kasmin’s engaging recall of people, events and conversations is extraordinary. The extracts include Marta Fraser, Gillian Ayres, Anthony Burton and Elena Crippa, ably supported by Cai Parry-Jones. The exhibition was covered extensively by the Financial Times, Christie’s Magazine and the Twentieth Century Society Journal. To coincide with the exhibition opening we added a further 130 interviews to the Artists’ Lives project on BL Sounds available online globally, making 211 in total. Cathy reflects on the Tate exhibition in more detail later in this Review.

We continue to work closely with the Henry Moore Institute (HMI). HMI’s Jon Wood has recently concluded his recording with sculptor Garth Evans, and Ann Sproat’s recording with performance artist Shirley Cameron is nearing completion. New recordings by interviewers Cathy Courtney and Hester Westley for Artists’ Lives include the artist Alan Gouk, Paul Huxley, Stephen McKenna and Laetitia Yhap, the gallantess Anthony Reynolds and Karsten Schubert, and co-founder of the magazine, Art Monthly. Jack Wendler. Recently completed recordings include Jane McAdam Freud, John Mclean and Jane Kasmin. Life stories with Yinka Shonibare (supported by the Yale Center for British Art), pioneer of cybertechnics Roy Ascott and art publisher Hamsjorg Mayer are scheduled to begin shortly. Amongst continuing recordings are those with Phyllida Barlow (who represents Britain at the 2017 Venice Biennale), Nicholas Serota, David Tremlett and Richard Wentworth. For an Oral History of British Science and in collaboration with the project ‘Science and Religion: Exploring the Spectrum’, led by Newman University, Birmingham and York University, Toronto, and funded by the Templeton Religion Trust, Paul Merchant continued the life stories of scientists and others who have written, spoken and broadcast on relations between science and religion. He concluded interviews with evolutionary psychologist Nicholas Humphrey whose career includes work on blindsight in monkeys, the psychology of nuclear armament and the nature and function of consciousness; academic and broadcaster in the relatively new field of ‘religious studies’ (distinct from theology) John Bowker; statistician David Bartholomew; ‘radical theologian’ Don Cupitt; best-known for the controversial book Taking Leave of God (1980) and as writer and presenter of BBC television series ‘Sea of Faith’ (1984); biologist and writer on science and society Steven Rose; former members (Yonick Wilks, Fraser Watts; Chris and Isabel Clarke) of the Epiphany Philosophers – a group active in Cambridge between 1950 and 1980; and Thought how to have inspired Iris Murdoch’s The Bell (1958); atheist Hebrew Bible scholar Francesca Stavrakopoulou (writer and presenter of BBC 2’s ‘The Bible’s Buried Secrets’); BBC Radio science programme maker Martin Redfern; the astronaut and Imam Usama Hasan who leads Islamic studies at the counter-extremism think tank ‘Quilliam’ and is an outspoken critic of creationism in Islam; theologian Sarah Coakley; science journalist Ehsan Masood; science writer and cultural critic Ziauddin Sardar; and pioneer in molecular biology and epigenetics Marilyn Monk. The interviews have been generously supported by the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation.

One of the gaps identified in the evaluation report for an Oral History of British Science was around ‘big science’. To address this Tom Lean initiated a short series of interviews focusing on the Daresbury Laboratory near Warrington, which has been home to a community of scientists clustered around its large-scale particle accelerators since the 1960s. Daresbury was established as almost a mini-British CERN and developed particular expertise in synchrotrons, a type of circular particle accelerator that generates an intense light, mostly as x-rays, billions of times brighter than the sun. Synchrotrons have been used for everything from fundamental physics research to jet engine design, to examining the structure of the HIV virus. Interviewees so far include particle physicist John Dainton (son of another NLS interviewee, chemist Lord Frederick Dainton); and Ian Munro, a pioneer of using synchrotron radiation as a biophysics research tool. Tom has also been interviewing Lord Alec Broers, a pioneer in scanning electron microscopy and its use in fabricating tiny structures, later also Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University and a member of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology.

Emmeline Ledgerwood, our AHRC collaborative doctoral student in conjunction with the University of Leicester, has continued to research the history of government research establishments (GREs) since the 1970s. Some GREs were operated directly by government departments and the scientists within them were employed as civil servants in a separate scientific class. However there were few scientists in the upper tiers of the service in Whitehall, and little has been written about how the structure of the service may have affected the movement of scientists into its top ranks. She is also looking at what has been written about how these scientists engaged with trade unionism during the transition from being civil servants to employees in the private sector.

Our Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry in the UK was concluded with a successful video shoot at Oldbury nuclear power station and some final interviews that have filled the gaps in its coverage. The project’s trade union perspective was enhanced through a recording with John Edmonds, former General Secretary of the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union (GMB) between 1986 and 2003. As GMB national officer for the energy industries in the 1970s Edmonds had insightful first-hand experiences of the sector’s industrial relations machinery. His memories from the trade union side of the negotiating table mesh well with recollections in other interviews from the industry’s managers. He and Tom Lean share their thoughts about the interview later in this Review.
Our long-running Architects’ Lives added a recording with architectural historian Joseph Rykwert (born 1926), who came to England from Poland in 1939 and studied architecture at the Bartlett and the Architectural Association. A radical writer and teacher, he created a new course at the University of Essex before moving to posts at Cambridge and at the University of Pennsylvania; he was awarded the RIBA Gold Medal in 1974. Yeang continued his work on the Eden Project and Waterloo International, which shaped the London skyline such as the headquarters of MI6 and the redevelopment of Charing Cross station, which the firm is currently working on for the Crossrail. He talked about the breakthrough in his work while he was on a fellowship in Japan and the subsequent success of his gestural porcelain pieces when he returned and set up a workshop in Cumbria. Eden started his career running a local pottery making tableware and commissioned pieces in traditional slipware before changing course in his fifties and deciding to study at the Royal College of Art (RCA), where he started experimenting with additive manufacture, also known as 3-D printing. This resulted in 3-D printed vessels which propelled his work into the fine art market. Michael explained how his skills as a potter had transferred to the digital world. Frances also completed her recording with Julia Manheim, who made her name as a jeweller but moved into larger body-worn pieces, cardboards and newspaper sculptures, architecture, public art and now video.

Edmund de Waal’s long interview was finished in which he talked about the breakthrough in his work while he was on a fellowship in Japan and the subsequent success of his gestural porcelain pieces when he returned and set up a workshop in London. He described how he moved into the world of fine art with large scale installations of porcelain vessels made in response to architectural settings including the Gerffrye Museum, Kettle’s Yard and Chatsworth House and how he combines his work as a potter and a writer since the huge and unexpected success of his memoir The Hare with Amber Eyes. Frances also completed recordings with calligrapher Ewan Clayton in which he talked about his book on the history of writing, The Golden Thread and his thoughts on the future of documents, and with two furniture designers Jane Dillon and David Colwell, who were exact contemporaries at the RCA and the stars of that intake, but took diverging paths. Jane went to Italy to work with Ettore Sottsass at Olivetti and then set up a design company with her husband Charles which produced a range of ingenious designs for lighting and office furniture, mostly produced by European manufacturers. David eventually moved to Wales to concentrate on making sustainable batch production chairs out of steam bent ash. Both tell the same tale of conservative and unimaginative British manufacturers and the decimation of the manufacturing base in the 1980s, which they believe has hampered innovative design in this country. Jane and David are both dyslexic and give thoughtful accounts of their struggles to read but also of their ability to appreciate spaces, volume and movement, which suggests that dyslexia may be an asset in design.

Elizabeth Wright’s interview with furniture designer Luke Hughes has continued, covering the period when Luke Hughes and Company began to create architectural interiors for large organisations. He describes the methods he uses for understanding corporate cultures and translating this knowledge into furniture and fittings. This sensitivity towards people and the spaces they inhabit is also apparent in his description of designing the halls of residence at St Hugh’s College, Oxford and Pembroke College, Cambridge. Liz also interviewed the weaver Stella Benjamin at her loft studio in St Ives. The recording covers Stella’s childhood in Kent, her first job in insurance and her decision to study art at the Regent Street Polytechnic. Stella describes the process of dying...
Omani sheep and goats’ hair yarn and the technique that she uses to weave rugs on a specially constructed Navaho frame loom. Recently, Liz has started a recording with silver smith and practitioner Simone ten Hompel.

A scoping study for our proposed City Lives Revived project was commissioned in late 2016, kindly sponsored by Nicholas Goodison. We expect to use this as the basis for taking this programme area forward over the next year.

Public profile and access

The sound post at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, funded by the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation, is open to the public and provides comprehensive playback facilities. It has, to date, carried edited Artists’ Lives extracts from John Latham, Stuart Brisley, Bryan Kneale and Liliane Lijn’s recordings to accompany exhibitions.

Thanks to generous support from the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation, this year we were able to award two National Life Story Goodison Fellowships researching Artists’ Lives, one offered to staff, students and alumni of The Courtauld Institute of Art. Hester Westley and Isabel Sutton were awarded the Courtauld fellowship to explore a history of Crown Court, the Bath School of Art and Design, in Wiltshire. The second fellowship, awarded to Michael Bird, will result in a book about the post-war developments of art in Britain, linking social, political and art world themes, and an exhibition at The Lightbox. We thank using audio extracts from Artists’ Lives. The three Fellows report in more detail later in this Review.

The team have again been busy with public talks, training and publications over the past year. In May Paul Merchant gave a paper entitled ‘The composed self of the scientist and Christian’, drawing on his interviews, at the conference ‘Public Perceptions of Science and Religion’ at the University of California, San Diego. I chaired and spoke at an event entitled ‘What happens when oral history goes public? Oral history online’, as part of the International Oral History Association conference in Bengaluru, India, in June; and I also gave the Annual Godrey Archives Lecture on business and corporate oral history at the Cihatpati Shriji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalya (CSWVS) Museum, formerly the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, in Mumbai in July. Also in July Cathie Courtenay made a presentation at a Cathy-funded seminar in London for architects and historians who are working on conservation management plans for major twentieth century buildings in London, at the British Library. Thomas Littledale spoke at an event to celebrate the BL’s purchase of the complete works of poet and writer, Ken Campbell. Paul Merchant presented a paper on the science and religion interviews at a conference ‘Science in Public: Past, Present and Future’ at the University of Kent in July. Tom Leonard presented a public talk about our ‘Voices of Science’ web resource at the British Science Association Festival of Science in September, and also did an interview for BBC Radio Wales about the project. Sally holster gave papers at the three Societies Conference in Edinburgh, Canada in June, entitled ‘From metallurgy to materials science: exploring disciplinary transitions through scientist’s life stories’; and another, ‘Making oral histories accessible to diverse audiences: challenges, opportunities, lessons’, at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in November.

