NATIONAL

Life stories

Review and Accounts

2014/2015
National Life Stories

When many people think about history, they think about books and documents, castles or stately homes. In fact history is all around us, in our own families and communities, in the living memories and experiences of older people. Everyone has a story to tell about their life which is unique to them.

Whilst some people have been involved in momentous historical events, regardless of age or importance we all have interesting life stories to share. Unfortunately, because memories die when people do, if we don’t record what people tell us, that history can be lost forever.

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

Each collection comprises recorded in-depth interviews of a high standard, plus content summaries and transcripts to assist users. Access is provided via the Sound and Moving Image Catalogue at http://sami.bl.uk and a growing number of interviews are made available for remote web use through British Library Sounds at http://sounds.bl.uk. 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.

Chairman’s Foreword

This year we celebrate important milestones for two long-running National Life Stories projects: twenty-five years for Artists’ Lives, and twenty for Architects’ Lives. Together they have gathered nearly 500 interviews, many with individuals no longer alive to share their memories. We devote much of this year’s Review to reflecting on the connections between these and our other collections. When both projects started, users had to travel to the Sound Archive’s building and its rather primitive listening facilities in Exhibition Road, South Kensington. Now, growing numbers of the interviews can be accessed on the web in the comfort of home or office; and those not yet available online can be listened to in the British Library’s reading rooms. Some, of course, remain closed at the request of interviewees but they too will one day be marvellously rich resources for researchers. Internet access continues to transform the ways that people are making use of oral history. Our campaign to raise the funding that we need to digitise NLS’s collections has made excellent progress. We thank the many trusts and individuals who have contributed, notably the Pears Foundation and the Monument Trust.

Digitisation and enhanced access was a key goal of NLS’s ten-year strategic plan, launched in 2011, alongside several other dissemination initiatives, many of which have borne fruit. Peter Hennessy gave the inaugural NLS Annual Lecture in December last year. His talk was every bit as stimulating as we had hoped. Our first NLS Goodison Fellowship has been awarded, to raise the public profile of our food collection of some 200 interviews which are also due to go online later in 2015. NLS team members have again had a busy year presenting their work at academic conferences, and our joint training programme with the Oral History Society continues to expand. Last year we ran 84 courses for over 700 people.

Partnerships remain crucial to NLS’s success and are likely to figure more prominently in our work in the future. Two academic partnerships with the London School of Economics and Leicester University are helping us to develop our legal and science collections respectively. And the long-running relationship between Artists’ Lives and Tate Britain will be marked in very tangible ways over the next two years, through exhibitions, listening posts and events. There will be a new partnership with the Courtauld Institute of Art. The Rootstein Hopkins Foundation has again been a generous supporter of Artists’ Lives. Other collaborations with Women in Publishing and with Newman University Birmingham are developing our collections around the book trade and science.

This is my final foreword as Chairman. NLS is creating a remarkable resource of living history for future historians and researchers. I have enjoyed my twelve years of office during which we have had much enlarged both the quantity and range of this material and set about making it much more accessible online. The achievement is due to the generosity of our donors and to the imaginative and diligent efforts of our staff under the leadership of Rob Perks. I would like to thank Rob and the staff and volunteers most warmly for all they have done during my tenure, to thank our donors, and to thank my co-Trustees and our Advisors for the energy and enthusiasm they have brought to our work, not least in the last year.

I am delighted that the Trustees have elected Dame Jenny Abramsky to succeed me. She has a formidable experience of live and recorded sound and of the arts of chairmanship. I wish her the greatest success and much enjoyment.

Lord Rees of Ludlow OM
Chairman of Trustees
Review of 2014
Rob Perks
Director of National Life Stories

Digitisation and access

Our campaign to digitise National Life Stories’ older analogue cassette interviews for long-term preservation and enhanced access via the web has been a key focus of the year and we have made excellent progress. We raised a further £50,000 towards the £140,000 that we need to complete the programme and successfully added over 500 interviews to the British Library’s ‘Sounds’ website for global access (http://sounds.bl.uk), including 289 testimonies drawn from two major oral history projects: Jewish Care’s Holocaust Survivors’ Centre Testimony collected between 1993 and 1998, and the Living Memory of the Jewish Community, a project run by NLS between 1987 and 2000. We launched this to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2015. With over 1,000 hours of recordings, this is one of the largest online collections of Holocaust testimonies in Europe, and we thank the Pearson Foundation and the Brian and Jill Moss Charitable Trust for their generous support.

