National Life Stories
Review and Accounts
2018/2019
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 over 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 transcripts to assist users. Access is provided via the Sound and Moving Image Catalogue at sounds.bl.uk and a growing number of interviews are made available for remote web use through British Library Sounds at sounds.bl.uk. Each individual life story interview is several hours long, covering family background, childhood, education, work, leisure and later life.

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.

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As part of our core mission ‘to record the first-hand experiences of as wide a cross-section of society as possible’ National Life Stories has always sought to cover myriad subject areas and I am delighted to report that we have this year launched a new initiative focusing on farming, land management and conservation, thanks to a generous grant from the Arcadia Trust. Crucially, we will explore the dialogue between farmers and science and technology, and build on the excellent previous work in the history of science and technology, much accessible through our award-winning ‘Voices of Science’ web resource. Many of the key post-war changes in farming that we will be documenting relate to national and EC/EU policy and thus the project can claim significant timeliness and potential to contribute to debates around the future for British farming. We have recruited a distinguished advisory committee and I look forward to reporting further about these new interviews next year.

Intercdisciplinarity is a growing feature of our work. Our new series of interviews around infrastructure – Britain Building the World – has developed with further funding and embraces technology and policy, planning and the built environment. We are seeking funding for a related interview programme about London’s Broadgate development, which would include architects and engineers, City planners, lawyers and financiers, the developers themselves, those who contributed the buildings, some of the artists whose work contributes to the environment and some of the tenants. We also continue to pursue our City Lives Revisited project and a proposal around the concept of risk. Finally, work is underway to scope a new series of interviews around design, embracing industrial design, transportation, and graphic design as well as fashion, textile and digital design, following on from Crafts Lives which we paused this year.

Chair’s Foreword

Online access to our collections remains an important objective and over the past year we have launched a new web resource within the British Library’s web domain – ‘Voices of art’ – offering over 100 audio clips alongside images, specially-commissioned essays, and teachers’ notes focusing on the British art world between the late 1950s and early 1970s. ‘Voices of art’ was made possible with the support of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art whose involvement was warmly appreciated. Its launch last autumn coincided with the publication of a new book by Michael Bird, Studio Voices: Art and Life in 20th Century Britain, based on extracts from Artists’ Lives. This was the latest output from our successful NLS Goodison Fellowship scheme, for which we will once again be seeking applications later this year for a fellowship in 2020–2021. Meanwhile we look forward to 2018–19 Fellow Rib Davi’s play script, based on our Living Memory of the Jewish Community collection.

Dame Jenny Abramsky
Chair of Trustees
Review of 2018
Rob Perks
Director of National Life Stories

Collections and projects
An oral history of farming, land management and conservation in post-war Britain
We are pleased to announce a new project in the area of farming and science, thanks to significant funding from the Arcadia Charitable Trust. An oral history of farming, land management and conservation in post-war Britain will focus on the experience of changes in farming practice, patterns of landownership, and approaches to land management brought up with the development and incorporation of various kinds of scientific knowledge and technology. Over the next three years a full-time project interviewer (Paul Merchant) will record fifty life story interviews with farmers and landowners engaged in food production and stewardship of land at a time of transformation in agricultural practices; scientists involved in the development of new knowledge and technologies – such as plant breeding, the development of agrochemicals and ecology for nature conservation – that impacted on the experience of farming; and representatives of organisations involved in exchange of knowledge and expertise between farmers, landowners and scientists. The aim is to record ways in which environmental knowledge has been developed, promoted, marginalised and revived as part of dramatic changes in British farming and landowning since the Second World War. As many of these changes relate to national and EC/EU policy, the project claims significant timeliness and potential to contribute to debates over a post-European Union future for British farming.

An Oral History of British Science
For An Oral History of British Science Tom Lean has concluded a series of recordings focusing on the Daresbury Laboratory near Warrington. Established as almost a mini-CERN in the 1960s, Daresbury developed world-leading expertise in synchrotron particle accelerators, which generate X-ray and ultra-violet light brighter than the sun. The final interviewee included Rob Cernik, a material scientist whose early career included work on the Ferranti silicon chip fundamental to the success of the ZK Spectrum home computer; and Susan Smith, who became the current site director after spending her earlier career developing novel particle accelerators. Daresbury interviewees touched particularly on the 1990s controversy over the building of the Diamond particle accelerator. Diamond, Britain’s most expensive scientific instrument, was designed at Daresbury, but ultimately built at Harwell instead, despite a major campaign for Diamond at Daresbury. This has been a revealing set of interviews looking at the politics of funding big science and the role of scientists as activists. Tom has also concluded an interview with distinguished particle physicist Professor Lord John Dainton, whose career at Daresbury, Liverpool, CERN and DESY (Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron) has been spent understanding fundamental physics. John is the son of scientist Frederick Dainton, former Chairman of the British Library and himself an NLS interviewee in the 1980s. Later in this review John reflects on listening to his father’s interview. Tom has also been recording physicist and computer scientist Peggie Rimmer about her career at CERN and memories of the early development of the World Wide Web as Tim Berners-Lee’s section leader in the 1980s.

Emmeline Ledgerwood, our AHRC collaborative doctoral student in conjunction with the University of Leicester, continues to explore the history of government research establishments (GRESs) since the 1970s. Her interviews with government scientists (in particular those that worked at the Building Research Establishment and the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough and its successor organisations) focus on the processes that led to privatisation. Interviewees from the Building Research Establishment include Roger Courtayne (pre-privatisation chief executive), Martin Wyatt (post-privatisation chief executive), Carol Atkinson (certification business), Vic Crisp (energy efficiency programme) and Chris Scivier (radon). Interviewees from Farnborough include David Dunford (aerospace technology), Pam Turner (librarian), Chris Peel (aluminium alloy), Susan James (acoustics) and Phil Catling (helmet mounted display systems).

Britain building the world: an oral history of infrastructure and the built environment
Struggling engineering and architecture, we have been further developing our new interview series. Britain building the world: an oral history of infrastructure and the built environment. With generous funding from Chris and Gilda Haskins and the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, Tom Lean has been recording Bernard Ainsworth, whose long career in construction management included factories, airfields, motorways, the Millennium Dome, and culminated in management of the Shard’s construction, as well as serving as Chief Operating Officer for the Manchester Commonwealth games; Mark Whitby, a structural engineer with an eye for architecture and a former Olympic sprint canoeist, whose projects included the Halley IV Antarctic research station, Tate Modern extension, and the Hepworth Gallery; Jean Venables, first female President of the Institution of Civil Engineers, whose career in water management and sustainability includes work on the Thames Barrier; Ian Liddei, a structural engineer and founding partner of engineering consultancy Buro Happold, whose projects often featured innovative types of structure and include government buildings in Saudi, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre and the Millennium Dome; Norman Haste, who started his career as an apprentice at Scunthorpe Steelworks, but later led civil engineering on several major infrastructure projects, including Sizewell B and Heathrow Terminal 5; and 91-year-old tunnel engineer John Bartlett, who trained originally as a paratrooper-engineer in the Second World War, but spent most of his working life on underground projects, stretching from Cold War underground telephone exchanges, to project engineer of the Victoria Line, to the design of the Channel Tunnel.

Interviews have begun with Nick Tillett, a pioneer in applications of computer vision guidance and robotics in farming practice; John Matthews, an expert in tractor technology and former Director of the National Institute of Agricultural Engineering; John Fox, responsible for numerous new agricultural machines – including the ‘Superflow’ cultivator – produced by the company Bomford and Evesheds; and George Mackay, who developed new varieties of potatoes through innovative breeding experiments at the Scottish Plant Breeding Station and the Scottish Crop Research Institute. Paul Merchant introduces the project in more detail later in this Review.


Future for British farming. Potential to contribute to debates over a post-European Union EC/EU policy, the project claims significant timeliness and potential to contribute to debates over a post-European Union future for British farming.

Agricultural Engineering; John Fox, responsible for numerous applications of computer vision guidance and robotics in farming practice, patterns of landownership, and approaches to land management bound up with the development and incorporation of various kinds of scientific knowledge and technology. Over the next three years a full-time project interviewer (Paul Merchant) will record fifty life story interviews with farmers and landowners engaged in food production and stewardship of land at a time of transformation in agricultural practices; scientists involved in the development of new knowledge and technologies – such as plant breeding, the development of agrochemicals and ecology for nature conservation – that impacted on the experience of farming; and representatives of organisations involved in exchange of knowledge and expertise between farmers, landowners and scientists. The aim is to record ways in which environmental knowledge has been developed, promoted, marginalised and revived as part of dramatic changes in British farming and landowning since the Second World War. As many of these changes relate to national and EC/EU policy, the project claims significant timeliness and potential to contribute to debates over a post-European Union future for British farming.
Architects’ Lives

Architects’ Lives has been energised by the generous support of Drawing Matter, The Graham Foundation, the Linbury Trust and Metropolitan Workshop, as well as by donations from individual practices. Among the new recordings undertaken by lead interviewer Niamh Dillon are those with Alan Baxter, John McAslan, John Miller, David Pritchard and Roger Zogolovitch. Engineer Alan Baxter formed his multi-disciplinary practice in 1974 and has worked on a range of high profile conservation projects such as St. Martin’s in the Fields, Waddesdon Manor and Tate Britain, as well as significant infrastructure developments at London Bridge, Cроссrail and Paddington Station. John McAslan was one of the younger architects who took part in the 1988 exhibition ‘40 under Forty’. His firm recently refurbished King’s Cross Station, and has been involved in many international projects such as the Iron Market in Haiti. John Miller, an academic as well as a practitioner, established his firm with partner Alan Colquhoun in 1961, later becoming John Miller & Partners. They were part of the generation of post-war modernist architects who designed educational buildings, housing in Wilton Keynes, and a range of arts spaces, notably refurbishments of the Whitechapel Art Gallery and The Tate Gallery. David Pritchard spent much of his career at MJP with Richard MacCormac and Peter Jamieson – notable projects were Cable and Wireless College and New Broadcasting House for the BBC. David went on to establish Metropolitan Workshop with Neil Deely, a multi-disciplinary practice working on large scale housing and urban regeneration. Roger Zogolovitch, an architect and a developer, was a founder partner of CZWG (a pioneering practice which included Piers Gough) before setting up as Solidspace which focuses on small scale, residential housing and urban regeneration. Roger Zogolovitch, an architect and a developer, was a founder partner of CZWG (a pioneering practice which included Piers Gough) before setting up as Solidspace which focuses on small scale, residential housing and urban regeneration.

Artists’ Lives

Our major new web resource ‘Voices of art’ (www.bl.uk/voices-of-art) was launched in autumn 2018, generously funded by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. The site explores the art world of the 1960s and 1970s through Artists’ Lives audio extracts, and was developed from our exhibition at Tate Britain, Artists’ Lives: Speaking of the Kasmin Gallery. Camille Johnston writes further about this later in the Review. Figurative painter Celia Paul’s recording is in progress, funded by the Yale Center for British Art. And, Ibrahim El-Salahi and Norman Dilworth have begun recordings with Project Director, Cathy Courtney. Ibrahim was born in Omdurman, Sudan, in 1930 and after art school there came to study at the Slade in 1957 before returning to Sudan. A resident of Oxford for many decades, he has had recent exhibitions at Tate Modern (2013) and the Ashmolean Museum (2018). Norman Dilworth, now living in France, was born in Wigan in 1931 and also studied at the Slade. His work embraces wall drawings and sculpture and, in 1980, he was co-curator of the influential ‘Per + Ocean’ exhibition at the Hayward Gallery. Recently completed Artists’ Lives conversations are those with Alan Gouk and Stephen Buckley, whilst Cathy’s on-going recordings include painters Rose Wylie and Tom Phillips.

Hester Wesley concluded her longest Artists’ Lives recording to date with abstract painter Paul Huxley. As former Professor of Painting at the Royal College of Art (1986-1998), Chairman of the HEFCE Research Assessment Exercise panel for Art and Design (1992-96), and Treasurer and Trustee for the Royal Academy (2000-2014), Huxley’s meticulously detailed recording offers a wealth of material uncovering the power dynamics and influence shaping these art world institutions as well as insights into the strategies underpinning art education in the UK. Hester also completed her recording and Laetitia Yhap. Yhap is of Chinese and Viennese heritage, and from a generation which underwent the rigours of a seven-year training in figurative painting in the 1950s under tutors Ewan Uglow at Camberwell School of Art and Sir William Coldstream at the Slade School of Art. Yhap’s observations are revealing about the condition of being a woman of mixed-ethnic heritage in such resolutely British (not to mention predominantly male) environments and on her experience as an emerging artist as well as an artist’s model. Yhap later turned her hand to the metropolitan art world and devoted her practice to recording the quotidian lives of the beach fishing fleet in Hastings for two decades from the mid-1970s. Her drawings and paintings stand today not only as a unique artistic contribution, but also as a social record of a waning industry.