Continuing from previous years, Cathy and Naomi Dillon hosted a group of Year Five architectural students from the Architectural Association. Oral history has now become an established methodology for students looking to research creative practice. The A4’s Ed Bottoms commented: ‘the seminar is always one of the most important sessions for our students’ who are encouraged to use or make oral history recordings as part of their final year dissertation. The Survey of London has resumed its oral history project of the architectural survey of the former County of London, founded in 1894 by Charles Robert Ashbee, an Arts-and-Crafts architect and social thinker, and motivated by a desire to record and preserve London’s ancient monuments. The first volume was published in 1900, but the completion of the series remains far in the future. It was initially a volunteer effort, but later became a government-sponsored project, administered since 2013 by the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London. To date the Survey has focused on documentary evidence to record London’s architectural history, but their latest focus on Whitechapel will use oral history for the first time. As Survey staff start interviewing, trainer Rib Davies and Naomi spent a day introducing oral history as a tool to add to the historical record.

In terms of publications, Tom Leonard and Sally Horrocks have written an article entitled ‘Good nuclear neighbours: The electricity industry and the communication of nuclear power to the public, 1950s – 1980s’ for publication in the Journal of Science Communication. It uses several electricity interviews alongside other sources including newspapers and archival material from The National Archives and the Electricity Council. The team also continues to work with the Oral History Society, working on the science and religion interviews at a conference ‘Science and Religion in the Public Sphere, 1950s – 1980s’ due for publication in 2017 following her maternity leave, which was very effectively covered by Cari Parry-Jones. Emily Hewitt, our assistant Archivist left the team in July to take up a new post at Swansea University. We thank them both for their hard-work and dedication. We also thank our longstanding and valued interviewer Louise Brodie, who has decided to retire. Over many years Louise has interviewed on a wide variety of projects, including Horticulture, Legal Lives and Pioneers of Charity and Social Welfare. In June we were very sad to hear of the sudden and unexpectedly death of Matt Casswell, our video cameraman, with whom we have been working over many years, notably on the science and electricity projects.

We were deeply saddened to learn, shortly before going to press, of the death of Audie Mundy, who has been a supporter of NLS since its inception, when she was one of the volunteer interviewers working on the Living Memory of the Jewish Community. She continued to interview and to summarise recordings for us, always with commitment and not a little dry wit. In her retirement she proof-read our Annual Review, and if there are mistakes in this one it may well be because we lack her acute eye. Her unfailing belief in the value of our work gave us steady encouragement, and we were relieved when, after much persuasion, she at last agreed to be recorded herself. She is greatly missed.

Our Trustees and Advisors are invaluable in supporting and guiding our main collecting activities and there have been several changes this year. After many years as Trustee, Advisor and Chair of our Authors’ Lives Advisory Committee, Dame Penelope Lively has stepped down. Also leaving after a long term as a Trustee is Dorothy Sheridan. We thank them both warmly for all their dedicated support and enthusiasm for NLS. Lexley Knox has also indicated that, due to increased work commitments, she may have to withdraw as a Trustee. We are delighted that she and Dorothy have both agreed to continue as Advisors.


Liz has continued to interview costume designer Deidre Clancy for The Legacy of the English Stage Company, covering the beginning of her work in opera, as well as her collaborations with set designers including John Gunter and Hayden Griffin – both interviewed for the Oral History of British Theatre Design. Clancy reflects on her costume designs for An Admiring Night’s Dream directed by Bill Boyd at the National Theatre in 1983 and on working in Japan on a production of Macbeth for the Shoshiku Company in 1987. The team continues to work closely with the London School of Economics on a project to produce an oral history of the National Theatre in the 1970s onwards, has moved into its final stage as a joint project with the London School of Economics and Political Science, supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), ‘Exploring the social world of Crown Court clerks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries’, has, to date, productions of Macbeth for the Shoshiku Company in 1987. The team continues to work closely with the London School of Economics on a project to produce an oral history of the National Theatre in the 1970s onwards, has moved into its final stage as a joint project with the London School of Economics and Political Science, supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), ‘Exploring the social world of Crown Court clerks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries’, has, to date, productions of Macbeth for the Shoshiku Company in 1987.

Liz is also working on an oral history project on the city of London, a project which is currently in its final stages, supported by funds from the National Lottery. We have been working with the three French-speaking Fellows of the History of Science at the University College London. To date the Survey has focused on documentary evidence to record London’s architectural history, but their latest focus on Whitechapel will use oral history for the first time. As Survey staff start interviewing, trainer Rib Davies and Naomi spent a day introducing oral history as a tool to add to the historical record.

In addition to our regular publications, the Oral History of Legal Lives has been launched in 2017 following her maternity leave, which was very effectively covered by Cari Parry-Jones. Emily Hewitt, our assistant Archivist left the team in July to take up a new post at Swansea University. We thank them both for their hard-work and dedication. We also thank our longstanding and valued interviewer Louise Brodie, who has decided to retire. Over many years Louise has interviewed on a wide variety of projects, including Horticulture, Legal Lives and Pioneers of Charity and Social Welfare. In June we were very sad to hear of the sudden and unexpectedly death of Matt Casswell, our video cameraman, with whom we have been working over many years, notably on the science and electricity projects.

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Oral history at the British Library: what else has been happening?

For An Oral History of British Photography this year Shirley Read interviewed collector and curator Eric Franck who talked of growing up in London before being evacuated to America during the Second World War. He discussed his work as a collector and dealer in fine art photography, the need to keep the two activities separate, the time it can take to recognise a great artist, his friendships with the artists he exhibits including Richard Hamilton and Josef Koudelka, the impact of the internet on the gallery world, auctions and gallery sales and working at international art fairs and festivals such as Frieze London and Paris Photo. He talked also of his sister, the Magnum photographer Martine Franck, and his husband Henri Cartier Bresson and of organising his sister’s first major one-person show for the first Paris Photo Fair in 1996. He mentioned the Tate’s photography policy, their photography collection and the donation of his and his wife, Louise’s, collection of photographs of London to Tate, where they made a popular exhibition during the 2012 Olympics.

Rock photographer Jill Furmanovsky recalled her childhood in Bulawayo, in what was then Rhodesia, the daughter of refugees from Hitler’s Germany and earlier pogroms in Lithuania. She described her architect father’s hobbies of music and photography and the magic of watching him work in the darkroom when she was a child. She talked of her difficulty in adjusting when the family moved to what was then Rhodesia, the daughter of refugees from Hitler’s Germany and earlier pogroms in Lithuania. She described her architect father’s hobbies of music and photography and the magic of watching him work in the darkroom when she was a child. She talked of her difficulty in adjusting when the family moved to London, of spending time outside Abbey Road studios as a teenager waiting for the Beatles and of her first photograph, an instant image of Paul McCartney on the roof of the Apple office in London, of spending time outside Abbey Road studios as a teenager waiting for the Beatles and of her first photograph, an instant image of Paul McCartney on the roof of the Apple office in London.

Max Kandhola grew up in Birmingham with a family background in the Punjab. He discussed Sikhism and the changing attitudes of both his own and the broader society, reflecting on his approach to showing and collecting photographs. The autobiographical aspects of his work were explored, in particular his documentation of his father’s death from cancer and the resulting book and exhibition, Illustration of Life, and how this led him to make a further work, Flatland, about the landscape of the Punjab as seen through European eyes. He talked too of the way The Aura of Boxing grew out of his family’s interest in boxing and his own and his brother’s need to defend themselves while growing up. He reflected on his pride and pleasure in his work as course leader of the BA in photography at Nottingham Trent University, one of the oldest photography degrees in the country, of his documentation of the university, the course itself, of his teaching methods and of what students teach him.

Tom Stoddart talked of a childhood in Northumberland and the influence on him of the working ethos of local fishermen. Starting work on a local newspaper on his sixteenth birthday, he knew he had found what he wanted to do and later moved to London to work in Fleet Street before going freelance when he could no longer tolerate the sorts of stories he was being given. He spoke in detail of the many international photography and having a professional camera gave him a confidence he hadn’t had before. As a result of this he joined the professional photographers at a Yes concert at the Rainbow Theatre, was offered a job that evening and became a rock photographer while still at college studying textile design. She talked also of what it meant to be a woman in a predominantly male world and of photographing Stevie Wonder, the Who and Pink Floyd.

There are now nearly seventy interviews in the British Library Staff Oral History collection and the latest batch was particularly strong on special collections with Katharine Hayden interviewing Frances Wood (Lead Curator of Chinese Collections), David Breach (Head of Philatelic Collections), John Goldfinch (Head of Incunabula), Christopher Wright (Head of Manuscripts), Geoff West (Head of Hispanic Collections) and Peter Barber (Head of Maps and Topographical Material). From these came detailed accounts of how specialist curators maintain and develop the collections through the behind-the-scenes activities of acquiring, cataloguing and conserving, whilst at the same time managing the public-facing roles of making the collections available to the widest possible audience. Katharine was also able to interview Brian Lang, the Chief Executive on whose watch the protracted and often painful process of completing the St Pancras building was undertaken and who oversaw the successful move of the British Library to its present-day home. Andy Stephens (Secretary to the Board of the British Library and Head of International Engagement) and Harry Wanless (Property and Construction Manager) both had important roles in the development at St Pancras, and gave insights into some of the non-curatorial functions involved in running the Library. The British Library is, of course, not confined to London and Gillian Riley (Document Supply Manager) spent her entire career at Boston Spa. Through her recording Gillian told the story of how the National Lending Library for Science and Technology became the British Library Document Supply Centre and how the various functions undertaken at Boston Spa evolved and adapted in response to changes in demand for material and technological advances.

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Max Kandhola grew up in Birmingham with a family background in the Punjab. He discussed Sikhism and the changing attitudes of both his own and the broader society, reflecting on his approach to showing and collecting photographs. The autobiographical aspects of his work were explored, in particular his documentation of his father’s death from cancer and the resulting book and exhibition, Illustration of Life, and how this led him to make a further work, Flatland, about the landscape of the Punjab as seen through European eyes. He talked too of the way The Aura of Boxing grew out of his family’s interest in boxing and his own and his brother’s need to defend themselves while growing up. He reflected on his pride and pleasure in his work as course leader of the BA in photography at Nottingham Trent University, one of the oldest photography degrees in the country, of his documentation of the university, the course itself, of his teaching methods and of what students teach him.