Other NLS collections now live and accessible via the internet include City Lives (75 interviews), An Oral History of Wolff Olins (34), Lives in Steel (87), Architects’ Lives (85) (funded by the Monument Trust), and Crafts Lives (85) (supported by the Nicholas and Judith Goodison Charitable Trust). Food: From Source to Salepoint will follow over the coming months, thanks to the generosity of NLS trustee David Webster and many others who helped raise the funds we needed.Edited extracts from NLS CD publications (such as The Writing Life, Lives in Steel, The Sculptor Speaks, and Food Stories) are also now available online in a new collection ‘Oral history curator’s lives’.

Collections and projects

Following the completion of the first phase of our ambitious Oral History of British Science programme, we commissioned a second scoping study from Elizabeth Haines and Alexander Gronow, Marketing Adviser Jack Taylor, Forecasting Adviser Edmondson (Director of Berkeley Nuclear Laboratories) and Peter Chester (Director of Central Electricity Research Laboratory at Leatherhead and a key figure in the acid rain debate).

Our Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry in the UK Tom Lean now has thirty-seven interviews completed or underway, documenting the full spectrum of activities in the industry and its place in the wider context of energy supply, industrial and technology policy, and the lives of consumers. Eighteen of the recordings have been loaded to BL Sounds at http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Industry-water-steel-and-energy. Over the past year Tom has been documenting the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) and the organisations that followed it, through interviews with Ed Wooley, a power station chemist and later CEGB Fuel Supplies Officer during the miners’ strike; and Norman Holland, a technical expert who managed the major station at Didcot during the miners’ strike. The development of the CEGB’s nuclear programme is well covered in interviews with Brian George, who as the CEGB’s Director of Sizewell B was the last man in the country to direct the building of a nuclear power station; and CEGB head of power station planning, Michael Gammon, has explained the complex web of issues behind the siting of power stations. Complementing these with an operator’s perspective is Tom McInerney, Station Manager of Hinkley Point, the first operational Advanced Gas-cooled Reactor (AGR). The scientific research behind the development of the industry is demonstrated in interviews with Bryan Edmondson (Director of Berkeley Nuclear Laboratories) and Peter Chester (Director of Central Electricity Research Laboratory at Leatherhead and a key figure in the acid rain debate).

reviews have revealed the vital infrastructure of the National Grid. The challenges of creating a newly-independent organisation are explored by David Jefferies, founding Chairman of National Grid Co. after its split from the former CEGB, and previously Deputy Chairman of the Electricity Council, and Chairman of London Electricity Board. Arthur Fowkes’ interview covers much of the postwar history of the Grid, from planning parts of it in the 1960s, system control in the difficult years of the 1970s and 1980s, and then privatising the Grid in the 1990s; and Nick Winser, the outgoing Director of National Grid Transmission, brings the story up to the present day and a much expanded role for the Grid.

Interviewee Kevan Gee (r) in Rugeley Power Station control room c.1970s.
As Artists’ Lives marked its twenty-fifth anniversary it was completed with Stephen Farthing, Peter Karda, Wendy Baron, Dennis Czierfeld, Jeffrey Steele, Ralph Steadman and Gerald Scarfe. Frances Cornford concluded her recording with illustrator and engraver John Lawrence, who reflected on the many authors and their books for which he has provided illustrations, including Richard Adams, Philip Pullman and Penelope Lively, and described the evolution of the wood and vinyl engraving techniques he currently uses. Frances’s interviews continue with ceramic sculptor Glynnis Bently, painter and stained glass artist Brian Clarke, book artist Simon Cutts, and artist and polymath Tom Phillips. She has begun recording Malcolm Le Grice, a key figure in the development of experimental film in the UK, covering his transition from recording audio clips from Keir Smith, Paul Maguire, David Nash, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Michael Lyons and John Hilliard.