Authors’ Lives

New recordings with Liz Calder and Will Self were added to the Authors’ Lives collection this year. During her career as an editor, Liz worked closely with authors such as Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes and Anita Brookner. In 1986 she co-founded Bloomsbury Publishing where her list included Booker winners Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje and Nobel literature laureate Nadine Gordimer. She was a founder of the Groucho Club, the Orange Prize for Fiction, BAND (Book Action for Nuclear Disarmament), the FLIP Festival and the campaigning group Women in Publishing. Will Self is the author of eleven novels, five collections of short fiction and three novellas and has a significant profile as a journalist, political commentator and broadcaster. Self’s interview is a welcome addition as his archive was acquired by the Library in 2016.

Crafts Lives

After twenty years we decided to pause the interviewing programme for our Crafts Lives project in order to focus on dissemination. Frances Carnford concluded her work by completing recordings with visual artist and researcher in the field of ceramics, Clare Twomey, covering the recent development of a performative strand in Twomey’s work through projects such as ‘Exchange’ at the Foundling Museum, which invited participants to perform good deeds in exchange for pieces of art in the form of teacups. ‘Piece by Piece’ at the Gardner Museum, Toronto, considered what it is to be dedicated to the making of objects. Frances’s interview with glass sculptor Danny Lane explored the complex processes and risks involved in designing and realising his large scale, lenticular glass artworks such as ‘Parting of the Waves’ in Canary Wharf, ‘Borealis’ for General Motors in Detroit, and ‘Threshold’ for the Mint Museum, North Carolina. Liz Wright has been interviewing Rosemary Ransome Wallis, who recently stepped down after forty-five years as the first female Curator and Art Director of the Goldsmiths’ Company. Rosemary has been mentioned in almost all of Liz’s Crafts Lives interviews with silversmiths, jewellers and art medallists because of her involvement in establishing the Company’s modern silver collection, key exhibitions and publications such as ‘Treasures
of the Twentieth Century’, advising on significant commissions for Coventry and Lichfield Cathedrals, as well as the support and opportunities she has provided for contemporary makers. Liz also completed a long-running interview with silversmiths. Her sessions covered his ‘Conditions for Ornament’ series, created during the mid-1980s and 1990s, that described experiments in geometry as part of his ‘After Euclid’ series, and his recent ‘Pre-Genus’ series exploring orthogonal structures of architecture via a series of boxes.

Since Tanya Harrod’s first interview with jeweller Gerda Flockinger for Crafts Lives in 1999, a great deal has been achieved in documenting the sector and capturing a key generation of makers: 162 in-depth interviews have been gathered covering ceramics (40 interviews), metalwork (22), book arts (21), textiles (21), furniture/woodwork/basketry (19), and other artists (26). In total, 228 automata (206 plus gallery owners and curators). By any standards we have created an extraordinary archive of international standing available to students and scholars worldwide.

Many individuals and organisations have been financially generous towards Crafts Lives and we would like to thank them for making the project what it is today. We raised nearly £300,000 for the project. The Lisbet Rausing Trust, Sir Siegmund Warburg’s Voluntary Settlement, and the J Paul Getty Junior Charitable Trust have been major donors; and we have also benefited from their donations from Sir Nicholas Goodison, the Goldsmiths’ Company, the Furniture History Society, the Laura Ashley Foundation, the Michael Marks Charitable Trust, the Sackler Trust, the Keatley Trust, Sarah and Gerard Griffin, Lesley Knox, the Idevild Trust, the Stuart Heath Charitable Settlement, the Basketmakers’ Charitable Trust, the Jerwood Foundation, Janice Blackburn, the John S Cohen Foundation and Morgan Stanley Quilter.

We would like to thank all the members of the Crafts Lives advisory committee who have given their time and enthusiasm to guide and support us: James Beighton, Annabelle Campbell, Amanda Clarke, John Goodison, Tanya Harrod, John Keatley and Martina Margetts. Their knowledge and contacts were invaluable at every stage in shaping the archive. We also have fond memories of those advisors who, sadly, have died: Emmanuel Cooper, Ralph Turner and Amanda Fielding. We thank all our interviewers, most recently Liz Wright and Susan Goodison, for their dedication and hard work.

**Partnerships**

Sarah O’Reilly completed work on An Oral History of Women in Publishing (WIP), our joint project with the campaigning organisation established in 1979 to promote the status of women through networking and training. The project culminated in the launch of a website featuring clips from the thirty recordings in the collection: www.womeninpublishinghistory.org.uk. Hacketh’s Gender Balance report was published this year and has been using the site to inspire and educate Hachette employees and Hachette’s Gender Partnership. The project culminated in the launch of a website featuring the site to inspire and educate Hachette employees and Hachette’s Gender Partnership.

Sarah selected and edited a thirty-minute film drawing on a range of NLS interviews to tell the history of the Booker Prize, with contributions from administrators Martin Goff and Ian Trewin, judges Victoria Glendinning and John Carey, and winners Howard Jacobson, Penelope Lively and Graham Swift. In September 2018, ‘Behind the Scenes of the Man Booker’ was released online via the Man Booker Prize website and the British Library YouTube channel (https://youtube.be/Zc2PKMT1i). The film was covered in The Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Telegraph, The Evening Standard, The Times, The Guardian, The Guardian. It explored the impact of the Booker Prize on Society, the Laura Ashley Foundation, the Michael Marks Charitable Trust, the Sackler Trust, the Keatley Trust, Sarah and Gerard Griffin, Lesley Knox, the Idevild Trust, the Stuart Heath Charitable Settlement, the Basketmakers’ Charitable Trust, the Jerwood Foundation, Janice Blackburn, the John S Cohen Foundation and Morgan Stanley Quilter.

Projects in development

NLS is seeking to create an oral history project which would document all the skills which came together to make Broadgate. The creation of this busy office and leisure development beside London’s Liverpool Street Station was a seminal event in postwar placemaking, uniting quality architecture, art and leisure to create a new sort of urban space for Britain initiated in the 1980s by the developer Stuart Lipton of Rosehaugh Stantospe, working with Arup Associates, Broadgate arose to meet the needs of the UK’s financial sector in the era of Big Bang. Subsequently acquired by British Land, the site continues to evolve to the present day, adapting to the changing needs of the City. We are intending to capture a rich cross-section of experience: those employed by contractors to build the structures onsite, architects and engineers, City planners, lawyers and financiers, the developers themselves, some of the artists whose work contributes to the environment and some of the tenants of the office space. Over the past year we have completed a scoping study – Building Broadgate: London’s History and Architecture. Tom Lean has been interviewing property developer Stuart Lipton, who masterminded the development (further details later in this Review).

As part of developing our Legal Lives project we continue to work with Linda Mulcahy, who has recently left the London School of Economics to take up a new post in socio-legal studies at Oxford University. Together also with Marie Burton from Middlesx University we have been developing a new project to capture the important history of community law centres from its origins in the 1970s.

We held the first of our planned roundtable meetings about a new project Design Lives. Building on the success of Crafts Lives, we wish to extend the project to cover the coming year. We also submitted a full project proposal on the theme of ‘Dangerous Oral Histories’ at Queen’s University Belfast in partnership with the Oral History Network of Ireland. In July Mary and OHS colleagues Cynthia Brown spoke at a workshop at Leeds City Museum entitled ‘Family history and academics – the value of collaboration’, and in September gave a lecture to the Archives and Records Association on oral history and family history. In September I led a two-day seminar on oral history archiving at University College Dublin for a mixed audience of academic staff, librarians, postgraduates and community organisations, and in October attended the US Oral History Association annual conference in Montreal, Canada, leading a panel about sensitivity and oral history and family history. Mary and I both presented lectures at Newcastle University’s new Oral History Unit and Collective in October. I spoke about GDBR and its impact on oral history practice, and in November Mary gave a seminar entitled ‘Exploring family reactions to life story recordings: a curator’s perspective’. Later in November I gave a talk to the new Messianic Oral History Group in Kalama, Greece, on ‘Methodology and the contemporary development of oral history in digital oral testimony archives’.

Many taught sessions for an elective module for the MA in Digital Direction at the Royal College of Art School of Communication, entitled ‘The Other Voice’, run by Eleanor Dare. The students constructed their digital responses to oral history clips from the collections for a ‘student showcase’ at the British Library’s Foyle Visitor and Learning Centre, including an immersive quilt containing speakers, ceramic listening pots, and an animated short film.

and continue to work with them to refine the bid. We are seeking funding to enable us to return to the financial sector as there have been so many dramatic changes even in the short time which has elapsed since our original project City Lives, many of which recordings are now online.

**Public profile and access**

In a collaboration with the £2.3m ‘Understanding Unbelief’ programme at the University of Kent, Paul Merchant has been using collections of life stories interviews – including NLS’s City Lives and An Oral History of the Water Industry – to explore ways in which interviewees speak about the absence of religious belief. This resulted in an extended audio essay, several blogs, a ‘research toolkit and user journey’ (which takes interviewees through the recording and extracting particular material from long interviews), and a collection of edited audio clips which will form the basis of a public lecture at the British Library later in 2019.

The NLS team has been actively teaching, giving public lectures and writing. The 2018 cohort of the MA Curating and Collections students at Chelsea College of Art made an exhibition using theatre material in March entitled ‘Jocelyn Herbert and David Storey’, and another in May entitled ‘Sound and Perspective: Post-war Ideas at Chelsea’ using Artists’ Lives. In August we gave a presentation to the joint Royal College of Art/UAL MA in History of Design Research students, the third time we have been asked to present to this course, and in June took part in a British Museum study day about artists using the Museum. Hester Westley presented a paper in July at the Paul Mellon Centre conference: ‘Frenemies: Friendship, Enmity and Rivalry in British Art, 1769–2018’ on the subject of Paul Huxley, entitled ‘The family we choose: informing friendships in the art school studio from 1769–2018’ on the subject of Paul Huxley, entitled ‘The family we choose: informing friendships in the art school studio from 1769–2018’.

In April we ran a training day for the Society of Architectural Historians, using oral history in digital oral testimony archives’. As part of a three-day conservation programme that brings together architects, conservators and professionals tackling conservation projects across the world.

Our collaborative doctoral student Emmeline Ledgwood attended a History & Policy seminar to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the ‘Next Steps’ report on the civil service, and wrote a blog on the fiftieth anniversary of the Fulton report on the civil service, using clips from the collections to illustrate its impact on government scientists. She also presented papers at the East Midlands Oral History Archive open day in Leicester in June and at the Political Studies Association Conference ‘The presentation of government research labs: how Conservative policies affected the working lives of scientists’, using sound clips from interviews in the collection An Oral History of British Science. In September we hope to submit a paper at the conference ‘A Century of Women MP’s’ at Portcullis House, held to mark the centenary of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918. This paper used the History of Parliament collection of oral history interviews with former MPs to discuss women’s political ambitions. Emmeline and two fellow collaborative PhD students co-organised a one-day workshop in October for historians of twentieth-century science, technology and medicine at Nucleus, the newly opened archive for civil nuclear records in Wilt, Caithness.

Mary Stewart and I contributed a panel about the British Library Sound Archive’s Heritage Lottery-funded ‘Unlocking Our Sound Heritage’ initiative to the International Oral History Association conference in Finland, and we were co-organisers of this year’s Oral History Society (OHS) annual conference on the theme of ‘Dangerous Oral Histories’ at Queen’s University Belfast in partnership with the Oral History Network of Ireland. In July Mary and OHS colleagues Cynthia Brown spoke at a workshop at Leeds City Museum entitled ‘Family history and academics – the value of collaboration’, and in September gave a lecture to the Archives and Records Association on oral history and family history. In September I led a two-day seminar on oral history archiving at University College Dublin for a mixed audience of academic staff, librarians, postgraduates and community organisations, and in October attended the US Oral History Association annual conference in Montreal, Canada, leading a panel about sensitivity and oral history and family history. Mary and I both presented lectures at Newcastle University’s new Oral History Unit and Collective in October. I spoke about GDBR and its impact on oral history practice, and in November Mary gave a seminar entitled ‘Exploring family reactions to life story recordings: a curator’s perspective’. Later in November I gave a talk to the new Messianic Oral History Group in Kalama, Greece, on ‘Methodology and the contemporary development of oral history in digital oral testimony archives’.