Tom Stoddart talked of a childhood in Northumberland and the influence on him of the working ethos of local fishermen. Starting work on a local newspaper on his sixteenth birthday, he knew he had found what he wanted to do and later moved to London to work in Fleet Street before going freelance when he could no longer tolerate the sorts of stories he was being given. He spoke in detail of the many international photography and having a professional camera gave him a confidence he hadn’t had before. As a result of this he joined the professional photographers at a Yes concert at the Rainbow Theatre, was offered a job that evening and became a rock photographer while still at college studying textile design. She talked also of what it meant to be a woman in a predominantly male world and of photographing Stevie Wonder, the Who and Pink Floyd.

There are now nearly seventy interviews in the British Library Staff Oral History collection and the latest batch was particularly strong on special collections with Katharine Hayden interviewing Frances Wood (Lead Curator of Chinese Collections), David Breach (Head of Philatelic Collections), John Goldfinch (Head of Incunabula), Christopher Wright (Head of Manuscripts), Geoff West (Head of Hispanic Collections) and Peter Barber (Head of Maps and Topographical Material). From these came detailed accounts of how specialist curators maintain and develop the collections through the behind-the-scenes activities of acquiring, cataloguing and conserving, whilst at the same time managing the public-facing roles of making the collections available to the widest possible audience. Katharine was also able to interview Brian Lang, the Chief Executive on whose watch the protracted and often painful process of completing the St Pancras building was undertaken and who oversaw the successful move of the British Library to its present-day home. Andy Stephens (Secretary to the Board of the British Library and Head of International Engagement) and Harry Wanless (Property and Construction Manager) both had important roles in the development at St Pancras, and gave insights into some of the non-curatorial functions involved in running the Library. The British Library is, of course, not confined to London and Gillian Riley (Document Supply Manager) spent her entire career at Boston Spa. Through her recording Gillian told the story of how the National Lending Library for Science and Technology became the British Library Document Supply Centre and how the various functions undertaken at Boston Spa evolved and adapted in response to changes in demand for material and technological advances.
Rob Perks, Director of National Life Stories

National Life Stories (NLS) celebrates its thirtieth anniversary in 2017. In the year that Paul Thompson and Asa Briggs launched National Life Story Collection (NLSC) Margaret Thatcher was re-elected for a third term in government, Everton topped the first division of the football league, channel tunnel construction began, and one person a day was dying from AIDS in the UK. 1987 was marked by a number of disasters: the sinking of the ferry Herald of Free Enterprise, the Hungerford massacre, the ‘Great Storm’, and the King’s Cross underground fire. On ‘Black Monday’ in October the Wall Street crash wiped £50 billion off the value of shares on the London stock exchange. Inflation was 4.2%, economic growth 5.5%. Penelope Lively’s Moon Tiger and Ian McEwan’s The Child in Time were published, and a record-breaking 26 million people tuned into the Christmas edition of Coronation Street. The first ‘house’ music track went to number one in the singles chart, Rick Astley’s ‘Never Gonna Give You Up’ was 1987’s best-selling single, and Whitney Houston’s ‘I Wanna Dance With Somebody’ was the first single to be released on CD (compact disc), though it was to be another two years before NLS recorded all its interviews on analogue cassette (rather than open-reel) and another thirteen years before it recorded digitally, only becoming fully digital in 2005.

From its modest beginnings NLS has grown significantly in ambition and scope. Working as an integral part of the British Library’s Oral History Department, it has raised more than £50 billion off the value of shares on the London stock exchange. Inflation was 4.2%, economic growth 5.5%. Penelope Lively’s Moon Tiger and Ian McEwan’s The Child in Time were published, and a record-breaking 26 million people tuned into the Christmas edition of Coronation Street. The first ‘house’ music track went to number one in the singles chart, Rick Astley’s ‘Never Gonna Give You Up’ was 1987’s best-selling single, and Whitney Houston’s ‘I Wanna Dance With Somebody’ was the first single to be released on CD (compact disc), though it was to be another two years before NLS recorded all its interviews on analogue cassette (rather than open-reel) and another thirteen years before it recorded digitally, only becoming fully digital in 2005.

Michael Verey (1912–2000, C409/98) was celebrated as a leading merchant banker, described in his Telegraph obituary as ‘a persuasive behind-the-scenes operator at the highest levels of the City’. After Eton and Cambridge, in 1934, through family connections, Michael took a job at the merchant bank, Helbert, Wagg. He joined a world concentrated in the Square Mile of London, where bowler hats were uniform, the Bank of England wielded enormous power, regulations kept foreign firms at bay, the most concentrated in the Square Mile of London, where bowler hats were uniform, the Bank of England wielded enormous power, regulations kept foreign firms at bay, the most

Cathy Courtney

Since City Lives was active, the dramatic events which have avalanched the financial sector emphasise the value of oral history. Many of the recordings represent inherited values and assumptions that would be impossible for individuals to hold with confidence today; the very vocabulary signifies a subtext beyond the overt subject matter. Yet only twenty years have passed since the project ended. As Brexit casts a further shadow, City Lives gives the listener direct access to a vanished mind-set.

Michael Verey

Pharmaceutical advertising on David Verey

Photograph of Michael Verey and Michael Verey

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Joining the bank at a junior level, it was assumed that Michael would rise: ‘It was quite likely that clerks would stay doing the same work all their lives. ‘Upstairs’, where I went after about two years, was marginally more interesting’. In 1948, returning following courageous service in the Second World War, he was made a partner.

‘Either at lunch or dinner one saw a lot of people from Eton or Cambridge who had come into the City. At all the leading firms there was someone, more or less a contemporary, that I knew and liked. As they grew up in their firms and I grew up in mine we remained friends, so it was a good relationship later on.’

Surprisingly, Michael was an enthusiastic player in ripping a hole in this seemingly impermeable network, during what came to be known as the British Aluminium War – effectively the City’s first hostile takeover bid – instigated by a relative outsider, Siegmund Warburg of the investment bank, S G Warburg & Company:

‘I wouldn’t have worked for Siggy Warburg... He was frightfully concerned about change and getting things properly organised, and most of us didn’t give a damn about that. We took a bit of change in our stride but we certainly didn’t want too much. He was an upsetter of the Establishment. He wasn’t a member of it and he didn’t like it and was trying to get rid of it... the Establishment was dismissive and he was regarded as a squirt, an upstart. Very few people would have regarded him as a personal friend. People took off his foreign accent.”

Helbert, Wagg sided with Warburg in the 1958/9 Battle:

‘The difference was that until then there weren’t really any unfriendly takeovers. You went along to the merchant banker, say Barings, to say ‘We have plans and intend to make a takeover bid for your customer’... All very polite and gentlemanly. After the British Aluminium business, takeover bids were made by letter slammed on a table at eight o’clock in the morning without so much as a by-your-leave... So there was a deterioration in manners.”

The die was cast. Ironically, in a move Michael passionately opposed, Helbert, Wagg was effectively taken over (though it was described as a merger) by J Henry Schroder & Co in 1960. Michael became Chairman of J Henry Schroder Wagg & Co in 1972. He retired in 1977.

Living Memory of the Jewish Community (1988–2000)
Cai Parry-Jones

Recorded between 1988 and 2000, the Living Memory of the Jewish Community (C410) is one of several oral history collections held by the British Library relating to Jewish Holocaust experience and Jewish life in Britain. Comprising 188 recordings, the interviews explore the life stories of Jewish refugees who came to Britain before and during the Second World War to escape Nazism, Holocaust survivors
I remember that first day… (a) cart where they picked up of the Lodz Ghetto:

In one part of the interview Birkin recalls her first impressions and survivors’ experiences at each stage of forced relocation. Eventually liberated from Bergen Belsen concentration camp in 1945 and settled in England in 1946. Birkin was moving recordings I encountered in the collection was Edith Birkin, ‘The last goodbye’. Courtesy of Dennis Maryk

who migrated to Britain after 1945, and their children. Many of the interviews were conducted by volunteers in London, Manchester and Glasgow, recruited and trained by Jennifer Wingate and Bill Williams, who led the project.

As well as conducting my own oral history interviews as part of my doctoral research into the history of Jews in Wales (now archived at St Fagans National History Museum, Cardiff), NLS’s Living Memory of the Jewish Community proved to be an invaluable resource. Perhaps one of the most moving recordings I encountered in the collection was Edith Birkin’s interview with Katherine Thompson (C410/030). Born in Prague in 1927, Birkin was sent by the Nazis to live in a Jewish ghetto in Lodz in 1941 and was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in 1944, before being forced to participate in a death march to Flossenbürg concentration camp (approximately 400 miles). Birkin was eventually liberated from Bergen Belsen concentration camp by the British in 1945 and settled in England in 1946.

What is remarkable about this interview is the multitude of journeys that Birkin was forced to undertake during the Holocaust, and her testimony sheds light on both the victims’ and survivors’ experiences at each stage of forced relocation. In one part of the interview Birkin recalls her first impressions of the Lodz Ghetto:

“I remember that first day… (a) cart where they picked up the dead people, you know, when people died they came and collected all the dead people from the rooms or out in the street, just shoved them onto this sort of, like a cart, took them away. And people standing outside wailing, you know, if a relative died. And get these people to collect them and then they stood out there wailing. It was very, very frightening because people didn’t do that in Czechoslovakia, all this wailing and moaning and shouting and crying and screaming and all that.”

For some survivors, writing about their Holocaust experiences has proved to be extremely beneficial as a coping mechanism for their trauma. Having published a novel on the subject, Edith also felt the need to express her psychological and emotional feelings visually and this resulted in a series of moving and unsettling paintings, one of which (above) was used as the cover of the teaching resource pack which emerged from the Living Memory of the Jewish Community collection in 1994:

“I wrote a book about my experiences. And people didn’t want to know anymore because too much was written… I suddenly thought why not, you know, put those experiences into pictures… Because it was such a strong subject. It was such an impossible thing. The only way to do it was sort of in a modern idiom, expressionist idiom. Where you can do what you like, express it in your own way.”

Following the main programme of interviews NLS initiated a series with the second generation of Holocaust survivors and as part of this Edith’s daughter, Amanda, was recorded by NLS in 1991 (C410/111), two years after Edith’s original interview. Born in London, she details her experiences as a child of a Holocaust survivor and her attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the traumas her mother endured. Both Edith and Amanda Birkin’s interviews are available to listen to online via the BL Sounds website.