Generous support from the Monument Trust has allowed us to place most of the early Architects’ Lives interviews online and the recording programme is also making good progress. Niamh Dillon has been busy interviewing Denise Bennett, founding partner with her husband Rab, of Bennetts Associates. The firm has significant experience in commercial developments in London and cultural buildings including the refurbishment of the Royal Shakespeare Company theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon and the Hampstead Theatre. Niamh also has a recording underway with ninety year old Derek Sugden, a pioneer of acoustic engineering and founding partner at world-renowned engineering firm Arup Associates; and an interview with Elded Evans, daughter of the painter Merlyn Evans, and Yale contemporary of Rogers and Foster, who with her partner David Shalev designed Tate St. Ives, Truro Crown Courts, and Jesus College Library in Cambridge. Recently completed is an interview with Angela Brady, only the second woman to hold the Presidency of the Royal Institute of British Architects, while recordings continue with Sir Michael Hopkins, Sir Nicholas Grimshaw and Sir Terry Farrell.

Elizabeth Wright’s interview with Michael Rowe continues, most of whose career encompasses international development work and medical innovation. He also shared memories of his participation in the 1968 student sit-in at Hornsey College of Art. Elizabeth’s interview with Michael Rowe continues, most recently covering the development of his box series of works, influenced by phenomenology and theories of perspective, and he has added a session to Dorothy Hodg’s recording, covering her retrospective exhibition at the Scottish Gallery.

We received the welcome news that the Carrick Charitable Trust, the Charlotte-Bonham Carter Charitable Trust and the Sigrid Rausing Trust had agreed grants for Authors’ Lives, and we also thank NLS Trustee Jennifer Wingate for her kind donation. Over the past year interviewer Sarah O’Reilly has completed recordings with the novelists William Boyd and Jane Gardam, former Poet Laureate Sir Andrew Motion, and Andrea Levy, author of the multi-award winning Small Island. She began an interview with Linton Kwesi Johnson, a poet and performer who in 2002 became only the second living poet to be published in the Penguin Modern Classics series. Other recordings include former Children’s Laureate and bestselling children’s writer Dame Jacqueline Wilson, and novelist Lawrence Norfolk, championed as one of Granta Magazine’s ‘Best of Young British Novelists’ in 1993. Funding from the Sigrid Rausing Trust will enable us to record four other writers championed by Granta, including Louis de Bernières, another luminary of the 1993 list who is due to begin a recording shortly. Long-running interviews continue with A S Byatt and Ian McEwan, as and when their writing commitments permit.

We have been revising our collecting strategy to take Authors’ Lives into 2018, by which time it is hoped that we will have a complete collection of one hundred recordings. The new strategy looks at ways to enlarges the scope and diversity of the collection, prioritising those who have changed the literary landscape over the past few decades.

Partnerships

Our Legal Lives joint project with the London School of Economics Department of Law’s Legal Biography Project supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) – ‘Exploring the social world of Crown Court clerks from the 1970s onwards’ – has moved into its fieldwork phase. Collaborative doctoral student Dvora Liberman started her interviews with eighty-two year old Raymond Potter, who began his career as a third class clerk and progressed through the court system to become Head of the Courts Service in England and Wales. She is also interviewing Bill Young, Chief Clerk of Durham Crown Court, Tom Brown, ninety-five years old, who worked as Chief Clerk of Quarter Sessions and later as the Chief Clerk who set up the new Crown Court in Newcastle in 1971; and James Reid, who worked in the courts service for thirty-nine years, as a court clerk and then...
Projects in development

An Oral History of Talking Therapists in the UK will interview a wide range of professionals who depend primarily on verbal exchanges between client and therapist to alleviate mental distress. Interviewee Zibah Loukhtar Alfred and Deputy Director Mary Stewart co-authored a report following six pilot interviews for the project, and we are now seeking a suitable academic partner to work together on an application for academic funding. Zibah started a recording with Bob Hinshelwood, Professor of Psychoanalytic Studies at Essex University, former Director of the Cassel Hospital, and Fellow of the British Psychoanalytic Society.