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NLS interview clips continue to appear in books, exhibitions and websites. 2016 NLS Goodison Fellow Michael Bird’s book, Studio Voices: Art and Life in 20th Century Britain, composed of extracts from Artists’ Lives and co-published by Lund Humphries and the British Library, was launched at the British Library’s Knowledge Centre in November, the culmination of an immensely productive fellowship, resulting in the book and also an exhibition at the Woking Lightbox in 2017. Hester Wesley and 2016 Goodison Fellow collaborator, journalist Isabel Sutton, completed their 35-minute podcast on the subject of Corsham, Bath Academy of Art, featuring twenty voices drawn from Artists’ Lives, a commentary from Sir Nicholas Serota, an original piano score from Roland Johnson, and fragments of Humphrey Spender’s interviews (Davie was interviewed in 2000, sometimes take years to unfold the long interview, and also how recordings about women who had come to Britain from the Caribbean in the 1950s formed the basis for the groundbreaking theatre piece Motherland. This was performed by the girls at the Oval House in Kennington in 1982 as part of the West Indian Women’s Project (with support from Greater London Council and the Inner London Education Authority). It was the production that caught the eye of Max Stafford-Clark, who invited Elyse to be Director of the Royal Court’s Young People’s Theatre in 1985.

People
There have been several changes in the core NLS team this year: Our Archivist David Gaver left at the end of May to return to Manchester, and Charlie Morgan was appointed as his successor. Camille Johnston, who first joined us on a student placement from University College London in 2017, was invited to Charlie’s former post as Assistant Archivist and Administrator. Frances Conford concluded her work on Crafts Lives in November and we thank her and David for their work for NLS.

Our trustees and advisors are invaluable in supporting and guiding our main collecting activities. We welcomed Linda Mulcahy from Oxford University as a new Advisor, and bid farewell to advisor Caroline Waldergrave and trustee Peter Hennessy, and we thank Peter warmly for presenting the first NLS’s Legacy of the English Stage Company. As international director of the Royal Court Theatre in London, Elyse was a trustee from NLS’s origins in 1988 until 2001. Between 2009 and 2010 Harriet Devine carried out an in-depth life story interview with her as part of NLS’s Legacy of the English Stage Company. As international director of the Royal Court Theatre in London, Elyse was a powerful force in bringing theatre from around the world to the British stage, helping playwrights in more than seventy countries find their voice. Her oral history work is perhaps best known but as Head of Drama at Vauxhall Manor, a girl’s comprehensive school in South London, she pioneered a new form of theatre using oral history and improvisation. Her pupils interviewed their own families, and recordings about women who had come to Britain from the British Library, was launched at the British Library’s Sound & Moving Image Catalogue (sami.bl.uk), which provides detailed content data about individual recordings. NLS recordings can also be discovered through ‘Explore the British Library’ (explore.bl.uk), the Library’s main catalogue which provides a more comprehensive way for users to search within the Library’s collections of books, journals, datasets and sound recordings. A range of NLS projects and thematic oral history collections guides are available on the British Library website (www.bl.uk/subjects/oral-history).

The Listening and Viewing Service at St Pancras provides free public access to open 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.

British Library Sounds
National Life Stories and British Library Oral History provide online access to over 23,500 individual recordings from 4,000 oral history interviews in a selection of thirty collections via British Library Sounds sounds.bl.uk. British Library Sounds enables people to access the material offline without travelling to the British Library, therefore increasing usage considerably, and is beneficial to researchers and inspirational to new generations of students and the public generally.

In 2018 new recordings were added to the Architecture, Art, Banking & Finance, Charity & Social Welfare, Crafts, Oral Historians, Photography, Politics, Science, and Theatre collections. Two new collections were added: six interviews from Authors’ Lives, and thirteen interviews from An Oral History of the Water Industry augmented the Industry package.

Online Learning
Many of the British Library’s learning packages and online exhibitions feature oral history extracts. These include:

• Sounds Familiar, an accent and dialect resource (www.bl.uk/learning/slang/trends/sounds/)
• Playtimes on the Library’s Opie collection of children’s songs and games recordings (www.bl.uk/playtimes)
• Holocaust Voices including extracts from Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust (www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/voices/holocaust.html)
• Sisterhood (www.bl.uk/sisterhood) including extracts and videos from the Women’s Liberation Oral History Project
• LGBTQI+ Histories (www.bl.uk/lgbtiq-histories) on the struggles for love, identity and legislative change faced by LGBTQI+ communities in the UK
• Voices of the UK (www.bl.uk/voices-of-speech) which tells the stories of some of the most remarkable scientific and engineering discoveries of the past century using oral history interviews with prominent British scientists and engineers.

Follow us on Twitter @BL_OralHistory and keep up to date with what’s happening at National Life Stories via the Library’s Sound and Vision blog (blogs.bl.uk/sound-and-vision/). The National Life Stories podcast is available at iTunes, SoundCloud and all major podcast apps (www.bl.uk/projects/national-life-stories).

An overview of the Library’s Oral History collections can be found at www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-history

Ways of listening: access to National Life Story recordings
Charlie Morgan, Archivist, and Camille Johnston, Assistant Archivist, NLS

The interviews recorded for National Life Stories projects are archived at the British Library and cared for as part of the Library’s Oral History collections. All National Life Stories interviews are catalogued on the British Library’s Sound & Moving Image Catalogue (sami.bl.uk), which provides detailed content data about individual recordings. NLS recordings can also be discovered through ‘Explore the British Library’ (explore.bl.uk), the Library’s main catalogue which provides a more comprehensive way for users to search within the Library’s collections of books, journals, datasets and sound recordings. A range of NLS projects and thematic oral history collections guides are available on the British Library website (www.bl.uk/subjects/oral-history).

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Photographs of Ashley Cartwright looking on a model for a New Gardens table, and of a hanging pot made by Cartwright for the Grand Union Canal in 2004. Ashley Cartwright (1934/48) was interviewed by Frances Cartwright for Cartwright in 2015-16 and this interview was added to British Library Sounds in 2016. sounds.bl.uk/OralHistory/Crafts/0516-C686204E603A3D19E
Listeners responses

Researchers access oral history collections at the British Library in a variety of ways. While we still receive many onsite visitors at St Pancras and Boston Spa, the amount of online researchers increases each year. In 2018 there were 95,362 page views of National Life Stories content online at BL Sounds, an increase of nearly 30,000 from 2017. Oral history content as a whole received 187,115 page views. Our most used online package of interviews by far remains Living Memory of the Jewish Community, but there was a significant increase in online access to other collections, notably our online interviews from Artists’ Lives saw an increase from 4,871 page views in 2017 to 15,250 page views in 2018. This coincided with the ‘Speaking of the Kasmin Gallery’ exhibition which ran at Tate Britain from 2016-2018 and the launch of the online resource ‘Voices of art’.

We are always looking for feedback from researchers and often receive comments that help us assess the interviews we are making available online. One academic working with an interview with Pauline Vogelpoel commented on the Artists’ Lives collection: “these interviews are such a treasure trove… they reveal so much about the importance of inter-personal relations in organisational settings that I find them an essential tool for my research.” Another who had been listening to an interview with Mary Midgley from Science and Religion: Exploring the Spectrum both before and after her death noted that, while it was harder to re-listen, “at the same time there was something incredibly vital about her even in the twilight of her life. The interviews revealed someone who clearly remained interested and excited by ongoing scientific and philosophical debates and was looking towards the future.”

Many other users specifically appreciate the oral nature of our collections. One author remarked on how vividly she could recall the voices of interviewees as she was typing out quotes, and another reflected on how “for subjects no longer alive it does help bring them closer to hear their voices”. That listener had been listening to ‘Attitudes to modernism in the work of Quin’ by Elinor Wainwright and went on to comment how “at the same time there was something incredibly vital about her even in the twilight of her life. The interviews revealed someone who clearly remained interested and excited by ongoing scientific and philosophical debates and was looking towards the future.”

Voices of art

Generously funded by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, ‘Voices of art’ (www.bl.uk/voices-of-art) is a new online resource that enhances the prominence of National Life Stories recordings on the British Library website. ‘Voices of art’ presents a series of oral histories gathered from writers immersed in the art world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The essays interpret a selection of carefully chosen clips from oral history recordings, and are illustrated by striking images drawn mostly from private family collections. The website currently features nearly 100 audio extracts from the NLS collection Artists’ Lives and over 100 images, with more due to be added in 2019. ‘Voices of art’ also hosts a series of specially commissioned teaching resources tailored to the curriculum for A-Level History of Art students.

The website was launched in November 2018 with a series of eighteen essays that discuss influences on British art and artists since the 1950s. While some essays provide a focused overview of particular periods, for example, ‘The London art world, 1950–1965’ by Duncan Robinson, Opening up to international influences: British art in the 20th century by Michael Bird, and Art and advertising in the 1960s by Simon Martin, others reveal insights into the changing relationships between artists, curators and gallerists. Gareth Bell-Jones’s essay on John Latham and the Kasmin Gallery documents the artist’s early career and uncovers rumours that circulated in the 1960s regarding the sale of Latham’s work. Within her two essays Hester Westley examines the personal relationships and studio practices of a group of artists working in Wiltshire in the 1960s, and those of Sheila Girling and her husband Sir Anthony Caro. The following excerpt is taken from Hester’s interview with Girling, which features in the essay:

“Well I said, look at music. Why is music such an abstraction? How can that get into abstraction, you know? And we thought of the timepiece in music. And he started doing Early One Morning then, going along the whole pole with intervals. And then we said, you know, you get two different themes blending in music, and he did Month of May then with different themes, well, going, you know, this all, talking about this. And I had lots of ideas that I could give him, and he had lots of ideas to add to it, and we fed each other all the time.”

Other essays highlight the contributions of gallerists and curators in this period, such as Mel Gooding’s Bryan Robertson and Lawrence Alloway which assesses the impact these curators had on the Whitechapel Art Gallery and Institute of Contemporary Arts, Norman Reid as Director of the Tate Gallery by Nicholas Serota, and Gallery One: Victor Musgrave’s ‘stable’ of artists by Sarah Victoria Turner; Cathy Courtaul’s essay Selling art and the art of selling delves into the world of art dealing inhabited by gallerist John Kasmin and his peers, and Chris Stephens describes how a newcomer entered the fold in David Hockney at the Kasmin Gallery:

“His opening at Kasmin’s was a big event. The title of his exhibition – Paintings with People In – was pointed. At that time contemporary art – and the Kasmin Gallery – were dominated by the cool abstract painting of such Americans as Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, characterised by large areas of plain colour. To assert the importance of figurative was to make a stand.”

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

Compiled by Mary Stewart, Deputy Director, NLS

Our longstanding Oral History of British Photography (C459) now has an impressive 227 interviews since the first was made in 1990 with Godfrey Thurston Hopkins. This year Shirley Read recorded artist-photographer Tom Wood who is widely known for his intimate and empathetic photographs of people and his early and subtle use of colour. Tom was nicknamed ‘Photio’man’ during a period of about twenty-five years during which he lived in Liverpool and Merseyside and photographed people on the streets, in the markets, on the buses and in places of work and leisure. Shirley and Tom discussed his archive and exhibition prints and in future sessions will cover his work for the prestigious annual festival Les Rencontres de la photographie in Arles, France – which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 2019.

Shirley also interviewed photographer and photographic collector Harriet Logan, who talked about her childhood in Providence, America, where she fell in love with photography. Logan discussed his archive and exhibition prints and in future sessions will cover his work for the prestigious annual festival Les Rencontres de la photographie in Arles, France – which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 2019.

We welcomed several other diverse collections into the archive in 2018. As part of her PhD, artist Patricia Townsend recorded oral histories to try and answer some fundamental questions: What does it feel like to be an artist? Are there common threads between the experiences of individual artists or does each artist work in his or her own idiosyncratic way? Townsend then used psychoanalytic theory to analyse the creative process through factors common across many interviews, twenty-five of which have been archived with us. The results have been published in her book Creative States of Mind: Psychoanalysis and the Artist’s Process (Routledge, 2019) and the interviews can be accessed at the Library in the collection Interviews exploring artists and the creative process (C1301).