**Artists’ Lives** (1990– )

Cathy Courtney

“If it will do, it won’t do.”

(The text, a spur to rigour, that Jon Thompson had on his studio wall, a quotation from his grandfather, an ecclesiastical woodcarver)

Jon Thompson’s contribution to Artists’ Lives (1993– 2016, C466/312) embodies the complexity of his character, the story of his achievement as an artist (primarily as a painter but also using a variety of other mediums, including photography, text and installations) and the considerable influence of his role as a teacher, curator and writer. The high public profile of his Goldsmiths students – including Damien Hirst, Steve McQueen, Sarah Lucas and Yinka Shonibare – has tended to displace focus on his own work. His recording helps reset the balance, detailing what he made from the earliest stages to the evolution of his last three shows at the Anthony Reynolds gallery. (Anthony Reynolds’ own NLS recording, C466/374, is in progress).

Jon’s childhood was rooted in Derbyshire, to which he returned at times of crises. There were several of these, related to the continuous interrogation to which he subjected the act of painting and to a deep questioning of himself (during his time on the staff at Goldsmiths he nearly became a Catholic, taking instruction at the Jesuit Church in Farm Street, London, though eventually felt he couldn’t honour this). There were long periods when he didn’t paint and he was criticised when, after early success with shows at the Rowan Gallery, he changed style, a response which inhibited his progress initially. He speaks of undergoing psychoanalysis and of the various intellectual and emotional struggles that he faced. He knew from the age of twelve he was homosexual; it was a topic he could never discuss with his father, and Jon later taking a stand as a conscientious objector created a further breach (his father had been reported missing in action in the Second World War and on his return his young son didn’t recognise him). Jon moved to London, becoming a student at St Martin’s School of Art in 1955, and his memories of the years prior to the 1967 Sexual Offences Act and its aftermath add a vivid layer to his testimony. Here is Jon speaking about the National Gallery’s Landscape with a Man killed by a Snake (c 1648) by Nicolas Poussin (which can be viewed online) in relation to his own 2013 work, Simple Painting (Thinking About Poussin):

“The Man Killed by a Snake, I’ve been totally fascinated by. There’s something about the way the light works, it’s almost like heaven and hell in the same painting so you’ve got this beautiful sunlight bathed landscape and then you’ve got this dark Strygian hole and then you’ve got this strange character who’s attempting to mediate between the two, running across the painting.

“And your ‘Simple Painting (Thinking About Poussin)?’

“That painting is quite complex. It is in the kind of proportion of the Poussin and it’s got slabs of colour moving from left to right, interlocking sometimes, sometimes pushing. I’m fascinated by the way Poussin organises two levels of space, one is like an opera set, where everything is given its place, the other side to it is the way there’s a kind of abstract space which is to do with things pushing and pulling at the surface of the painting. They play those two things interlock is what I was trying to get at.

“How much did you go back to the actual Poussin?

“I went back to the National Gallery and looked at it quite a lot but then I’ve been looking at that quite a lot over the years. Every time I go to the National Gallery, I go to look at it.”


Niamh Dillon

“For me architecture is about inspiration, interpretation, imagination and instinct.”

**Architects’ Lives** focuses on the built environment but also considers the social context in which buildings are commissioned and constructed. Eva Jiricna’s recording (C467/127) captures the range of her work as well as highlighting shifts in the landscape of Europe, the wars and ideological divisions which shaped the continent, and both the impact which foreign architects have had on British architecture and the influence British architects have had internationally.

Eva was born in Czechoslovakia in 1939. It was a newly
My favourite materials are glass and metal. Glass because I love its purity and the way it reflects light, and metal for its durability and versatility. I value these materials for their aesthetic and functional qualities, and I appreciate the way they can be combined to create a harmonious whole.

At the beginning of my career, I was inspired by the glass and metal structures of the early modernists like Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. These architects used glass and steel to create buildings that were both functional and expressive. They believed in the use of these materials to create a new kind of architecture that was modern and progressive. I was drawn to their ideas, and I set out to create my own design proposals that would reflect the spirit of modernism.

In the 1960s, when I was working in Prague, the situation was quite different. The communist regime did not encourage experimentation with new materials, and there was a great deal of pressure to conform to the established norms. Despite this, I managed to sneak a little bit of modernism into my projects, and I was able to create some works that were quite innovative for the time.

In the 1970s, I was able to move to the United Kingdom, where the climate was more conducive to my ideas. I was able to work on a number of important projects, including the restoration of the Millenium Dome and the design of the new staircase at Somerset House. These projects were a testament to my commitment to the use of glass and metal in architecture.

Looking back on my career, I am proud of the way I have been able to use these materials to create buildings that are both beautiful and functional. I believe that architecture should be an expression of the culture and the society that it serves. In this way, I have tried to make a contribution to the development of a new kind of architecture that is both modern and progressive.
“May didn’t really have a job for me at all. However, when I revealed that I was crazy about children’s books and had read a great many, she gave me a book by an author called Peggy Bacon to take home and review as though it was a manuscript coming in. When I read it, I realised that the theme was exactly that of the manuscript I had submitted to her; it was about a boy who sunburned easily and was denied by his peers. I wrote a précis and critique of this book – it was a very good book – and when I handed it in, I said, ‘Miss Massie, I have not read this book before.’ She said, ‘Don’t worry, it’s not plagiarism; this happens all the time. Books for young children are about simple subjects, therefore they recur.’ And she took me on.”

In a publishing world dominated by men, even this taste of the lengthy discussion with May Massie was wonderfully vivid, and bears witness to a generation of women who otherwise may not feature prominently in wider histories of publishing. After working at Viking Press for four years Marni moved to England and spent the next fifteen years raising her family, and it was only through a British-based acquaintance from her time at Viking that she kept her foot in the door of the publishing world, reading manuscripts and completing ad hoc editing. She returned to work first at Hart-Davis (1960-66) and ended her career at Macmillan (1966-78). Here Marni reflects on the various parties a children’s editor must consider, and gives her thoughts into two of the iconic children’s titles of the 1960s (a view with which I have some sympathy):

“As the world has got nastier, people are more and more apprehensive about frightening children. Particularly the Americans, I may say. I don’t know what it is. A sort of self-protective guilt, if you will, on the part of adults. I think children are very tough. The thing that’s so fascinating about children’s books is that you have to balance the child’s enjoyment, the parents’ feelings about what the child should or should not read, and the bookseller’s view of what the parents are going to feel about the book. Not to mention the critics. Between the child and the book there are a number of adults – parents, teachers, librarians, bookellers – all of whom have their own view of what is proper for the child or not.”

“Do you remember deciding not to publish any books because you thought they were unsuitable for children?”

“Yes. When I was at Hart-Davis I didn’t do it, but I did when I was at Viking. I always remembered the title of the manuscript I had submitted was ‘Mushroom Hat’, about a little boy who always had to wear a big sun hat because he got badly sunburned. So I was summoned to Viking by Miss [May] Massie (1883-1966), then the leading children’s editor in New York. I always called her ‘the Queen’. She came from the Midwest and was very upright, with white hair, bright blue eyes and pink cheeks. She had a tremor, so she always had to hold her wrist when signer her name. At that interview I thought, this lady’s going to be dead within a month. Not a bit of it. She was wonderful.”

Jaci奎 Poncelet (born 1947, C960/116) was at the heart of the re-invention of crafts in the 1970s, when art school graduates and bears witness to a generation of women who otherwise may not feature prominently in wider histories of publishing. After working at Viking Press for four years Marni moved to England and spent the next fifteen years raising her family, and it was only through a British-based acquaintance from her time at Viking that she kept her foot in the door of the publishing world, reading manuscripts and completing ad hoc editing. She returned to work first at Hart-Davis (1960-66) and ended her career at Macmillan (1966-78). Here Marni reflects on the various parties a children’s editor must consider, and gives her thoughts into two of the iconic children’s titles of the 1960s (a view with which I have some sympathy):

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technical professionals and specialists and personnel from government and regulatory bodies – and also from the local communities whose stories are so entwined with the rigs that sit nearest to their shores. Together these voices record the major changes which have occurred in the UK oil and gas industry in the twentieth century, focusing particularly on North Sea exploration. Along with intrepid bravery displayed by the deep sea divers and engineers, the collection captures testimony from the voices of those workers, such as caterers and cleaners, who perform routine yet essential tasks that ensure the smooth running of oil rigs.

As the worst offshore oil accident in the history of the industry, it is unsurprising that the Piper Alpha disaster features prominently in the collection. On 6 July 1988 a massive explosion on the Piper Alpha North Sea oil rig killed 167 people, and the collection features – amongst others – the explosion on the Piper Alpha North Sea oil rig killed 167 people, and the collection features – amongst others – the powerful testimony of Bob Ballantyne (1942–2004, C963/53) who survived and vividly recalls how it felt to be alone in the water amidst the inferno:

The testimony of Alan Swinton (1926–2004, C963/134), Chaplain at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary at the time of the disaster, is equally compelling as it gives a different viewpoint on this harrowing day:

"What was your first notion that something was wrong?"

"I was afraid. I was terrified. And I thought ‘oh no, I can’t’. And I thought this was a bad dream that somehow, this was a nightmare. That somehow someone was going to turn this off. And I was gonna wake up and back in the cabin and I was somewhere else. And it never happened. And also I had never been in the North Sea so far away from land. And I thought ‘no way, I’m not gonna do it’..."

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When we were dealing with the garden of remembrance I of designing Michael Tippett's 'New Year':

When we were dealing with the garden of remembrance, I was designing Michael Tippett's 'New Year'. Even when working on a much larger scale in opera, she was used to being in the back of the Hackney Empire, it'll be about just moving in the back of the Hackney Empire, it'll be about a week until we get that set'.

'Ok, well if that's the situation what about this?'

Even when working on a much larger scale in opera, she describes how simple ideas can be the most effective, for example in helping to overcome a difficulty during the process of designing Michael Tippett's 'New Year':

"When we were dealing with the garden of remembrance I said to Michael Tippett, 'I can't seem to design this. I don't know what it is and don't know what it should be.' And he said 'Oh... it's a place where roses are.' And it totally released me. It was quite incredible. It was like one of those magic moments and as he said I could imagine these roses blowing in the wind, floating across the space, just in the air. Almost like lovely fitton wallpaper unravelled with great big cabbage red roses. And that's actually what we did – they were on a gauze, these wonderful roses in the air – and we didn’t need to have anything else."