Our trustees have been evaluating NLS's progress against its ten-year strategic plan (2012-2021) and during 2015 will identify new project areas for further research and development.

Public profile

We have been working hard to raise public awareness of NLS and its collections. On 2 December 2014 Peter Hennessy presented a very well-received and amusing inaugural National Life Stories Lecture entitled 'The Nature of Memory in Writing and Speaking the History of Our Times', available as a podcast at www.tinyurl.com/nls-lecture2014. In November 2015 we received more than a hundred applications for our first NLS Goodison Fellowship to Polly Russell and Barry Fry. Our first fellow will be announced shortly. We are about to pitch for a full Radio 4 'Archive on Four' programme, and will use the fellowship to research and write a book proposal in conjunction with Peter Jackson from the University of Sheffield.

The team have again been busy with public talks and presentations. In the first week of March I presented keynote talks at the Greek Oral History Association's second annual conference at Athens University; and at a conference at the Cycladic Art Museum on 'Audiovisual Art Archives' organised by the Contemporary Greek Art Institute. I also chaired two linked panels at the International Oral History Association conference in Barcelona in July about the issues around online oral history; and led an ethics and copyright workshop at the Oral History Society's annual conference in Manchester on 18-19 July. Mary Stewart led a family history workshop at the same event. I taught an archiving workshop and gave the keynote lecture (on the development of UK community oral history) at the third annual conference of the Oral History Network of Ireland in Kilkenny on 12-13 September; and in October I gave two public lectures and took part in two panels during an exhausting visit to Changsha and Wenzhou in China.

Closer to home Paul Merchant presented one of the Oral History Society's seminars at the Institute of Historical Research, and he and I gave the experience of NLS and its collections.

Due to internal restructuring at the British Library, which saw NLS and Oral History move from the History and Classics section to Sound and Vision, Richard Ranft replaces Scott McKindrie as the trustee representing the BL. Sir Harry Solomon and David Webster also stepped down as trustees. We thank them all. The Architects’ Lives Advisory Committee added a new member, architect Robin Gurnett, who joined the committee in late 2014. Jameson was appointed as Chair of the ARA's new Strategic Committee.

In April 2014 we welcomed back Deputy Director Mary Stewart from maternity leave on a four-day a week basis. In December our valued and popular Archivist Elspeth Millar left the Library to take up a new contract at the University of Kent's Stand-Up Comedy Archive. During her seven years with us Elspeth made significant improvements to National Life Stories archive and records management practices, and to our webpages and social media presence. We wish Elspeth well in her future career.

Martyn Goff CBE, 1923 – 2015

We were very sad to hear the news of Martyn Goff’s death on Wednesday 25th March 2015 after a long period of ill health. Martyn succeeded Lord Briggs as Chairman of NLS in 1995 and served for eight years. During that time he led the development of the Book Trade Lives project, bringing on board an impressive advisory committee which included Penny Mountain, Ian Nairne, Michael Turner, Raynor Unwin, David Whakatake and David Young. He also oversaw the launch of Crafts Lives, Architects’ Lives, Legal Lives and Food: From Source to Salespoint, as well as projects on the oil industry, the Post Office and fashion. Famed for his natty ties, Martyn was unflaggingly good-humoured, supportive and well-connected, his fundraising abilities over lunch were impressive, and helped NLS expand its activities significantly during his Chairmanship. After he was succeeded by Sir Nicholas Goodison in 2003, Martyn continued as Advisor. Between 1998 and 2002 he completed a 38-hour interview for NLS (C048/24). Martyn was the Administrator of the Booker Prize for Fiction from 1970 to 2006 and, ever more than more than three decades, he helped shape the prize into the literary force it is today.
Oral history at the British Library: what else has been happening?

Louise Brodie has continued to add to the Pioneers of Charity and Social Welfare collection. Interviewee Mike Howard is an ordained Anglican priest who served as a missionary for Church Mission Society and went to Nigeria with his young family, working to set up youth groups and small business enterprises. The family lived in Nigeria during the Biafran War. On his return to the UK, Mike trained for the probation service, mainly in North Oxfordshire where he became acting deputy head of the Community Service Team and founded the Youth Custody Centre. In 1988 Mike became the Liaison Probation Officer at the Ley Community, a residential community at the forefront of the rehabilitation for drug offenders. With others, he started Howard House in Oxford for the ongoing rehabilitation of drug users, and in recognition of his work the house was named after him.