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Charlie Morgan catalogued a rare speech by the legendary cricketer Sir Learie Constantine (C1763), recorded in the mid-1960s for a speech day at Rastrick Grammar School in West Yorkshire. Constantine (1901–1971) was a West Indian cricketer, lawyer and politician, and speaks of his personal history and career as well as a brief history of the Caribbean. The recording was donated by Alson Johnston and Ian Johnston, children of the headmaster of the school who also features in the recording. Southend Museums Service donated four recordings made by Juliana Vandegrift for an exhibition on the iconic London clothes store BIBA, which was open 1964–1975 (C1832). Adding to the 2017 community project recorded by Woodcraft Folk, Annelita Pollen deposited five interviews she recorded as part of an Arts & Humanities Research Council funded project, Cultural History of the British Woodcraft Movement 1916-2016 (C1821), including people active in the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, the Woodcraft Folk and the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry.

Highlights from Unlocking Our Sound Heritage in 2018

It has been an exciting year for ‘Unlocking Our Sound Heritage’, the national project led by the British Library which will preserve and provide access to many thousands of the nation’s rare and unique sound recordings – both from the British Library holdings and key collections from heritage partners collections across the UK. ‘Unlocking Our Sound Heritage’ is funded by a £9.5 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, as well as generous support from charities and individuals, including the Foyle and Garfield Weston Foundations. Ten regional ‘hub’ partners around the UK have now embarked on digitisation, cataloguing and outreach work in their catchment areas. The project has brought two excellent curatorial volunteers – Anna Savory and Laurie Green-Eames – to the oral history department.

Since the project began in 2017 over fifty oral history collections have been fully digitised by expert audio engineers at the library, with catalogue entries enhanced by a team of catalogueers. NLS collections An Oral History of the Post Office (C1007) and National Life Stories: General Interviews (C464) are now digitised and over the next year Lives in the Oil Industry (C963) and Book Trade Lives (C872) will also be digitised – meaning that by mid-2020 almost all NLS collections will have been transferred to digital formats. This is a major achievement.

A cluster of important analogue collections on health and well-being are now preserved, including recordings about HIV and AIDS (Haemophilia and HIV Life History Project C1086; HIV/AIDS Testimonies C743); the history of nursing and healthcare
Ayomide Oluyemi leading her tour of the Library.

The outreach and learning activities for the project are also underway and in autumn 2018 four talented young scholars explored the oral history collections to highlight voices from Caribbean migrants – building on themes highlighted in the Library’s ‘Windrush: Songs in a Strange Land’ exhibition. The four guides, Korantema Anyimadu, Amelia Francis, Ayomide Oluyemi and Shani Page-Muir, each gave a tour based on four guides, Korantema Anyimadu, Amelia Francis, Ayomide Oluyemi and Shani Page-Muir. Designing and leading the sound tour was a new idea of getting to create my own tour, at the start I was very nervous. Feeling more confident with practice tours, being trained in how to edit sound clips and learning about oral history have been wonderful skills to gain.

The tours were a sell-out for British Library staff and the general public, and the guides are running further tours to celebrate Windrush Day in June 2019.

National Life Stories has created a healthy portfolio of oral histories by distinguished architects whose achievements mapped out the rise of modernism after the Second World War, fuelled by the convictions that produced the National Health Service, public sector housing and the welfare state. But what about the next generation, whose childhoods, university educations and subsequent careers emerged from this background? Many of these ‘baby boomers’ are now at the peak of their powers but very few have had the chance to record their life stories and capture the way UK architecture became an entirely private sector phenomenon. With household names such as Norman Foster and Richard Rogers now in their eighties, this new cohort is less well-known but has finally emerged from their shadows to produce some of the best and most voluminous work around.

The 1980s was a time of architectural turmoil, with modern architecture under fire and a sense that things needed to change. Patronage was shifting towards younger architects, partly due to this restlessness for new ideas, but also for the pragmatic reason that the more established firms were struggling to cope with a property boom. Local authority architects departments, which previously employed as many as forty per cent of all UK architects, had all but ceased to exist, which meant that architects had to cut their teeth in private practice before going solo, with all the attendant risks of workload, experience and building up a reputation.

A seminal exhibition held at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1988 directed the spotlight precisely on this group, under the banner ‘40 Under Forty’. The notion of ‘young’ architects being under the age of forty says something about the time it takes to reach maturity in this notoriously slow-burn profession, but a spread of forty emerging practices represented a very broad snapshot of those who were beginning to make waves. An open invitation to submit three panels of illustrations, showing built or unbuilt work, led to 130 submissions which were judged by an eminent panel chaired by the late Professor David Dunster.

‘40 Under Forty’: Architects’ Lives
Rab Bennetts, Chair, Architects’ Lives Advisory Committee

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Looking back at the exhibition catalogue it is remarkable how many of the forty, who ranged from sole practitioners to small studios no more than a handful strong, have gone on to create important work and build up highly reputable practices. Among them were David Chipperfield, Allies & Morrison, Terry Pawson and Keith Williams, and Troughton McAslan from London, together with Edinburgh-based Neil Gillespie, for example, and Sauerbruch Hutton has since become one of the most respected practices in Germany. My own practice, Bennetts Architects, was only a few months old at the time but the exhibition kick-started our profile and led to numerous articles in the UK and abroad.

Keith Williams, 2019, who as part of Pawson Williams Architects, was selected for the ‘40 Under Forty’ exhibition at the RIBA in 1988 (catalogue shown above).
Around a dozen of the most active architects from the forty have been invited to record their life stories as part of the Architects’ Lives programme. Some are well underway and others will follow as resources permit, but they seem certain to chart the personal development of those born after 1948 and the way in which their creativity prevailed over the insecurities of the 1980s. This is also the generation that has had to face up to environmental pressures, from the oil crisis and the three-day-week during their education, but the way

**Allies and Morrison**

Bob Allies and Graham Morrison formed Allies & Morrison in 1984. The firm was among those picked for ‘40 Under Forty’ in 1988. Bob Allies, interviewed by Niamh Dillon, remembers:

“Then the only way of getting yourself known was to get published in one of the magazines, by comparison, now, people can find out about you more easily… it was harder then to get your name about and these opportunities were important for us, and for other young practices. Our submission was quite austere: we were interested in communicating the rigour of what we did…black and white, no colour, and quite restrained. And that was one of the things that you experience in these exhibitions, it was up to everyone to represent themselves graphically. Over and above what you think about the buildings, you do get a very strong sense of the aesthetic of the practice. Almost without meaning to, everybody communicated a lot about their approach and their aesthetic and their priorities, but probably not consciously…I think we’ve always been wary of drawings which are merely seductive drawings in their own right. Our drawings have always been quite serious, simple and controlled.”

Graham Morrison was also interviewed by Niamh Dillon. He comments that:

“We went into ‘Forty under 40’ wanting to be part of a new wave of thinking and getting credit for being a participant. We did it to be recognised and to get our drawing style appreciated. We felt we were a part of the forging of a new identity for a generation of architects. We had certain things in common, we weren’t afraid of technology and we wanted to include an interest in history into the way we thought about architecture. Unlike earlier generations of modernists, we refused to take a dogmatic view and that allowed us to look at a time before Le Corbusier. We could enjoy Borromini, Bernini and Alberti as much as Asplund and Wright. We learned about representation of an idea from them all and I believe that was one of the things that set us apart from a previous generation.”

**The past is a foreign country: a research journey through the Artists’ Lives archive**

Hester R Westley, 2016–17 NLS Goodison Fellow

Mel Gooding [NLS interviewer]: “Was it their school [referring to Clifford and Rosemary Ellis and Bath Academy of Art at Corsham], and they ran it the way they wanted?

Gillian Ayres: “It was his baby, sort of thing. Like I said, it was at the end of the war and it was a funny, idealistic… I mean, for better and for worse, some idealism was probably a bit potty.

Mel: “And you could do more or less as you wished as long as you got the results, and they were the results that they liked?

Gillian: “As long as they were pleased with what happened in your studio.

Mel: “But what if they weren’t? And what wouldn’t they be pleased with?

Gillian: “They watched… if they didn’t like somebody–it might be what they were up to, or their ideas – if they or he judged he didn’t like them, they got the sack very quickly and so did students. Later on, this literally wouldn’t have been allowed… Clifford could give someone money and say: ‘Here’s a fiver. Get out; go back to Manchester’– and you wouldn’t see them again. Once they liked you, you were family and you were very well treated. This went for students too… So you will find people with the most dreamy memories of Corsham, and also people who might run down the Ellises.”
How, as historians, do we reconcile the confusion of individual oral testimonies into coherent historical narrative? In this fragment of a conversation between abstract painter Gillian Ayres and artist writer Mel Gooding (C466/391), Gillian highlights this dilemma for us. This conversation is just one of many discussions on the subject of Bath Academy of Art, Corsham, that can be found in the Artists’ Lives archive. Just as Gillian cautions, when we listen to these discussions, we are left at once intrigued and baffled by the diversity of experience and memory in the retelling of this perhaps extraordinary, perhaps eccentric institution.

Bath Academy of Art, or ‘Corsham’, as it was known, was, from its founding in 1946 through to 1967, a progressive residential, liberal arts college with the unusual remit of training art teachers as well as artists (it continued as an art school after this date, but it stopped offering the teaching training component). The legacy of the institution is shrouded in its own mythology, and it has to date largely been missed out in art historical scholarship. Opinions in the Artists’ Lives archive about the legacy of the institution range from laudatory to quizzical. There is a general consensus that Corsham was progressive – ‘the school was, by a miracle, by far the most interesting provincial school in the country at the time’ (Michael Craig-Martin, C466/109) – as well as unique: ‘Corsham had other dreams and idealism and was a very separate place on its own’ (Gillian Ayres C466/91). Neither progressive nor unique obviates its nature as experimental: ‘They were trying to run it free of the constrictions of the Ministry of Education, and therefore they had a wonderful time’ (Michael Craig-Martin, C466/22).

As far the man in charge – the inimitable Clifford Ellis – he appears as nothing short of a Jekyll and Hyde character: ‘a man of immense energy’ (Adrian Heath, C466/11); ‘a difficult man’ (Jack Smith, C466/96); ‘a benign dictator’ (Michael Pennie, C466/377). Indeed, he was a walking contradiction: anti-establishment but respectful of tradition; progressive nor unique; indeed it appears as nothing short of a Jekyll and Hyde character: ‘a man of immense energy’ (Adrian Heath, C466/11); ‘a difficult man’ (Jack Smith, C466/96); ‘a benign dictator’ (Michael Pennie, C466/377).

It’s because of this collision of narratives that Artists’ Lives recordings offer the most illuminating methodology for an institutional art school history. It was a daunting task: many egos were at stake, many agendas were in competition, and little trace existed of an institutional archive (Clifford Ellis conveniently had a bonfire upon retirement – or so a few accounts contend).

As we all know, the minutes of meetings and documentary traces of establishment protocol have little – closer to nothing – to do with what actually transpires in the classroom or studio. It’s the audio testimony that delves below the official façade of the institution to uncover how ideas between artists and students (1956 –1962). Hodgkin remembers, as a student in 1953, the ‘international group’ of such importance visited Corsham that Ellis went so far as to move the trees in his effort to ensure the school was seen in its best light. Such an anecdote (and the first mention of this visit) reveals the international scope and meticulous attention that Ellis had for Corsham. From our interview with German typographer Hansjörg Mayer, we knew that Ellis had broad visions for his school – after all, he drew his faculty from different cultures and different systems, openly decrying the insularity of interbellum Britain. Only after recording former student Rosemary Devoradil (who matriculated in 1946) did it become clear that this mysterious ‘international group’ was, in fact, a delegation from UNESCO.

Our first lead came through a recording with Howard Hodgkin (C466/286). Hodgkin occupied the rare position of having both studied at Corsham (1950–54) and been employed on staff (1956–1962). Hodgkin remembers, as a student in 1953, ‘an international group’ of such importance visited Corsham that Ellis went so far as to move the trees in his effort to ensure the school was seen in its best light. Such an anecdote (and the first mention of this visit) reveals the international scope and meticulous attention that Ellis had for Corsham. From our interview with German typographer Hansjörg Mayer, we knew that Ellis had broad visions for his school – after all, he drew his faculty from different cultures and different systems, openly decrying the insularity of interbellum Britain. Only after recording former student Rosemary Devoradil (who matriculated in 1946) did it become clear that this mysterious ‘international group’ was, in fact, a delegation from UNESCO.