As Director of the Motley Theatre Design Course for over twenty years, Alison passed on her own knowledge but also worked within a philosophy that has been an important influence on British theatre, originating from the course's founder, Margaret 'Percy' Harris, who was part of the Motley design trio, as well as the work of Jocelyn Herbert at the Royal Court where the priorities and passions are on the Royal Court where the priorities and passions are on the fluid material: text, words, people, casting, theatres, limitations, health and safety, you put it all together and you go, 'We're sorry guys, we're just moving in the back of the Hackney Empire, it'll be about a week until we get that set'.

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"The Motley approach comes from Percy's ideas as much as it comes from how she actually worked – my understanding and interpretation is that the school is inspired by the work of the Royal Court where the priorities and passions are on the text and the performer and we go into the design of every production through the text and the performer. That doesn't mean to say that we don't design, or we don't have scenery, but the absolutely crucial central element to any piece of theatre is what somebody's got to say and who's going to say it. My own philosophy is to be a designer not a decorator and it's a fine line but it's what I've become and what I believe in and so I pass that on."

Alison sums up the essential role of the theatre designer as follows:

"The buzz of being a theatre designer is sorting it all out, making it an extraordinary experience for people to hear and see this story. You start with all this completely uncontrollable fluid material: text, words, people, casting, theatres, limitations, budgets, health and safety, you put it all together and you go, 'Ok, well if that's the situation what about this?'"

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An Oral History Of British Science (2009–)

Paul Merchant

In some ways, Sir Harry Bhadeshia FRS (born 1953, C1379/100) is an atypical interviewee in An Oral History Of British Science (OHBS). He went to a co-educational secondary school, lived for part of his childhood in a flat above a London shop, didn’t take A Levels but worked as a technician and studied part time at college for an Ordinary National Certificate in Sciences, and took his first degree (in metallurgy) at a polytechnic. He was born in Africa to Indian parents and has memories of homes with pet parrots and ‘trees on which mangos were growing’. But in other ways, his life story could easily represent the collection in the way that it tracks so many features of the general culture of British science that OHBS has recorded. He read the Breran and the Dandy, ‘lots and lots of Enid Blyton books’, was a Boy Scout and talks of childhood play in Nairobi in ways that echo many other interviewees. 

And like many other scientists in the collection, Harry regards work as more fun than ‘fun’. Asked about ‘non-work life’ he replied ‘you’re going to be disappointed’, said that he occasionally watches Bruce Willis ‘action movies’, undertakes applied outcomes (including the rails on which the channel tunnel trains run, tank gun barrels and the world’s strongest steel. [...] So once you hear acoustic emissions you think maybe the transmission is happening incredibly fast. [...] So we investigated that further, and that’s how Super Bainite (was invented).’

The thoroughness of apprenticeships shines through the interviews. For craft apprentices it might mean five years of practical training, but even those picked out for student apprenticeships, to be educated as professional engineers, would begin with the same practical basis working on the tools:

“I’ve got my indentures upstairs… they are medieval in their content: the owner declares to look after, to ensure a moral upbringing, to provide. The apprentice must, as it were, honour and obey, apply himself diligently, learn the crafts… whatever else they became as their careers developed, the influence of the apprenticeship and its grounding in practical engineering was a strong influence on many figures from the electricity industry. Career development may have turned them into managers or businessmen, but many would confess to never having stopped being engineers at heart: ‘My apprenticeship was a sheer joy, a sheer excitement, a revelation of what engineering was all about. I’ve often wondered if I’d have gone into medicine or into some other activity, would I have had the same consuming enthusiasm about it all? I don’t really know, but what I do know is that even now, as a retired old trout of seventy-seven, I’m in my workshop and I’m thrill at making stuff.”

I was introduced to the power station because my mother had a weaving friend in the mill, Mrs Ashworth, and her son had got a student apprenticeship at the power station and she said: ‘You’ll never believe it May, they gave him two pairs of overalls.’ And I can remember my mother saying ‘you should go to the power station, they give you overalls…’ I was interviewed in the town hall, and there were three or four men there, but one of them was markedly different… he was the local trades unionist. Lord Citrine (first chairman of the nationalised electricity industry) institutionalised the process of consultation and negotiation with workers’ representatives. At its time, what a wonderful decision it was… it picked up the great value that state industries recognised as the need to care for, to educate, to promote discussions with the labour force. It was, after decades, its great failure and it frustrated me to death, but right at the beginning I was one of those given an apprenticeship partly because a trade union local rep must have said ‘yes he’ll be alright…’ And I entered this closed society… who were cared for, paid well, properly treated, and looked after, and who were trained… Gosh, what an opportunity!

“...One’s apprenticeship was very well planned and was subject to thoughtful design, with a lot of good content, and that was the CEBG at its best.”

Whatever else they became as their careers developed, the influence of the apprenticeship and its grounding in practical engineering was a strong influence on many figures from the electricity industry.
Celebrating Artists’ Lives at Tate Britain

Artists’ Lives: Speaking of the Kasmin Gallery

Cathy Courtney, Project Director, Artists’ Lives

As the twenty-fifth anniversary of Artists’ Lives approached, an idea arose that it might be celebrated in an exhibition at Tate Britain, reaching a wider public, where as well as gallery-goers who sought it out, some would come upon it by chance. We at NLS were delighted (and not a little daunted) when Tate offered us a large gallery for a year. Working with Elena Crippa, Curator Modern and British Contemporary Art at Tate, we seized this opportunity to experiment with an exhibition where the rationale was driven by the audio rather than, more usually, the sound being added in a supportive role to the artworks, almost as an afterthought.

There are now over 380 recordings in Artists’ Lives, with many cross-references tracking between them. I needed to find a narrative that would tell a story embracing some part of Tate’s collection. One of the themes still to be fully explored in the history of twentieth century art is that of the economics of being an artist, the role of the dealer in his or her life and the relationship of our national institutions to the art market.

Thanks in part to a grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation, the relationship of our national institutions to the art market. Thanks in part to a grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation, the relationship of our national institutions to the art market.

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Kasmin’s story forms the backbone to the sound, beginning with his upbringing (he was born John Kaye in 1934, changing his name briefly in 1937 to Count Kasmin when he ran away to New Zealand as a teenager and began to publish poetry, later dropping the Count), his experience of bohemian London in the 1950s, working in Victor Musgrave’s Gallery in the early 1950s, working in Victor Musgrave’s gallery where he met Richard Smith, the photographer Ida Kar. There followed a brief period working for the Kasmin Gallery in New York, and more importantly in his year running Marlborough New London, gallery part of Marlborough Fine Art. It was at this point that he met Richard Smith.

The Kasmin Gallery was the first London commercial space to have an architect-designed interior (by Peter Ahrends and Richard Burton). Kasmin’s recordings detail the running of the gallery, its international character and his relationships with his artists and clients; conversely the artists’ accounts include their perspectives on him, and how the memories of the Tate curators involved in acquisitions of work from him.

Artists’ Lives: Speaking of the Kasmin Gallery runs until January 2018 at Tate Britain.

The audio extracts and photographs are accessed via the four touchscreens in the exhibition area.

As Keeper of The Modern Collection. Gallerist John Kasmin’s recording is one of the longest in NLS’s collection, one of the liveliest and most frank. The Tate was a client of his and several of the artists he represented – including Anthony Caro, Robin Denny, John Latham and Richard Smith – have been recorded for Artists’ Lives. I began to see how extracts from this group could weave together to make a conversation told from many viewpoints.

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Paintings and sculpture by Kasmin’s artists now in Tate’s collection make up the gallery display, with the sound delivered on four screens in a seating area. The British Library’s Tom Ruane edited the 260 extracts with me, and Michael Fisher designed the programme that delivers them alongside photographs to illustrate them on the screens. Two events marked the opening of the exhibition, an ‘in conversation’ between Kasmin and Nicholas Serota on 9 December 2016, chaired by Fiona MacCarthy, and a conference about Artists’ Lives, ‘The Voice of the Artist’, held at the Courtauld Institute on 10 December 2016, organised by the Henry Moore Institute, Tate, NLS and the Courtauld. Speakers included William Boyd, Professor Lisa Tickner and Bruno Wollheim alongside the NLS’s Goodison Fellows (Dr Hester Westley, Isabel Sutton and Michael Bird) and panels representing curators (Dr Elena Crippa, Lisa Le Feuvre, Sam McGuire, chaired by Dr Sarah V Turner) and artists (Paul Huxley and Richard Wentworth, chaired by Dr Jon Wood).

The support of the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation made both the exhibition and the conference possible and the Foundation also generously funded the staff costs that have enabled NLS to put over 200 Artists’ Lives recordings online at http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Artists’ Lives: Speaking of the Kasmin Gallery’ runs until January 2018 at Tate Britain.

Elena Crippa, Curator of Modern and British Contemporary Art, Tate, and co-curator, ‘Artists’ Lives: Speaking of the Kasmin Gallery’

I first learned about Artists’ Lives when I was a doctoral student. I attended an Oral History Society training day at the British Library, a wonderful introduction to the processes, pleasures and technical challenges of making history by granting posterny to the human voice. Later, I listened to various recordings, particularly by artists whose work I loved and yet remained mysterious and challenging, such as Eduardo Paolozzi or Victor Pasmore. Hearing their voices was a way of getting a better sense of the person and what mattered to them, seeking to follow their way of thinking and what propelled their imagination.

When in 2014 Penelope Curtis, Tate Britain’s then Director, asked me to meet Cathy Courtney to discuss the possibility of using Artists’ Lives recordings in the museum, I had no idea what we might achieve. In preparation I mapped the artists interviewed and identified excerpts where they talked specifically about works at Tate’s collection, seeking a simple way of inserting the voices alongside Tate Britain’s displays of the permanent collection.

Cathy’s detailed knowledge of the recordings and the way they intersect meant that she proposed a much more interesting and complex way of using them. Not just fragments of artists’ voices, but extracts creating a constellation of interconnected narratives and weaving the socio-historical backdrop of a past time, its colours and clashing perspectives. As soon as the extension was explored and its mentioned and the particular subject of the gallery he opened in London in the 1960s, I recognised how this narrative could illuminate the display of many works in the Tate. I offered the framework for a presentation that I am thoroughly proud of. It was much loved, and the long post-Second World War period; did justice to the transatlantic nature of art exchanges of the time; and gave insight into the way in which canons evolve through the complex relationship between artists, art dealers, collectors and those forming public collections.