Our explorations in the Artists’ Lives archive helped us situate Clifford Ellis and his achievements at Corsham within the broader landscape of art education in post-war Europe. In his new position in Bath, Ellis saw an opportunity to implement a new form of art training: with a broad curriculum foregrounding design, he seized the fast-fading opportunity to democratise fine art to ensure that it remained open to students of various backgrounds, sharing the bright prospect of future employment. Ellis trained artists to be inspiring art teachers. He insisted on the centrality of art – its ways of looking and seeing – in a general education. Born out of a spirit of optimism about the potential for remaking a society scarred by war, Corsham was founded on a post-apocalyptic idealism about the role that the artist could play in improving people’s lives, both in Britain and across the world.

The timing of this research journey – poised as we are against current political turmoil and ongoing confusion over the status of the UK within the EU – added a decided poignancy to the project. We hope that our podcast and its accompanying multi-media article do justice to the panoply of perspectives at play in this very particular history, comprising as it does the arguments, philosophies and approaches that defined this ‘enchanted realm’ where a promising future seemed not only possible, but probable.
As children, Jenkinson’s observations were made as a child growing up on smallholdings between Armagh and Portadown in Northern Ireland:

“I saw the back-breaking work our local, our neighbours spent their time doing, you know: ploughing with horses [...] stoking grain and milking by hand [...] And, I was aware, even as quite a young, young boy, that [...] these things could be improved. I mean [...] one of my uncles for example, a very progressive farmer, was introducing, you know, quite a lot of fertilisers, inorganic fertilisers. And [...] I saw farmers, first of all, they took old cars and they converted them to mowing machines, and, these were very, [laughs] very impressive gadgets going round the field. And then of course the first tractors came, and I remember one of my uncles was one of the first people in that part of the country to sell their homes and buy a tractor. And, I, I was very impressed by this, and I still, I still feel that, that this is something that is important, science and engineering should be used in agriculture, both to raise productivity and also to, to eliminate, at least some of the, the awful heavy hard work that was normal in those days.” [C1379/06]

The extracts above point to certain features of change in farming and the management of land in Britain since 1945: increasing farm size; new patterns of ownership; fewer workers; vastly increased yields; changes to the permanent and ephemeral agricultural landscape; artificial fertilisers and other chemicals used more widely, expansion of wheat acreage; more and bigger machines.

An oral history of farming, land management and conservation in post-war Britain

Paul Merchant, Oral Historian and Researcher, National Life Stories

Interviewed for the NLS collection Down to Earth: An Oral History of British Horticulture in 2006, landowner and former land agent Sir Richard Carew Pole shares his memories of an ‘agricultural revolution’ well underway in Britain in the late 1960s:

“When I left Cirencester [Royal Agricultural College] in 1967, I went to work for a very small firm of land agents outside Oxford [...] they managed estates in Oxfordshire [...] and in those days [... all the small farms were being amalgamated [...] small farmers were going – because the cry was for bigger units; the government was saying [...] this country has got to be self-sufficient in food [...] and so every incentive was given to farmers to become more efficient. [...] It only cost you 2p in every pound to modernise your estate so [...] farms were being amalgamated, hedges were being taken out because machinery was getting bigger, wet spots were being drained [...] and obviously damage was being done, environmentally, there’s no doubt about it. [...] Sprays and fertilisers were coming in [...] the seeds you put into the ground were getting much more sophisticated because all the research had been taken, and so instead of getting one 25 hundred weight or 30 hundred weight an acre, you were getting yields of three tones.” [C1029/38]

Here we have a land manager’s view of the transformation of British farming that had begun during World War Two. In another collection – An Oral History of British Science (OHBS) – we find James Lovelock recalling similar changes around the Wiltsheire village where he lived between the mid 1950s and the mid 1970s:

“It was wonderful, it was like (…) Cider With Rosie, that kind of thing. And, it was a lovely life. And it all lasted until about the [...] again the awful Sixties. And it all fell apart [...] The farms sold up, and they were bought, properties were bought by insurance companies and the like, who suddenly put in farm managers who said, ‘Ah, this is no good,’ and tore out all the hedgerows, turned it into one giant prairie with barbed wire around, not hedgerows. And, enormous, gigantic tractors that just ploughed up a square mile of field, that sort of thing, you can see it all over Wiltsheire. It suddenly changed, almost within a year, from gorgeous, beautiful countryside, to an awful lot of it becoming completely devastated. And that was agribusiness. Needed to feed us.” [C1379/15]

In a third NLS collection – Food: From Source to Salepoint – south Cambridgehire arable farmer Oliver Walston provides a vivid example of the effect of mechanisation and artificial fertiliser on both the workforce (far fewer ‘men’ needed) and what Paul Bradsey calls the ‘ephemeral’ agricultural landscape (in this case the temporary appearance of molehills of ‘muck’):

“For the first ten years of my life [...] gangs of men would drive these carts full of [horse] manure across the fields and would stop every fifteen yards and would fork off the trailers on the field little conical heaps of dung [...] about three foot tall and about four foot wide [...] and so it looks as if there are huge molehills dotted all over this field. And then whenever conditions permit another gang of men will come in and will spread the little conical heaps of manure all over the field and that way the fertiliser is applied to the field. Incredibly labour intensive. [...] Today of course what happens is a great big lorry turns up at the farm, and tips up a huge heap of grey, granular powder stuff. This then gets picked up by a big loader bucket, put into a fertiliser spreader, taken up to the field, and is spread. [...] So one man does everything.” [C821/154]

Walston is careful to stress that the ‘grey, granular powder stuff’ worked much better than manure – it was an improvement, affording yields of wheat beyond the wildest dreams of his father:

“Even with the amount of animals we used to have in the old days [...] you could, if you were lucky, fertilise every field every ten years. [...] Now we fertilise the land every year and as a result we get much, much bigger yields. One of the reasons the yields were so terrible in the old days was that the soil was very, very poor, even with a nice organic rotation [...] In those days my father said to me that we never grow wheat on this farm [...] We grew barley and we grew rye. Today we don’t grow rye, we don’t grow barley, we only grow wheat and we get very good yields of wheat.” [C821/154]

Walston’s view of artificial fertiliser as providing essential improvements in agricultural output is echoed by former soil scientist at Rothamsted Experimental Station, David Jenkinson, recorded for OHBS in 2010:

“There’s really no choice. I mean I was walking over, yesterday, the farm owned by the Prince of Wales, well it’s the Duchy of Cornwall of course [...] and he’d got, he was growing an organic crop of wheat there, and it was miserable. Full of weeds. Obviously yellow, suffering from extreme nitrogen deficiency, and they’ll get a tiny little yield. But on the other hand, they’ll sell it as organic flour at a colossal price. So, it’s tolerable as long as people are prepared to buy these enormous, enormously expensive special things. But as a way of feeding huge populations, it’s not on.” [C1379/06]

Both Walston and Jenkinson explain their enthusiasm for mechanisation and the judicious use of artificial fertilisers (and pesticides) with reference to forms of hardship in farming work that they observed as children. Jenkinson’s observations were made as a child growing up on smallholdings between Armagh and Portadown in Northern Ireland:

“I saw the back-breaking work our local, our neighbours spent their time doing, you know, ploughing with horses [...] stoking grain and milking by hand [...] And, I was aware, even as quite a young, young boy, that [...] these things could be improved. I mean [...] one of my uncles for example, a very progressive farmer, was introducing, you know, quite a lot of fertilisers, inorganic fertilisers. And [...] I saw farmers, first of all, they took old cars and they converted them to mowing machines, and, these were very, [laughs] very impressive gadgets going round the field. And then of course the first tractors came, and I remember one of my uncles was one of the first people in that part of the country to sell their homes and buy a tractor. And, I, I was very impressed by this, and I still, I still feel that, that this is something that is important, science and engineering should be used in agriculture, both to raise productivity and also to, to eliminate, at least some of the, the awful heavy hard work that was normal in those days.” [C1379/06]
On the surface the lives of Roger Gibbs and his younger brother, Christopher, were very different. Roger appeared to be an establishment figure, happy to don a top hat to visit the Bank of England early in his City career in the 1950s. By contrast Christopher wore kaftans, consorted with the Rolling Stones, was hailed by the New York Times as the ‘Avatar of Swinging London’ and, as he told the writer David Jenkins, ‘took to acid like a duck to water’. Roger (born 1934) was recorded by NLS for City Lives, Christopher (born 1938) for Swinging London’ and, as he told the writer David Jenkins, was hailed by the New York Times as the ‘Avatar of Swinging London’ and, as he told the writer David Jenkins, ‘took to acid like a duck to water’. Roger (born 1934) was recorded by NLS for City Lives, Christopher (born 1938) for Swinging London’ and, as he told the writer David Jenkins, was hailed by the New York Times as the ‘Avatar of Swinging London’ and, as he told the writer David Jenkins, ‘took to acid like a duck to water’. Roger (born 1934) was recorded by NLS for City Lives, Christopher (born 1938) for Swinging London’ and, as he told the writer David Jenkins, was hailed by the New York Times as the ‘Avatar of Swinging London’ and, as he told the writer David Jenkins, ‘took to acid like a duck to water’.

The Gibbs children with their mother, Helen, 1946. Christopher (top), Roger second from the left.

Roger was recorded between 1992 and 2002 and Christopher’s recording captures a vanished world. The names of the firms he worked for – Jessel Toynbee, de Zoete, and Gerard & National – have gone completely, as has Antony Gibbs & Son, which was taken over by the Hong Kong Bank in 1979. The flavour is caught in this extract from a City Lives recording with his younger colleague, Ross Jones, remembering the 1977 interview for his first job on leaving school:

“I came to see Roger Gibbs, who was Chairman of Gerrard & National, and I thought he was the most charming man I’d ever met in my life. He sat me down and we talked about cricket for a while and then he said, ‘Well, would you like a job? If you did come, when would you like to start?’ I was taken round the office and then I went home. He phoned my mother that night to say he’d offered me a job and hoped very much that I would take it and that if she had anything she wanted to ask, not to hesitate to call. That sums up Gerrard & National under Roger. He looked after his whole staff like that. You couldn’t have come to a more paternalistic company in the City than Gerrard & National.”

In 1975 Roger survived a major operation for cancer, and in 1982, aged forty-seven, ran the London Marathon, raising £440,000 for Guy’s Hospital. He continued to support health charities all his life but it was because of his financial acumen that he was invited to become a trustee of the Wellcome Trust and, in 1989, took on the role of Chairman. Roger is credited with having increased the wealth of the Trust by details about him in this article are those easily gleaned from magazines and online but safe to say that his is a piquant account of the London scene before the 1967 Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexual acts between consenting males over the age of twenty-one. Peter Hinwood was Christopher’s long-term partner in business and in life although they didn’t cohabit. Roger lived alone until his marriage aged seventy-one to Jane Lee, although he divulged he got close to marriage three times before he was thirty.

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Christopher’s path was utterly different. Morocco and Tangiers were to figure large in his life, both as a source for the objects he brought back for his shops and for trips (of both kinds) with Brian Jones, Anita Pallenberg and John Paul Getty Jr. Bruce Chatwin lodged for years in his rooms at Albany, William Burroughs was a friend. Antonioni shot the party scene in his film, Blow-up, in the Cheyne Walk house Christopher rented in the 1960s, and Christopher himself designed the film, Performance, starring Mick Jagger and James Fox. He was with the Stones, Robert Fraser and Marianne Faithful when the 1967 drugs bust took place at Keith Richards’s home, Redlands in Sussex. By the end of his life he claimed the only thing he was addicted to was raspberries, and felt that his work ethic was what rescued him from too dissolute a life. He was the person Jagger chose to help create his home in France, Jacob Rothschild hired him for the refurbishment of Spencer House, Joseph Brueys was a client, and Christopher was immensely sought after and celebrated for his flair and erudition. It was Christopher who helped the reclusive John Paul Getty Jr beat his drug addiction and emerge into life again from the London Clinic.

NLS recordings from various projects interweave with those of the Gibbs family, among them Laetitia Fleming (nee Borthwick), interviewed for Food: From Source to Salespoint and John Craven for City Lives.

City Lives ran from 1987 to 1997 and even though less than twenty-five years have passed, the environment it documented – physical (in the Square Mile), technological and ethical – has changed out of all recognition. For this reason, NLS hopes to launch a new project – City Lives Revisited – in the near future.