Hearing the extracts was a wonderful journey of discovery, enjoyment and not-infrequent laughter. Voices are always present and affecting. Yet, while remaining personal and honest to each individual’s trajectory, they address not only historical time and social change, but also the mundane aspects of life and work that rarely make it into print. It felt like time travelling, listening to Kasmin’s desolate voice, describing the painful return to London from New Zealand in the 1950s, ‘well before any colours in the streets or any sense of excitement’, only for his tone to become animated as he remembered that ‘it was also the beginning of expression bars’, with people sitting around and talking more. I shan’t forget Anthony Caro describing the friendship and great antagonism between Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, played more. I shan’t forget Anthony Caro describing the friendship and great antagonism between Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, played...
Michael Bird
In among the bruisers: a year of Artists’ Lives

‘I suppose,’ Sandra Blow sighed, when I showed her the first layouts of the book I’d written about her—a book, I fondly imagined, that we had in a sense created together—‘there do have to be words between the pictures.’ Blow’s late friend Roger Hilton was more uncompromising, insisting that ‘Words and paintings don’t go together.’ Bad news for a writer on art.

But think again about Hilton’s testy aphorism. Art, like poetry, is often a business of putting together things that don’t obviously or usually fit—or, in Wordsworth’s phrase, the ‘observation of affinities /In objects where no brotherhood exists / To passive minds’. This is probably why I like the way that artists—as distinct from, say, politicians or academics—talk. About art, yes, but just as often about ordinary things, noticing ‘affinities’ in mundane situations that even very perceptive non-artists tend not to pick up.

The 2016 Goodison Fellowship was a licence to indulge this tendency. I had previously used a few Artists’ Lives recordings in research for four books. Now I ranged at will, sampling and pursuing, following threads and taking detours through (at the last count) more than fifty interviews—still just a fraction of the total. The aim was to gather audio material for an exhibition at The Lightbox, Woking, drawn from the Ingram Collection (which will take place this summer), and a book, a ‘history from below’ of post-war art in Britain.

What did I find? Relatively little factual art historical information that could not be found in more cogent and accurate form in books and paper archives. A lot about childhood, families, relationships—all kinds of life experiences that you can have full-blast, full-depth, without having been to art school or put on an exhibition. These are the common currency of oral history. The difference with Artists’ Lives is that the texture of the times—the experience of working with and living among particular objects and materials, existing within certain spaces and social relationships—is simultaneously animated by ideas. To hear an eel fisherman recalling his attempt, aged eight, to carve a snowman in the shape of a naked lady; to Rosemary Young reliving the terror of the nanny that she and Reg Butler employed for their children—and to forty other extracts from Artists’ Lives accompanying work by those artists. The artist probably won’t be explaining the work you’re actually looking at (as a curator or audio-guide voiceover would do), but their voice and the life-moment it conveys will put them in the room beside you. That’s the idea, anyway.

And the book? The oral history of art goes back at least as far as Vasari, whose tales of artists often begin ‘I have heard say…’. Modern art history, however, even popular history such as Gombrich’s Story of Art, is almost never ‘history from below’, informed primarily by the subject’s own sense of what constitutes their life and work. Is such a history even possible for modern art? I’m finding out. There are times when, listening to Artists’ Lives recordings, you have the sense of standing on a very specific historical stage: Terry Frost, for example, on his first paintings in a POW camp in Germany, or Mary Kelly on the Women’s Movement in early 1970s’ London. But what comes across more consistently and variously is the changing texture of the times through which artists’ lives move and which, in their recollections, is not merely background or context but the air they breathe.

Hester Westley and Isabel Sutton
Art education for the many, not the few

Art historian Hester Westley and radio and television producer Isabel Sutton have used their Goodison Fellowship to examine a long-overdue institutional history of The Bath Academy of Art at Corsham in the post-war decades between 1946 and 1972. Overlooked by scholars in part because of the dearth of extant archival documentation, Corsham, as it became known, warrants a reconsideration through the wealth of material in Artists’ Lives. This reconsideration examines Corsham against the context of a shifting post-war landscape of higher art education. The reformulated avant garde of the 1960s was unthinkable without the changes that took place in art education; Corsham played an integral role in this redevelopment.

The research gives voice to the players and problems of Corsham in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s: figuratively by charting the subterranean arguments, philosophies, and approaches that defined the ‘lived experience’ of an art student in this institution; and literally by ‘giving voice’ to these artists through their spoken experience, integrating a methodology that underscores the openness they espoused. Artists’ Lives holds interviews with over thirty artists either studied or taught at Corsham. Through a multiplicity of perspectives we have uncovered the personal ambition and goals of the redoubtable Clifford Ellis, Corsham’s first Principal, and his equally formidable wife, Rosemary Ellis, as they gave shape to their artistic and pedagogical ideas. The Ellises’ stated intention was to establish at Corsham ‘a more liberal form of art education than had been possible previously.’ Such a vision of curricular breadth proposed a different model of education informed by their unflinching intellectual and social belief in art’s role within a general education. From 1946, Corsham became the first residential college for the education of art teachers in the country. In the words of Howard Hodgkin, ‘it seemed as if (Clifford Ellis) was trying to correct the anomalous position of an artist in England by turning his students into passionate and creative teachers rather than professional painters or sculptors. In this way, the benefits of art would be spread through the teaching of children and the awakening of their responses rather than through the making of art in their own right’. Our research argues that Corsham was unique in its multifaceted approach to art pedagogy: at once giving space for practicing artists and broadening the remit of a standard art teacher’s training—thus manifesting an ideological stance towards a model of ‘education through art’.

We have situated the Ellises’ initiatives within the critical discourse of their time—specifically, the ideas articulated by contemporary theorists such as Herbert Read, whose insistence upon the centrality of an art education reinforced the Ellises’ own commitment to training art teachers. This position had been championed by Clifford Ellis’s own tutor, the child artist painter Marion Richardson, who was a regular visitor to Bath Academy in its early years.

Our recent interviews with students of this era have shaped a new understanding of the Ellises’ prescient engagement with the educational model of the Bauhaus, long before the legacy of ‘Basic Design’ was assimilated into the mainstream of British art education. Former students recorded for Artists’ Lives articulate the innovative teaching exercises and the various tutors’ approaches.

Ellis was uncompromising in his ambition for Corsham. His involvement in the 1953 UNESCO Symposium on art education underscored his forward-thinking internationalism, and his keen enlisting of an impressive array of avant-garde artists (Kenneth Armitage, Howard Hodgkin, Gillian Ayres, Michael Craig-Martin among many others appear in the archive) highlighted both his ambition and his sensitivity to new movements within the art world. Our research argues that the very shape of the new national Diploma in Art and Design qualification that was introduced to art schools in the 1960s, in fact, owed much to the model syllabus offered by Corsham from 1946.

The outcome of our work will appear in a peer-reviewed article and on the BBC Arts Online website. This research will give a wide international audience the chance to sample the voices of Artists’ Lives, and revisit an art school which aspired to make the highest standards of art education available to many and not just a few.
An Interviewee’s Perspective

John Edmonds, former GMB trade union General Secretary, with Tom Lean, Project Interviewer, National Life Stories.

An Interviewee’s Perspective

“Trade unionists are never asked to explain something. They’re always asked to justify something.”

John Edmonds

John Edmonds was born into a working-class family in Camberwell in 1944. From a young age his ambition was to become a trade unionist. After winning scholarships to Cheth’s Hospital School and Oriel College, Oxford, in 1966 he became a Research Assistant at the National Union of General and Municipal Workers (NUGMAW), later renamed the GMB, one of the largest unions in Britain. After working his way up through the organisation, working particularly with the electricity and gas industries and local government, he served as General Secretary between 1996 and 2003, from the height of the union through the early years of New Labour. In this role he steered the GMB through a period of great challenges and changes for trade unions, securing the GMB’s position through a series of amalgamations, supporting gender equality, the minimum wage, and the enshrining of workers’ rights in law.

In 2016 John recorded a thirteen-hour life story interview with Tom Lean as part of NLS’s An Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry. This touched not only on his memories of the role of unions in electricity supply, but many other topics: what it was like for trade unionists being interviewed by the, often hostile, media; what it was like for John interviewing female executives whilst researching his recent book on why so few women are in positions of power; what it was like for him to be interviewed by the, often hostile, media; what it was like for him to be interviewed by the, often hostile, media; what it was like for him to be interviewed by the, often hostile, media.

The interviews I conducted for the book on women in power were typically one or two hours long. I was trying to get people to talk frankly and I began to understand some of the techniques. I found that the way to get people talking in a constructive way is to start with their childhood. Most of us haven’t visited that for a long time and once you start talking frankly about your childhood and you’re recording things that you probably haven’t discussed with anybody, even in your family, then I think you make you feel comfortable about what you might say later.

Does understanding memory, from interviewing people yourself, help with recalling your own memories?

I was enormously conscious during the interview about just how fickle memory is. I could recall some incidents very clearly. Others I was not sure exactly when they took place, a few others I was not sure took place at all, they were in my head but whether they got in my head from the reality of everyday life or some other process I don’t know. You remember stories and the best stories you remember of course are those that you’ve told before. And you get out the beeswax and give them a bit of a polish and each time you tell the story the sheen is that much brighter and after you’ve told it a few times, but the connection between what you’re saying and what really happened can get less and less. I thought in many ways the things that were most valuable were things that I hadn’t talked about before and really had to try and remember. And it is amazingly difficult actually. And the things that I was remembering were not necessarily what I thought I had thought were important.

Were there any subjects that you found difficult?

When I was the General Secretary and it was 24/7 I deliberately carved out periods when I didn’t work. I tried not to work at home but sometimes it meant that I stayed at the office more than I should have done to finish things that I did not want to take home. Directly I stopped being General Secretary I integrated everything, there was none of that compartmentalisation of life. As far as I was concerned I was very happy with the compartmentalisation because that was what I had been doing in my own head.

Have you had much thought about what future users of your interview might make of it?

I’ve been re-reading a biography of George Lansbury, at one time a leader of the Labour Party, but nobody’s heard of him now other than he’s the grandfather of actress Angela Lansbury. But he was an enormously important politician who did a lot of good. It’s interesting and I like reading about it, but I must be one of a very small number who will be reading about George Lansbury, and I think there’s something of that about my interview. People might say – ‘Oh is that what is it was like then?’ But then they might be tempted to turn over a few pages, to find a bit about Tony Blair. So I’m not sure. This is easy to be modest about. You hope that someone will use it but the answer is I don’t know.

Do you have any questions for me?

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When I was the General Secretary and it was 24/7 I deliberately carved out periods when I didn’t work. I tried not to work at home but sometimes it meant that I stayed at the office more than I should have done to finish things that I did not want to take home. Directly I stopped being General Secretary I integrated everything, there was none of that compartmentalisation of life. As far as I was concerned I was very happy with the compartmentalisation because that was what I had been doing in my own head.

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Do you have any questions for me?
Last Words

David Jeffries (1933–2016)
Interviewed by Tom Lean, 2014–2015

David Jeffries was born in 1933 in London. He started work as an apprentice with Eastern Electricity Board in 1949, a period when the rapid growth of the electricity industry presented many opportunities for ambitious and able young engineers to develop. “If I’m totally frank,” he recalled, “I think at that time in my career, all I had in mind was how on earth could I get the boss’s job.” It was an ambition that would carry him to the very top of the industry, through a long career he recalled for An Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry, a project for which he was also a member of the Advisory Committee.

The breadth of David’s experience was unusual in an era when the electricity industry was divided between different autonomous fiefdoms. He worked as an engineer for Eastern, Southern and London Electricity Boards, as Personnel Director for the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), as chairman of London Electricity Board, and as Electricity Council Deputy Chairman. In the 1980s as electricity privatisation loomed, his wide experience made him the perfect “honest broker” to chair the new National Grid.

As he reflected, the Grid was unique: “It’s the brain or head of the whole system… If I’m really being provocative I say, I can find thousands of people who can make baked beans, so I’ll call those units of electricity, thousands of them. You’ve only got one company that can sit in the middle and manage those thousands of baked beans so that everybody gets the right share at the right time in a consistent manner and so on and so forth. We are a totally different business.”

David left National Grid in 1999, to take up a series of chairmanships in the wider engineering industry. While retirement made more time for golf, he couldn’t let go of his interest in new technology. As he noted at the end of his interview:

“Who on earth can give up an interest in engineering and technology with so much happening? Do you ever question some of my colleagues who, people you interview, who say they don’t want to continue to understand? I mean, isn’t it odd, if you’ve spent your life around it?”

Stanley Evans (1929–2016)
Interviewed by Paul Merchant, 2011

Here Stanley Evans remembers the successful use of radio-echo sounding equipment from an aircraft (it had previously been used by himself on sledges, tractors and other vehicles) to measure the change in depth of a glacier along its length. It was a technique that he invented following his discovery that equipment pointed at the sky in Antarctica to record features of the ionosphere (high atmosphere) could be turned upside down to record something else: the depth, structure and flow of glaciers.

“We flew down the Gilman Glacier. I had a steady echo […] and I saw the depth decreasing, just exactly as you would expect, as we flew down the glacier to the snout and I saw it peter out on the snout and then we just got the rocky ground below. And I think I can honestly say, that was the first time I really believed in my heart that what we were recording was the depth of the ice, wasn’t some complicated fault of the apparatus producing this sort of result. […] And so I developed the films. […] You could see everything clearly. And this was the first ever from the air. […] So I started to write there and then […] ‘Glacier Depth Sounding from the Air’. […] And […] I was less than two weeks between the time I dropped this paper addressed to […] the editor of Nature […] into a letterbox in Cambridge […] that it appeared in Nature with a notice on the front cover […] Plenty of other more distinguished people have had [laughs] many such moments, but I think that was my moment.”

Throughout his career – which moved from Jodrell Bank, via the Royal Society’s Antarctic Expedition (1955–1957), the Scott Polar Research Institute, to University of Cambridge’s Department of Engineering – Evans was fascinated by the way in which instruments could be developed to record otherwise invisible features of the material world. In part, this fascination was hands-on and technical. Speaking of his work at Jodrell Bank, he matches adult and childhood building with electronic bits and pieces:

“Making radio apparatus of one kind or another, not very successfully. But certainly you could buy cathode ray tubes and their power supplies and I certainly was using microphones and cathode ray tubes and looking at audio wave forms in my own garden shed.”

It was, as I say, in part a technical fascination. But another strong memory – this time of a moment during his undergraduate studies at the University of Cambridge – suggests that capturing direct traces of usually invisible phenomena also had emotional currency:

“One particular thing absolutely caught my imagination […] and it was a picture of how the radio-echo from a meteor trail […] rises and falls over a space of a second or two, as the meteor is entering the atmosphere. And the point about this was, we had learnt […] in fairly dry lectures on optics, about – if you could only see it – what the edge of a shadow would look like […] And you had diagrams of this in optical textbooks and it could all be calculated. But then when it was transformed to the longer wavelength of radio-echo observations, you could see the whole thing in time. […] I remember very clearly now seeing this picture in this little internal publication in the departmental library and I remember saying out loud to whoever was there around me, ‘That’s beautiful.’ [laughs] ‘Cause suddenly I saw that all this theoretical work was true, you could actually see this pattern. I still think it’s beautiful.”

These extracts and brief comments – I hope – give a sense of Stanley Evans’s scientific interests and career which he insisted was the background to the ‘family foreground’ of his life with his wife and children.
Statement of Financial Activities
Year Ended 31 December 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Restricted 2016</th>
<th>Unrestricted 2015</th>
<th>Total 2016</th>
<th>Total 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INCOMING RESOURCES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations and legacies</td>
<td>128,887</td>
<td>3,750</td>
<td>132,637</td>
<td>154,784</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment income</td>
<td>9,610</td>
<td>17,582</td>
<td>27,192</td>
<td>28,675</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other incoming resources</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>32,007</td>
<td>32,007</td>
<td>22,945</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL INCOME</td>
<td>138,497</td>
<td>53,339</td>
<td>191,836</td>
<td>206,404</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXPENDITURE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Raising funds</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10,025</td>
<td>10,025</td>
<td>8,128</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charitable activities</td>
<td>243,712</td>
<td>17,070</td>
<td>260,782</td>
<td>237,599</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</td>
<td>243,712</td>
<td>27,095</td>
<td>270,807</td>
<td>245,727</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net gains/(losses) on investments</td>
<td>35,643</td>
<td>37,377</td>
<td>73,020</td>
<td>(5,238)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NET (OUTGOING)/INCOMING RESOURCES</td>
<td>(69,572)</td>
<td>63,621</td>
<td>(5,951)</td>
<td>(44,561)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total funds:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Brought forward</td>
<td>587,770</td>
<td>617,837</td>
<td>1,205,607</td>
<td>1,250,168</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carried forward</td>
<td>518,198</td>
<td>681,458</td>
<td>1,199,656</td>
<td>1,205,607</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Balance Sheet at 31 December 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIXED ASSETS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td>871,041</td>
<td>798,021</td>
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<tr>
<td>CURRENT ASSETS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Debtors</td>
<td>1,256</td>
<td>11,836</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cash at bank and in hand</td>
<td>346,442</td>
<td>404,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liabilities: Creditors falling due within one year</td>
<td>347,698</td>
<td>416,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liabilities: Net current assets</td>
<td>328,615</td>
<td>407,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</td>
<td>1,199,656</td>
<td>1,205,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE FUNDS OF THE CHARITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Founder's donation</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unrestricted fund</td>
<td>481,458</td>
<td>417,837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted fund</td>
<td>518,198</td>
<td>587,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,199,656</td>
<td>1,205,607</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Restricted funds are limited to expenditure on specific projects; unrestricted funds are intended to provide sufficient resources to maintain the general activities of the Charity. The Founder's donation is the establishing donation given to NLS to contribute to the support of general activities. The balance on restricted funds represents donations received, the expenditure of which has not yet been incurred.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) – charities SORP (FRS 102), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Companies Act 2006.

The Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet have been extracted from the full financial statements of the charity. The opinion of the auditors on the full financial statements is reproduced below.

OPINION
In our opinion:
• the financial statements give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 December 2016 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its result for the year then ended;
• the financial statements have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice;
• the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

R Rubenstein (Senior Statutory Auditor)
For and on behalf of Parker Cavendish
Chartered Accountants & Statutory Auditors
28 Church Road
Stanmore
Middlesex HA7 4XR

Approved by the Board of Directors and Trustees and signed on its behalf.

Dame Jenny Abramsky
Chair of Trustees
Projects and Collections

Leaders of National Life (C408) [10 interviews]
Leaders of National Life is one of NLS’s founding collections. Its scope is wide, and includes politics, industry, the arts, sports, religion, the professions, administration and communications. Priority is given to those whose life stories have not been previously recorded or published.

City Lives (C409) [150 interviews]
City Lives explores the inner world of Britain’s financial capital. Support from the City enabled NLS to make detailed recordings between 1987 and 1997 with representatives from the Stock Exchange, the merchant and clearing banks, the commodities and futures markets, law and accountancy firms, financial regulators, insurance companies and Lloyd’s of London. The project’s interviews span the complex interrelationships and dramatic changes which defined the Square Mile in the twentieth century. City Lives: The Changing Voices of British Finance by Cathy Courtney and Paul Thompson (Methuen, 1996) was edited from the interviews.

Living Memory of the Jewish Community (C410) [188 interviews]
Recorded between 1987 and 2000 this major collection was developed with the specialist advice of leading Jewish historians and complemented a number of collections held by the British Library on Jewish life. The primary focus has been on pre-Second World War Jewish refugees to Britain, those fleeing from Nazi persecution during the Second World War, Holocaust survivors and their children. An online educational collection, and in association with the National Trust at British Library Sounds.

General Interviews (C464) [89 interviews]
This collection comprises diverse interviews additional to the main NLS projects. Interviewees are drawn from many fields including education, medicine, retail, dance and engineering, and embrace leading designers such as Terence Conran and members of Pentagram.

Artists’ Lives (C466) [381 interviews]
Artists’ Lives was initiated in 1990 and is run in association with Tate Archive. Collectively the interviews form an extraordinary account of the rich context in which the visual arts have developed in Britain during the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries. Artists’ Lives provides visual artists with a forum in which their lives and work can be documented in their own words for posterity. We are grateful to all our sponsors but in particular to the steady support of The Henry Moore Foundation. The Rothenstein-Hopkins Foundation and The Yale Center for British Art. A double CD, Connecting Lines: Artists Talk about Drawing, was published in 2010 funded by the Rothenstein-Hopkins Foundation. The audio from the CD is available online in the ‘Oral History Curator’s Choice’ collection at British Library Sounds.