In 1989 the research chemist and Nottingham University Vice-Chancellor Professor Lord Frederick Dainton (1914–1997) was interviewed by Paul Thompson for the NLS City Lives collection. Thirty years later his son, the particle physicist Professor John Dainton, is being interviewed for An Oral History of British Science. While professional life and times are often the major focus, life story interviews also reveal family life, including the experiences of being raised by parents and of being parents to others. In this case both father and son reflect on many of the same things in their interviews as they discuss these relationships look from the perspectives of the other people involved. In this case both father and son reflect on many of the same things in their interviews as they discuss the other person, yet there are similarities and differences.

Intrigued, project interviewer Tom Lean played John part of Fred’s interview where he discusses raising John, to see what he would make of it.

John: “I’d forgotten half of that. What a strange experience. I didn’t recognise his voice at the beginning and I think that might be something to do with long-term memory. I knew I was going deaf over donkeys’ years and you lose the high frequencies. I didn’t pick up his voice at first as being right and then it got processed very quickly compared with how I adapted to other voices that were immediate before I got the hearing aids. What an interesting scientific – I’m going to tell my physiology friends about that. And of course I didn’t really know him – you never know your father after you leave home except intermittently. A very curious experience. Is it typical I start analysing it? The emotional reaction is hearing his voice again. Sons and daughters of politicians see recordings of them the rest of their lives in the media, but I haven’t really listened to his voice like that since he died. That didn’t hit me that hard, but you do process it. And then there’s his tone, his turn of expression, the speed at which he was speaking. It’s very hard to explain, when you do experiment sometimes things fit and you think, ‘what I thought would happen did happen.’ Here, I had a similar sort of reaction.

“I think I’m a lot more like him having heard that than I originally thought, because I found myself following the flow of what he was saying, when I notched it in, not just the rate he was speaking, but the way the ideas were coming into his head, the fact they were mainly true but a bit scrambled now and again and I think perhaps I would have got that wrong too.”

While many of the facts are the same in Fred and John’s interviews, they have subtly different meanings to each. Walks in the countryside, for example, are mentioned frequently in Fred’s interview, including with his children.

Fred: “I think the thing that I was interested in doing for them… on the belief that… if it did take, it would give them enormous satisfaction… I wanted to get them out of doors… We went out on Sundays… and we explored the Yorkshire Dales on foot… When I took them out, or we went out into the country, they would turn into geography and geomorphology lessons, simply because there was the countryside… I think, occasionally, they were inclined to feel, you know, ‘I’m tired of scenery, can I have a comic?’”

The walks are present in John’s recollections too, but the experience is weighted differently. As oral historians have long pointed out, it is people’s interpretation of events that give them meaning, often more so than the details of the events themselves.

John: “What he meant by a walk was you get your boots on, your waterproofs, you made sure you’d got gloves and a hat. It didn’t matter if it was February, if it was snowing, you walked. At the age of nine I was walking ten miles up mountains, along moors and back down again. God I hated it at the time. Well I didn’t, but it wasn’t necessarily what I wanted to do. As a child you think, ‘I don’t want to do this now.’ ‘Well you’re going to have to do it.’ So you do it.

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And you remember resenting it… I think he wanted to give me what he discovered for himself, what he used to do when he was growing up in Sheffield, he discovered the Peak District and he used to go out onto the moors. I think he sort of thought he really enjoyed this, so his son should enjoy it as well.

“What he said was right, you can’t feel rebellious as a child all the time you’re being taken to things you’re rebelling against. But I’m sure now, if I’m going with friends into the countryside, I do understand things like limestone regions suddenly changing to millstone grit.”

In contrasting interviews it seems that things are often the same, but different. One thing that both Daintons agree on is that Fred and his wife Barbara, a biologist, had no desire to turn their children into scientists. Or as Fred put it, “We tried very hard… to make clear to them, our expectation was not that they should become scientists, quite the contrary!”

Perhaps we best recall the things that are important to us and the parts they play in the stories we tell about our lives. The student protests of the 1960s loom large during Fred’s tenure as Nottingham University Vice-Chancellor, a time when John was a student in Oxford. Fred recalls John objecting to a television news crew manipulating an Oxford student protest to appear larger than it was: “[John] felt so strongly about this, that it was a form of deceit on the public, and I admired him for this.” At another incident in Nottingham, Fred found himself being shouted down by a group of radical students.

Fred: “I heard a voice from the back of this room, enormous room, saying, ‘What about fair-play? Give him a hearing!’ It was my son John’s voice… And he didn’t arrive [home] until about, oh, half past eleven, and I remember saying, ‘Where have you been, John?’ And he said, ‘Oh I’ve been off, I’ve joined the radicals.’ I said, ‘What?’ He said, ‘Well, I thought I would round to see what they were up to’, and they were very much taken with the fact that here was an Oxford student with a First, [laughs] ‘And so I sat with them until the end, and then I told them I was the Vice-Chancellor’s son.’ I was rather touched by that, and he, he obviously was deeply offended by it all.”

Although the events hold significance for Fred in how he tells the story of his time as Vice-Chancellor and perhaps in how he thought about his son, for John the events are remembered slightly differently, less prominently, although with similar meaning.

John: “He liked talking about things in a scientific way and that’s enough. When I was a rebellious teenager I wondered, why do my parents spend all their time telling us things that other parents don’t necessarily when I’m at my friends’ houses? So it’s all very well to say that he didn’t, but given the basic genetics and the fact my parents were talking about science amongst themselves, not have this this rub off, so of course he did influence what was going on.”

When people discuss others in interviews it can only ever be as they understand the other person’s feelings and motivations, sometimes diverging from how the other person understands themselves. To Fred, it was Oxford University that had turned his son onto physics: “He had two physics tutors there, Baker and Bowler, and they did what I was unable to, they fired him off in physics, and then he took off.” To John, there were other factors too.

John: “He didn’t get right what turned me on to physics, which was a physics teacher at Bradford Grammar School. He remembered the names of my tutors in Oxford, he thought they’d turned me on to physics, well they did because they guided me… so he was right about that, but there was this school teacher at Bradford Grammar, he was the one who I think made me flip. Plus at the time my father was getting a grant for a Van de Graaff accelerator, and we were doing A-level physics and we were talking about these new things called particle accelerators and I remember listening to this carefully because my old man’s got a grant and he’s doing something with them.”

In their own right: preserved impressions of a person at a particular time in their lives. Yet if recordings are preserved in aspic, the listening experience is something that changes over time, and the experience of listening to a person we knew must have different meaning decades later. Perhaps, like wine, recordings become better with age.

John: “A lot of people still to this day say, ‘You’re no relation are you?’ It’s still going on, he died in 1997. But when I listen to him, and I think how listeners would react to what he’s saying, they would think: ‘This guy is quite something, I’d have no hesitation in going and asking him for help if it was in trouble.’ I never registered that, but I do know I like helping people, I’m a team player. He got a lot of pleasure from that, meeting all the people that he’d helped, and that came over to me in the emotion this time round. I thought ‘he does think the same way as me.’ There’s been twenty-two years since he died and it’s the first time I’ve thought like that, with his voice in the background, and my attitude to life has changed since I was last able to talk to him. So interesting. All down to recording technology two generations ago we didn’t have. All down to physics again! ‘Better life through physics’ as I always used to say. And he used to say, ‘better life through chemistry’!”

Oral history preserves memories about past events, but as time passes interview recordings become historical documents.
Space, planning and speed: developing Broadgate London

Cathy Courtney and Tom Lean, National Life Stories

Broadgate is one of London’s largest, most successful and innovative office developments. It is sited behind London’s Liverpool Street station. Its construction transformed a forlorn swathe of car park and semi-derelict railway property into a thriving business quarter that facilitated the City of London’s expansion after the 1986 ‘Big Bang’ of financial deregulation. NLS’s City Lives project documented many of the changes revolutionising the way of life of those working in the financial sector at this time.

Our new project seeks to capture the testimony of the complex web of people who have contributed to the ever-evolving infrastructure and architecture of Broadgate itself. The first phase represented the vision of property developer, Stuart Lipton of Rosehaugh Stanhope. Later, British Land became the site’s principal owner and the firm has worked with a variety of partners to adapt it to changing needs ever since, including with the new buildings under construction today and a new masterplan for the site’s future. National Life Stories has begun a series of recordings relating to the early stages of Broadgate and hopes to develop an in-depth project, Building Broadgate London: An Oral History covering its evolution to date. Our aim is to include a cross-section of the people involved, representing as many skills as possible and exploring how these came together to make one of the most thriving spaces in the City of London.

Philip Dowson, architect and founding partner in Arup Associates, was recorded for Architects’ Lives in 2002. Arup’s work with Stuart Lipton on neighbouring No 1 Finsbury was the firm’s first experience of collaborating on a commercial development. The success of this venture led to Arup’s crucial role in the first phase of Broadgate. The Arup team was led by the late Peter Foggo, who is remembered in several of NLS’s recordings. Philip Dowson recollected:

“We had never taken on any commercial office work because of what seemed to be a difficulty of meeting architectural criteria as well as commercial ones at the time. However after discussions with Mr Lipton we thought we’d try and see if we couldn’t design a building which we could be proud of and which would also be commercially successful. And that led directly to 1 Finsbury Avenue which was not considered then a good site to build an office building but it was a great success financially as well as architecturally.

“It projected Stuart [Lipton] into …involvement with Liverpool Street Station and then Broadgate. That concept of Broadgate originated from two historical plans, one… [of] which had the overlapping squares in the centre, which is geometrically a wonderful way of maximising the space with the minimum of waste of area and also of getting maximum access for different buildings from one central circulation space. Broadgate is essentially two overlapping squares in plan.

“That had to be built very, very fast indeed because money is expensive to borrow. It had to be designed to be built at a record pace, so it was an enormous amount of fabrication. … Everything like lavatories and everything inside had to be fabricated and brought in, and the whole of the fireproofing was done by clever little machines that worked all night and so on. It’s a… story in its own right.

“But the group involved with that, was Peter Foggo’s group. It was an extraordinary achievement I thought in being able to handle that scale of operation and get it on the ground and up so quickly. It stretched everybody to absolute limits. Peter refused to have more than about twenty people in his group at this stage because otherwise he said he wouldn’t be able to communicate quickly enough. And the whole thing was done of course on computers and we had quite a large number of people of the site as well.

“But it was, and I think it is, a great, great addition to the City of London and I think the pedestrian areas are wonderfully used … during the winter they skate there and in summer there always events planned for the circle … It is a place which is humming. The whole notion of – I always call the construction of place… is the creation of the ability to create activity and events because that’s what makes the city alive. And to try and achieve flexibility which does not mean anonymity that’s also one of the difficulties.

“I want to pay tribute to Stuart Lipton, who was our client for Broadgate, because he had the great quality of being both extremely demanding and totally constructive. He also was acutely aware of architectural objectives and the relationship we had was a very happy one … it was a great success and the tragedy was eventually when it was complete the bottom dropped out of the development industry and he had to sell it on… But he had a wonderful party at the end which I shall never forget for those of us who were engaged and said “This is a celebration. I’m not sad because together we’ve been able to create this and give it to the City and that’s what’s important.”

Sir Stuart Lipton provides his own perspective based on his ongoing recording with Tom Lean:

“Now I will admit to being in love with the detail, and when you have somebody who has a command of the detail, if you enjoy detail, it’s sheer pleasure. Because you’re not just looking on lines on paper you’re thinking about how the building is put together: Will it be fit for purpose? Will it be light? Will it be easy to build? Will it be easy to maintain? Will it be a decent piece of architecture? And everything...”
Sir Stuart Lipton, 2019. Photograph: Bill Knight

“He [Peter] always appeared to be a relaxed person. Hisbutton-down-shirt-and-jeans look was, as his head would roll back in its frame, the relaxed air of a man who knew his craft. His style was evident: he was a man who cared about the beauty of his work. He was a man who would never build a building that he didn’t believe in. His design was so joyful.

The Seagram Building in New York, you remember the space: the barrenness, the vastness, the grandeur. People would say, ‘What a blank space!’ But there was something to be filled, something to be seen. The space was an invitation to be filled by thought, by action, by design.

Peter was a master of the art of design. He was a man who could take a blank space and turn it into something beautiful. He was a man who could take a pile of materials and turn it into a work of art. He was a man who could take a building and turn it into a work of art. He was a man who could take a blank space and turn it into something beautiful.

Peter was a man who could design. He was a man who could think. He was a man who could create. He was a man who could see. He was a man who could see the future.

Andrea Levy (1956–2019)
Interviewed by Sarah O’Reilly, 2014

“Godfrey Bradman [Stuart Lipton’s business partner in Broadgate] was friendly with Sir Basil Feldman, who knew Mrs Thatcher, the prime minister, and his arrival was a civic event, he said to Mrs Thatcher: ‘Look, this is an opportunity to demonstrate modern Britain, would you come and inaugurate this project? It will produce a new station, it will make money for Britain, and so it’s a commercial project.’ So May of ’85, Mrs Thatcher donned a hard hat, sat on a JCB, dug the first hole. That was very popular, the Iron Lady was digging. And I said to her at that ceremony, that we planned to build the building in a year, two buildings in fact, and she said if I asked her if she would come back: ‘Of course I’ll come back because you’ll never build these buildings in a year, it’s never been done before.’ So one year later Mrs Thatcher came back and opened the buildings, much to her delight. And there were two buildings, looking rather elegant in Swedish, Dakota mahogany, I think it was, red granite. They looked elegant. They looked well designed. And as we started to build them tenants came along.

‘Broadgate unashamedly has aspects of Rockefeller Center – public space. All good thoughtful projects have public space and the system of plazas and public spaces was very strong there. The Seagam Building in New York, you remember the space… even though it’s a blank space, more so than you remember the building. Public space has been around since the Romans, nothing new about that at all. Did people actually have any realisation that the space was more important than the buildings? No. It was thought to be wasteful. If one thinks of the plazas which are successful now, university towns, market towns, cathedral towns, they all have public space, they all have the village green or town square, they all have a mix of uses, but I suppose Broadgate was the first to remember public space in the post war era and actually say that public space is more important than buildings and that the space left over is where the buildings live. Paternoster Square in the City had public space but it was pretty poor and one of my opportunities was to demolish it. So, without a doubt, the realisation that public space brought civic style, brought fun, sitting in a park in a square. Where would you like to live in square or in a street? Most people would say in a square. Provocatively in the UK, Inigo Jones came along to the piazza in Covent Garden and reinvented a Roman space. And then we create a whole series of squares. And then it’s forgotten. So the US did undoubtedly have an influence on Broadgate.

Years of effort ‘to be as British as I could be’ was to end in Andrea’s twenties, on the day of a racial awareness course in her workplace, when staff were asked to split into two groups, and she found herself crossing the floor to join her black colleagues: ‘it sent me to bed for a week.’

Writing provided an outlet. Having recently enrolled on a writing course at City Lit, she began to mine her family background and Caribbean heritage through written exercises set in the class. Early books, like Every Light In The House Burnin’ (1994), Never Far from Nowhere (1996) and Fruit of the Lemos (1999) explored questions of hybrid identity and drew heavily on Andrea’s own experience of growing up in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century. Then came Small Island, the story of Jamaican families like her own integrating into post-war Britain. It captured the imaginations of readers on its publication in 2004 and after winning the Orange, Whitbread and Commonwealth prizes it went on to sell over a million copies in the UK. She followed it in 2010 with The Long Song, the book about slavery she ‘didn’t want to write’.

In 2014, Andrea agreed to make a recording for Authors’ Lives. She was at that time living with the knowledge that she had a life-limiting illness. With courage and eloquence, she ended her recording by reflecting on mortality, and the impact she hoped her books might have in the world:

‘Everybody dies, and everybody knows they’re going to die. But while other people have it in the back of their heads, I have it here, right in front of my face: I see it and I know it. But in the meantime I’m fit and well and I’m loving life. There’s a certain freedom that comes from knowing that this is the time you’ve got, and every minute is going to be dedicated to what you want to do because you really don’t have long… If you can go day by day, there’s some sort of release in it…

Living with cancer is a process of forgetting and never forgetting that you have to do at one and the same time: I never forget, but I just get on with it… I’ve had a very good life, I’ve loved it. I’ve worked hard and produced some good work I think, and the confidence I have now is because of writing; because I was able to quieten, in my own time and my own way, to show my work.

I hope my books have a life beyond me. I hope I made a contribution to something, to the end of racism and the coming equality. I hope that the life that I’ve lived goes some way to make things easier. That’s the only poetry.”
Aaron Klug (1926–2018)
Interviewed by Katherine Thompson, 2002

Aaron Klug had a long and distinguished scientific career, winning the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1982 for the development of crystalllographic electron microscopy. This technique enables scientists to recover three-dimensional structural information from two-dimensional electron micrographs and can be used to model the structures of complex biological molecules. His career took him to the heart of the British scientific establishment, as director of the Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge and President of the Royal Society. He is frequently remembered for his work alongside Rosalind Franklin which combined her experimental expertise with his more theoretical approach.

“It was a very fine place to grow up… there were vervet monkeys in the bush. Untouched, absolutely untouched. Because the land hadn’t been cleared and there were large areas of bush and in the bush there would be snakes, mambas and things like that. There’s a green mamba and a black mamba that you learned to distinguish and there’d be small animals, a kind of rabbit and originally there had been deer but they’d been killed out… The monkeys would occasionally, when things were bad, would come and raid the small children in the infant school, take their sandwiches at lunchtime (laughs) and so the older children would sometime go and drive the monkeys away. But one used to watch the monkeys in the trees. They would eat a kind of fruit called masanguila, they were poisonous to people. So we had bicycles and my brother and me we would drive through the bush, trail through the bush and also we could go on hikes.”

He was acutely aware of the racial hierarchies around him, but sometimes defied them to develop an enthusiasm for Bollywood cinema:

“There was a large Indian community and although they were already most of them merchants, there was a whole Indian section really in the town where there were Indian tailors and Indian market and so on. Very colourful and when I was a little older, perhaps when I was twelve or thirteen, fourteen, and I would sometimes go and watch Indian films at the cinema. There was endless film with singing all the time and the plot was always the same: either there was a fat rich boy or a poor thin girl. You had to be plump in order to show that you were well off or there’d be the alternative the poor boy and the rich girl and in the end the two met but they always had the same plot. And there was lots of singing.”

His education in a British school meant that when he arrived in Britain itself as a PhD student he already had a sense of belonging as part of a multi-layered personal identity encompassing his Jewishness, South African upbringing and British influenced schooling.

“Arriving in England wasn’t any kind of culture shock because as I said I’d gone to a very English school, really a minor public school, where we learned the English virtues of duty, loyalty, endurance all those kind of things and also in the colonial experience… My loyalty was to South Africa as a dominion of the British Commonwealth and I did think of myself as South Africa… All these things co-existed. But I didn’t feel any contradiction between feeling Jewish and being South African and also a British subject.”

Gillian Ayres (1930–2018)
Interviewed by Mel Gooding, 2013–2016

By the time that the abstract painter Gillian Ayres had her overdue retrospective at the Serpentine Gallery in 1983, her abilities had already been recognised – if not fully appreciated – three decades earlier, when she was commissioned to paint a series of murals for South Hampstead high school for girls in London in 1957. Despite the subsequent wallpapering over of these murals – what Tim Hilton described as ‘the only true British contribution to American abstract expressionism’ – they were rediscovered in good condition in the year of her retrospective. The product of a young imagination forged by a fierce independence, these murals could be symbolic for Gillian’s entire, animated career. Her memory of the experience in her recording for the Artists’ Lives project shows just how wildly free-spirited her approach to painting could be, and contemporary eyes, and how daring and irreverent Gillian could be:

“This architect… [Michael Greenwood] said that he was redecorating. He said there was room for a mural and he said that it couldn’t go through a committee. It certainly wouldn’t go through, but it could go down as dining room decorations. It was very big, four panels, and I was very thrilled… and I laid awake, absolutely terrified…”

I had no idea how to do this big painting… I went along. There was all this material and all these boards laid out, and there was nobody about, just workmen, and I covered the whole ruddy lot in the first hour or two… I threw a lot of paint over these four very big boards and a lot of turps. I was probably going to wait to see what happened… and just then one of the workmen came in and said, ‘Did I want a cup of tea?’ and then just ran out and shut the door. I didn’t know why and I don’t think I ever got it out that I did want a cup of tea.

About half an hour later the architect turned up, sort of grinning, and shut the door. He said: ‘Gillian, they think there is a mad woman in here, and they think I am going to screaming mad and demented. I don’t know how to behave now. They are all outside, waiting: what are we to do?’

He was about my age – I was only about twenty-seven – he was young because I know we just sort of giggled at this, like, ‘Oh God’. He opened the door (they had all gathered from the whole building) and there were a lot of them… all listening and looking at us. He just shut the door again… went out and told them it was what he wanted.”

This short episode reveals much about Gillian who resolutely followed her own path in life and art, disregarding convention and others’ views on her opinions and approaches. In Gillian’s own telling, her passionate zeal for modern painting began as a thirteen-year old ‘delinquent’ school girl, shaping her decision to leave St Paul’s School to go to Cambridge School of Art in 1946, aged sixteen. Gillian’s self-confidence was a gift, perhaps, from her supportive, solidly middle-class parents: it was this confidence which spoke back to Sir William Coldstream, (then Principal of Cambridge): ‘Matisse may pass you by, but he won’t pass me by’. This independent streak also saw her leave art school prematurely:

“I felt utterly pissed off with institutions and walked out and became a barmaid in Cornwall… I just walked out and got on a train and went as far as I could… I couldn’t stand it, being taught”.

Gillian’s ambivalence towards institutional hierarchy belied the fact that she spent much of her life teaching in art schools (Corsham, St Martin’s, Winchester), where she communicated her belief in abstract painting, as well as her contempt for bureaucracy. But it was her confidence that carried her through, freeing her from the constraints of expectation; she moved away from the centralised London art world to raise her two sons, and she enjoyed some of her most productive years painting while living in a remote corner of North Wales before moving to Cornwall. A rare female figure in the relentlessly macho art world of the post-war period, Gillian’s voice almost embodies her sometimes stubborn, often compassionate and always idiosyncratic sensibility, revealing the drive behind her single-minded commitment to her vital, colourful, abstract painting. Such a commitment, she reveals, stemmed from her intuitive understanding as a young girl growing up in wartime Britain, ‘that what humans left behind was art; that it was their biggest contribution’.
Ralph Koltai (1924–2018)
Interviewed by Lydia O’Ryan, 2002–03

A highlight during Ralph’s prolific design career in opera, ballet and theatre, was ‘The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny’ at Sadler’s Wells Opera in 1963. Ralph created an Arbeidlust, Brecht’s term for a visual preparation of scenes, and in meetings with Lotte Lenya, widow of Kurt Weill, and Stefan Brecht, son of Bertolt Brecht, was able to overcome an initially cool reception from both to secure the performance rights.

“The English-speaking rights to Brecht’s book had been given by Helene Weigel, Brecht’s wife, to her son, Stefan who lived in Paris... The problem was that Stefan Brecht actually hated his father so that wasn’t initially much help and I don’t think I would have easily got the rights but by a total fluke something happened, and that is we talked about photography and he produced his camera and said ‘something’s gone wrong with this damn thing, I can’t think what’s gone wrong’. Now I’m not a camera technician but I said, like one would, ‘Let me see’. So I took his camera and I played around with it and I did by chance something helpful and got the camera shutter to work, I don’t know what I did but I got it to work... and I got the English-speaking rights to Mahagonny.”

Ralph is known for creating sculptural forms and using the inherent qualities of materials, latterly focusing on his work as a sculptor mainly in found metal. He remarks on how colour has been a less important element for him:

“in the early years of my career I used more paint, more colour and a more painterly technique initially, and then I think gradually moved more towards construction and a limited range of colour. A friend of mine once remarked, ‘Ralph thinks that elephants are colourful’ and that was a way of pointing out that grey – a greyish range of tones – is actually my favourite colour.”

Ralph divided his time between design work and teaching theatre design at the Central School of Art and Design under Jeanetta Cochrane, where he began to develop his own distinctive approach, centred on abstract imagery and visual metaphor:

“I obviously had some form of instinct for abstraction because I remember at college my very first project that I was given was to design the second act of Swan Lake and I did something automatically and unconsciously that today I think gradually moved more towards construction and a limited range of colour. A friend of mine once remarked, ‘Ralph thinks that elephants are colourful’ and that was a way of pointing out that grey – a greyish range of tones – is actually my favourite colour.”