Architects’ Lives (C467) [135 interviews]
Architects’ Lives documents architects working in Britain and those in associated professions. In addition to the main collection, and in association with the National Trust at Willow Road, NLS made a series of recordings documenting memories of Ernö Goldfinger which resulted in a co-published CD Passionate Rationalism (2004). NLS has also partnered English Heritage to document Eltham Palace and the Courtauld family (C1056).

Artists’ Lives Advisory Committee
Sir Alan Bowens, Dr Penelope Curtis, Caroline Cuthbert, Adrian Głow, Mel Gooding (chair), Lisa Le Feuvre, Cornelia Grassi, Lubiana himid, Richard Morphet CBE, Clive Philpot and Dr Andrew Wilson.

Legal Lives (C736) [12 interviews]
This collection documents changes in the legal profession in Britain, including interviews with both solicitors and barristers. Since 2008 further interviews have been added, including Lady Justice Hallet and Lord Hoffmann. From 2012 we have been developing this area of our work in partnership with the Legal Biography Project in the Law Department at the London School of Economics. A scoping study was completed in 2014 to outline the scope of a wider project and inform fundraising efforts.

Food: From Source to Salepoint (C821) [217 interviews]
Between 1998 and 2006 Food: From Source to Salepoint charted the revolutionary technical and social changes which occurred within Britain’s food industry in the twentieth century and beyond. Production, distribution and retailing of food are explored through recordings with those working at every level of the sector, including life stories with those in the ready meal, poultry, sugar, meat and fish sectors; a series with employees of Northern Foods, Nestlé, Sainsbury’s and Safeway; and a series with key cooker writers and restaurateurs. Within Food: From Source to Salepoint a set of interviews with chefs [12 interviews] explores the working lives of chefs over a period when their role has changed from being in charge of the kitchen, to being more high profile. The food programme of interviews also encompasses Tesco: An Oral History (C1087) [47 interviews recorded 2003–7] and An Oral History of the Wine Trade (C1088) [40 interviews recorded 2003–2004].

Book Trade Lives (C872) [120 interviews]
Book Trade Lives recorded the experiences of those who worked in publishing and bookselling between the early 1920s and 2007. Interviews covered all levels of the trade, from invoice clerks and warehouse-staff to wholesalers, editors, sales staff and executives. The Unwin Charitable Trust was lead funder for this project. The British Book Trade: An Oral History (British Library, 2008) and 2010) was edited by Sue Bradley from the collection.

Crafts Lives (C969) [15 interviews]
Documenting the lives of Britain’s leading craftsmen and craftswomen, Crafts Lives complements Artists’ Lives and Architects’ Lives. Areas of activity include furniture making, embroidery, ceramics, jewellery, silversmithing, calligraphy, weaving and textiles, metalwork, glasswork and bookbinding.

Crafts Lives Advisory Committee
James Brighty, Anneville Campbell, Amanda Game (chair), Sarah Griffin, Dr Tanya Harrod, Helen Joseph, John Keatley and Martina Margetts.

Lives in the Oil Industry (C963) [178 interviews]
A joint National Life Stories/Abderdeen University project, which, between 2000 and 2005, recorded the major changes that occurred in the UK oil and gas industry in the twentieth century, focussing particularly on North Sea exploration and the impact of the industry on this country. The project received support from within the industry.

An Oral History of the Post Office (C1007) [117 interviews]
From 2001–2003 this project, in partnership with Royal Mail, captured the memories and experiences of individuals from the postal services sector – from postmen to postwomen, to union officials, sorters, engineers and senior management.

A CD, Speeding the mail: an oral history of the post from the 1920s to the 1990s, was co-published by the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) and the British Library (2005) and is available online at BL Sounds.

An Oral History of Woolf Oils (C1015) [40 interviews]
This collection documented the development of design and corporate branding through a biographical project based around the growth and development of a single commercial company, Woolf Oils, and was completed 2001–2002.

An Oral History of British Fashion (C1046) [18 interviews]
This collaborative initiative between London College of Fashion (University of the Arts London) and National Life Stories documents fashion and its related industries within living memory.

Pioneers in Charity and Social Welfare (C1155) [28 interviews]
Records the memories and experiences of key figures in social welfare, social policy and charitable endeavour.

An Oral History of Theatre Design (C1173) [33 interviews]
This collaborative project with Wimbledon College of Art (University of the Arts London) charted developments in post-war British theatre design.

Authors’ Lives (C1276) [66 interviews]
Authors’ Lives was launched in 2007 with the aim of recording approximately one hundred novelists, poets, writers and editors. A CD, The Writing Life: Authors Speak, featuring extracts from the collection, was published by the British Library (2011) and the audio is available online in the ‘Oral History Curator’s Choice’ collection at British Library Sounds. In 2014 work began on the Women in Publishing project (C1657), to document the work of this campaigning organisation established in 1979 to promote the status of women in the book business through networking and training.

Authors’ Lives Advisory Committee
Stephen Cleary, Rachel Foss, Dr Maggie Gee CBE, Deborah Moghadd, Martin Pick, Lawrence Salt, Nicola Solomon and Jonathan Taylor CBE.

Authors’ Lives (C1155) [28 interviews]
Lives in Steel (C281) [120 interviews]
Lives in Steel recorded the lives of workers in the steel industry and is available online at BL Sounds.

Leaders of National Life was published in 2010 funded by the Rootstein Hopkins.

Living Memory of the Jewish Community was initiated in 1990 and is run in association with the National Trust at the British Library Sounds.
The Legacy of the English Stage Company
(C1316) [15 interviews]
Sponsored by the John Hodgson Theatre Research Trust, this series of interviews charts the story of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre. This complements other theatre collections and adds the important perspective of the theatre director.

An Oral History of Barings
(C1367) [34 interviews]
In partnership with The Barings Archive, this project ran between 2009 and 2013 and focused on the history of Barings throughout the twentieth century, providing important insights into life and work within the bank – including stories from the family and those working at all levels within the company. This complements City Lives and documents the bank up to and including its collapse and subsequent acquisition by ING in 1999.

An Oral History of British Science
(C1379) [120 interviews]
This programme was initiated in November 2009 and is run in association with the Science Museum. The first phase (2009-2013) was generously funded by the Arcadia Fund and the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851. It is creating a major archive for the study and public understanding of contemporary science in Britain through in-depth interviews with British scientists. As well as filling obvious gaps in our knowledge of major developments and innovative ideas by interviewing the key players in British science, this project aims to account for the character of scientific research since the Second World War. To complement life story interviews, averaging 10–15 hours in length, the project also includes some shorter video recordings reflecting key events or locations. There is a project website at www.bl.uk/voices-of-science and full interviews are available online via British Library Sounds. Interviews with ethnic minority British scientists conducted for a collaborative project with the Royal Society, ‘Inspiring Scientists: Diversity in British Science’, are available at www.bl.uk/voices-of-science. Other oral history-related projects from the Law and Political Science, these interviews provide an insight into the lived world of the law and the pivotal role that Crown Court clerks play in the administration of justice.

How to support National Life Stories

NLS’s charitable status means that donations or sponsorship are subject to the relevant tax relief for either individuals or companies. There are four tax efficient and convenient ways to support National Life Stories.

Gift Aid
The Gift Aid scheme allows us to claim back basic rate tax on any donation received from individual taxpayers. This means that for every £100 we can claim an additional £25 from the Inland Revenue if a signed Gift Aid form is received. A Gift Aid form can be obtained from the NLS Office. It needs to be completed and returned to NLS together with your donation.

Companies
Companies can pay a charity the full donation without deducting any tax and in turn obtain full tax relief when calculating their profits for corporation tax.

Donation of shares
Donors of shares are not deemed to have made a disposal that makes them liable to capital gains tax. The charity has the option of retaining the shares or selling them. Unlisted shares traded on a recognised exchange are included in this initiative. The individual making such a donation will also be able to reduce their taxable income by the value of the gift. A company donor will obtain full relief against corporation tax.

Bequests
Bequests left to National Life Stories are deducted from an estate in calculating their profits for corporation tax. The charity has the option of retaining the shares or selling them. Unlisted shares traded on a recognised exchange are included in this initiative. The individual making such a donation will also be able to reduce their taxable income by the value of the gift. A company donor will obtain full relief against corporation tax.

Access to National Life Story recordings

All National Life Stories interviews are catalogued on the British Library’s Sound & Moving Image Catalogue (http://sami.bl.uk), which provides detailed content data about individual recordings. NLS recordings can also be discovered through ‘Explore the British Library’ (http://explore.bl.uk), the Library’s main catalogue. Thematic oral history collections guides are available at http://www.bl.uk/subjects/oral-history. The Listening and Viewing Service at St Pancras provides free public access onsite to recordings which have no access restrictions, on an appointment basis. Many digital recordings are also available via SoundServer, a listening facility available at the Library’s sites in both St Pancras and in Boston Spa, Yorkshire. Further information about listening at the Library can be found at www.bl.uk/listening.

How to support National Life Stories

Contact
Rob Perks
National Life Stories
The British Library
96 Euston Road
London NW1 2DB
United Kingdom
nls@bl.uk
T +44 (0)20 7412 7404

National Life Stories is the trading name of the National Life Story Collection, which is registered as a company limited by guarantee no.2172518, and as a charity no.327571.

Donors and supporters in 2016
Authors’ Licensing and Collecting Society
Furniture History Society
Garrick Charitable Trust
Nicholas and Judith Goodison
Christopher and Gilda Haskins
Lesley Knox
Templeton Religion Trust
Yale Center for British Art
And a number of other generous anonymous and individual donors

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Listen online at National Life Stories interviews
Web access to over 18,000 individual recordings from almost 2,000 oral history interviews from a selection of twenty-two collections is available via British Library Sounds http://sounds.bl.uk. During 2016, new recordings were added to the Architecture, Art, Crafts, Industry and Science collections. The site attracted over 22,000 unique browsers and 62,000 views over the year, an increase of 20% on the previous year.

The ‘Voices of science’ website (http://bl.uk/voices-of-science) offers edited clips of the audio and video interviews from An Oral History of British Science. Other oral history-based learning resources (covering topics like the Holocaust, the Women’s Liberation Movement, and children’s play) are online at https://www.bl.uk/learning/online-resources.

Follow us on Twitter (https://twitter.com/BL_OralHistory) and keep up to date with what’s happening at National Life Stories via the Library’s Sound and Vision blog at http://blogs.bl.uk/sound-and-vision.
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