He jokes of a myth surrounding the tendency for abstraction in his work:

“I have a reputation in the theatre which is slightly exaggerated – but only just – that Ralph doesn’t read the plays because they get in the way of his ideas... There’s part-truth in that, a little bit of truth in that.”

Mary Jane Long (1939–2018)
Interviewed by Jill Lever, 1997

“We designed the building before the rash of what you might unkindly call Tesco architecture happened... I mean this funny, phoney, neo-vernacular of big lumpy brick buildings with slate roofs really hadn’t happened when we designed this building. Our precedents for it really had nothing to do with a neo-vernacular tradition. It had to do with a number of things; from wonderful big sloping roofed gold mines in Colorado that Sandy and I had seen out West, which the entrance hall roofs are reminiscent of, to Chinese temples, to ideas about the cross-section of the Reading Rooms which meshed with the necessity to get light to the neighbouring flats in Ossulton Street, which suggested a building on that side which was shaped with slate roofs, …those issues were in our minds, not Tesco which hadn’t happened yet. We were thinking that this has got to be a building which doesn’t look like a particular moment in time or doesn’t try to be fashionable because there is nothing that dies quicker than fashion. So we were thinking about the general form of the building – the relationship to St. Pancras, the way it sat on the site, the way light came in, the kinds of materials we would use, which were related to St. Pancras and long life and low maintenance and that is how the building happened. And I think it will justify itself in those terms. It will be a building that does survive changes in fashion and the fact it opened twenty years after it was designed won’t matter in twenty years.”

MJ Long, who died in 2018, was one of the key architects of the British Library. Together with her husband, Colin St. John Wilson – known as Sandy – she spent much of her career working on the development and construction of the project. Born in the United States, she studied for a Masters degree at Yale – during an era when British architects such as Richard Rogers, Norman Foster and Eldred Evans were also there. She came to Europe on a study trip in the early 1960s and began working with Colin St. John Wilson shortly afterwards. Alongside her early work on the British Library – she designed artists’ studios for Frank Auerbach, Peter Blake and Paul Husley. In this extract, Paul Husley remembers MJ designing his studio and home:

“I met MJ through Peter Blake ... MJ stood for Mary Jane. And there is no way she could have been a Mary Jane. Mary Jane sounds so girly. And MJ was not a girl. MJ was a woman with huge intelligence and presence and knowledge and she was an architect. She ended up being the most wonderful person to work with... I think her main strength as an architect is that she would always act and work and argue in defence of her building. Of course she had great respect for her client, in our case, great respect because she loved artists and we were going to live there, … in the case of making a conversion she would battle in defence of the building itself, so whenever I would say, “couldn’t we do such and such a thing?” She would say, “Yes, you could, but it would ruin the character of the building that you fell in love with when you bought it”... She was always defending the character of the building and always trying to preserve what she could of it that looked beautiful, not pretty beautiful but beautiful and workmanlike.”

In 1997-98 MJ was interviewed about her work on the British Library, and she reflected on the elements that influenced the design, while addressing challenges from those who argued that the project was so long in its gestation that the initial design originated in a different time and context.
## Statement of Financial Activities

### Year Ended 31 December 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Restricted</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>£</td>
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<td><strong>INCOME</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Raising funds</td>
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<td>Charitable activities</td>
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<td>76,348</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</strong></td>
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<td>87,228</td>
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<td>Net (losses)/gains on investments</td>
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<td>72,474</td>
<td>(96,400)</td>
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<td><strong>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) and net movement in funds for the year</strong></td>
<td>(66,420)</td>
<td>(96,767)</td>
<td>(163,187)</td>
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### Reconciliation of Funds:

- **Funds brought forward**
  - Founder’s donation: £200,000
  - Unrestricted fund: £387,190
  - Restricted fund: £341,762
  - **Total Charity Funds**: £928,952

- **Total funds carried forward**
  - £928,952

## Balance Sheet at 31 December 2018

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Restricted</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
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<td><strong>FIXED ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td>Investments</td>
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<td><strong>Total Fixed assets</strong></td>
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<td><strong>CURRENT ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td>Debtors</td>
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<td>Cash at bank and in hand</td>
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<td>Creditors falling due within one year</td>
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<td><strong>Net Current Assets</strong></td>
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<td><strong>NET ASSETS</strong></td>
<td>928,952</td>
<td>1,092,139</td>
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### The Funds of the Charity

- **Founder’s donation**: £200,000
- **Unrestricted fund**: £387,190
- **Restricted fund**: £341,762

### 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:

1. Give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company’s affairs as at 31 December 2018 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended.
2. Have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice, including Financial Reporting Standard 102 ‘The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and the Republic of Ireland’ (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.
3. Have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

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

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

Dame Jenny Abramsky
Chair of Trustees
Leaders of National Life (C408) [31 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 Square Mile, the merchant and clearing banks, the commodities and futures markets, law and accounting firms, financial regulators, insurance companies and Lloyd’s of London. The project is a unique record of 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. We are currently fundraising for City Lives Revisited, picking up the story where we left off.

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 contains a number of collections held by the British Library on Jewish life. The primary focus was 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 resource based on the collection is accessible at www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/voices/jewish.html. NLS also worked with the Holocaust Survivors’ Centre to archive and provide access to their collection of over 150 recordings (CC80).

General Interviews (C464) [34 interviews]
This collection comprises diverse interviews additional to the main projects. Interviews are drawn from many fields including education, medicine, retail, dance and engineering, and embrace scientists, notably Joseph Rotblat, Max Perutz and Aaron Klug; and leading designers such as Terence Conran and members of Pentagram. Artists’ Lives (C466) [398 interviews]
Artists’ Lives was initiated in 1990 and is run in association with Tate Archive and in close collaboration with the Henry Moore Institute. 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. The interviews are grateful to all our sponsors but in particular to the steady support of The Henry Moore Foundation, TheROOTstein Hopkins Foundation and The Yale Center for British Art. A CD, Connecting Lives: Artists Talk about Drawing, was published in 2010 funded by theROOTstein Hopkins Foundation and is available online in the ‘Oral History Curator’sChoice’ collection at British Library Sounds. The ‘Voices of Art’ web resource was launched in 2018 (www.bl.uk/nls/va-art).

Artists’ Lives Advisory Committee
Sir Alan Rowsome, Dr Penelope Curtis, Caroline Cubith, Adrian Glew, Mel Gooding (chair), Coralia Grassi, Professor Lubaina Himid MBE, Lisa Le Feuvre, Richard Morphet CBE, Clive Phillpot, Lawrence Sinclair, Dr Andrew Wilson and Dr Jon Wood.

Architects’ Lives (C467) [146 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 Ernő 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 (C106).

Architects’ Lives Advisory Committee
Rab Bennett (chair), Catherine Croft, Dr Elain Harwood, Peter Murray, Dr Alan Powers, Barbara Weiss and Elyas Woodman.

Fawcett Collection (C468) [14 interviews]
In connection with the Women’s Library (formerly known as the Fawcett Society) this collection of interviews recorded between 1990 and 1992 charts the lives of pioneering career women, each of whom in addition to their professional roles, has expanded the traditional idea of the ‘family’ to include, for example, politics, medicine, law and music. Woman in a Man’s World by Rebecca Abrams (Methuen, 1993) was based on this collection.

Lives in Steel (C532) [102 interviews]
Lives in Steel comprises personal histories recorded between 1991 and 1992 with employees from one of Britain’s largest yet least understood industries. Interviewees range from top managers and trade unionists to technicians, fusers, shearers and many more. British Steel General Steel Division sponsored the project and the Lives in Steel CD (BL, 1993), which is available online at BL Sounds.

Oral History of the British Press (C648) [24 interviews]
This collection of interviews with key press and newspaper columnists was extended with support from the British Library as part of the popular Front Page exhibition in 2006.

National Life Story Awards (C642) [1145 interviews]
This nationwide competition ran in 1993 to promote the value of life story recording and autobiographical writing. The judges, among them Lord Briggs and Dame Penelope Moggach, Martin Pick, Lawrence Sail, Nicola Solomon and Jonathan Taylor CBE.

Legal Lives (C736) [13 interviews]
This collection documents changes in the legal profession in Britain, including interviews with both solicitors and barristers. Since 2012 we have been developing this area of our work in partnership with the Law Society and the Law History Project in the Law Department at the London School of Economics (LSE), and more recently with the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies at Oxford University. Within Legal Lives, Crown Court Clerks Life Story Interviews (C1674) [20 interviews] resulted from a collaborative doctoral award with LSE, providing an insight into the lived world of the law and the pivotal role that Crown Court clerks play in the administration of justice.

Food: From Source to Salepoint (C821) [218 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, Nestle, Sainsbury’s and Safeway; and a series with key cookery 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 and publishers. The British Booksellers’ 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 (C960) [162 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 Brightly, Annabelle Campbell, Amanda Game (chair), Sarah Groves, Dr Tanya Harrod, John Keatley and Martina Margieta.

Lives in the Oil Industry (C963) [178 interviews]
A joint National Life Stories/Abereven 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, a partnership with Royal Mail, captured the memories and experiences of individuals from the postal services sector – from postal workers to union officials, sorters, engineers and senior management. A CD, Speeding the mail: an oral history of the post from the 1950s to the 1990s, was co-published by the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) and the British Library (2005).

An Oral History of Wolff Olins (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, Wolff Olins, 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 (C1195) [30 interviews]
Records the memories and experiences of key figures in social welfare, social policy and charitable endeavour.

An Oral History of Theatre Design (C1173) [34 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) [68 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. The authors’ programme of interviews also encompasses Women in Publishing (C1657) [29 interviews recorded 2014–2018).

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

Listen online at British Library Sounds
https://sounds.bl.uk/oral-history
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 the Water Industry (C1364) [31 interviews]

Between 2009 and 2012 this project recorded life story interviews with staff at all levels within the water industry. Funded by six water companies, these recordings provide valuable insights into one of Britain's most important and least documented utilities.

An Oral History of Barings (C1367) [34 interviews]

In partnership with The Baring 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. A booklet, In the Locker of my Memory: Extracts from An Oral History of Barings was published in 2012.

An Oral History of British Science (C1379) [132 interviews]

This programme was initiated in November 2009 in collaboration with the British Library's History of Science specialists 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 innovations 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. The project website at www.bl.uk/voices-of-sciencewon the Royal Historical Society's Public History Prize for Best Web and Digital Project, and the British Society for the History of Science's Ayrton Prize for Digital Engagement. 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 https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/diversity-in-science/inspiring-scientists/

An Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry in the UK (C1495) [58 interviews]

Contributing to NLS’s documentation of the utilities in the UK, this project collected the memories and experiences of those who worked in the industry at various levels, covering the period from nationalisation in the 1940s to privatisation in the 1980s and 1990s. It includes such themes as changing technology, industrial relations, the miners’ strikes, changing workplaces, corporate cultures, nuclear power, energy marketing, and public service. We are grateful to Hodson and Luanne Thormber for their generous support.

An Oral History of Talking Therapists in the UK (C1953) [13 interviews]

This growing collection explores the development in post-war Britain of those therapies that depend primarily on verbal exchanges between client and therapist to alleviate mental distress. A future project will interview a wide range of professionals in this complex and diverse sector.

Wellcome Trust Life Stories (C1665) [5 interviews]

A collection of interviews with key individuals with a long connection to the Wellcome Trust, funded by the Trust.

Science and Religion: Exploring the Spectrum (C1672) [33 interviews]

A collaboration between An Oral History of British Science, and York University, Toronto and the Centre for Science, Knowledge and Belief in Society, Newman University, Birmingham, this multidisciplinary research project funded by the Templeton Religion Trust investigated the social and cultural contexts of public perceptions of relations between ‘science’ and ‘religion’ across all faiths and none.

An Oral History of Farming, Land Management and Conservation in Post-war Britain (C1528)

Funded by the Arcadia Charitable Trust this project will focus on the experience of changes in farming practice, patterns of landownership, and approaches to land management bound up with the development and incorporation of various kinds of scientific knowledge and technology. It will record the ways in which environmental knowledge has been developed, promoted, marginalised and revived as part of dramatic changes in British farming and landowning since the Second World War. As many of these changes relate to national and EC/EU policy, the project claims significant timeliness and potential to contribute to debates over the future of British farming.

Farming and Science Advisory Committee Prof Jon Agar (chair), Prof Maggie Gill, Christopher Haskins, Prof John Martin, Andrew Thorman and Prof Michael Winter.

How to support National Life Stories

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