Eric Midwinter started his career as a teacher in the 1950s, and worked in Liverpool to make the educational curriculum more relevant to children in deprived areas. He became head of public affairs at the National Consumer Council and from there he became chairman of the Transport Users Consultative Committee in London. During his tenure the Committee proposed the idea of the day travel card, and tendering by the bus companies. After becoming the director of the think tank, the Centre for Policy on Ageing, Eric was the co-founder of the University of the Third Age in the UK (U3A), with its maxim that older people have skills to pass on and that they should never stop learning. Midwinter is also a respected historian of English cricket and the UK comedy scene.

Sally Greengross ran her own business from an early age, selling radios all over Europe. In 1977 she began working for Age Concern, and as Chief Executive transformed the charity’s fundraising initiatives. Age Concern has since merged with Help the Aged to become Age UK, continuing for Age Concern, and as Chief Executive transformed the collection. Wolffgang Tillmans, ‘Dan’, 40 x 30 cm, 2008. © The artist, courtesy Maureen Paley, London.

The recordings for Changing Dimensions: Interviews with Women at Oxford Brooks University, advisor to National Life Stories and author of the oral history work Fenwomen (1975 and republished 2011). These recordings help capture many perspectives on oral history in the UK from the 1960s onwards and will be essential listening for historians and researchers seeking to understand the development of oral history methodology and practice from the perspectives of those active in these decades.

The oral history section continues to work in collaboration with a diverse group of partner projects, in order to further broaden the range of interviews within the already rich national collection. Work continues with Dr Carmen Mangion of Birkbeck College, advisor to National Life Stories and author of the oral history section has accepted thirty-three interviews conducted by Lucy Delap for the project ‘Unbecoming Men’: Interviews on Masculinities and the Women’s Movement, 1970-1991 (C1667). Delap initiated the interviews because little research had been undertaken into men’s role in gender activism in this period, and the interviews capture experiences and reflections upon the extensive network of men’s centres, men’s groups, national and local conferences, men’s childcare initiatives, and the men’s therapy movement. The interviews examine the intellectual influences upon men’s movements and assess the extent to which there was change in masculinities alongside the more evident changes in femininities during this period of gender activism.

James Leroy Acord (1944–2011) was an artist who worked directly with radioactive materials. He attempted to create sculpture and events that probed the history of nuclear engineering and asked questions about the long-term storage of nuclear waste. Acord was the only private individual in the world licensed
to own and handle radioactive materials. He had his nuclear license number tattooed onto his neck and spoke on art and nuclear science at both art and nuclear industry events in the US and the UK. We thank James Flint for giving the British Library a fifteen-hour interview he conducted with Acord in 1998, and also recordings of an Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) lecture delivered by Acord earlier that year and the extensive conversation stemming from this lecture with James Acord, James Flint, Carey Young and David Cross. The James Acord Recordings (C1666) will be key reference works for any researcher interested in this unique artist.

Celia Plender and Mukta Das, postgraduate students studying the anthropology of food at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), conducted five recordings for An Oral History of Neal’s Yard (C1649). This project, which was supported by the European Research Council-funded ‘Food Futures’ proof of concept research grant at the University of Sheffield, comprised interviews with staff, customers and suppliers of Neal’s Yard Dairy, which has been an influential part of the London and UK food scene since it opened in 1979.

We welcomed a collection of fifteen interviews entitled The Secret Listeners: interviews with refugee radio operators and other wartime refugees (C1641) from the Pascal Theatre Company which were recorded as part of a Heritage Lottery funded project. ‘Secret Listeners’ was the name given to German and Austrian refugees, many of them Jewish, who had fled Nazi Germany before the Second World War and were then recruited by British intelligence to spy on Nazi prisoners held at Prisoner of War camps. Stemming from the interviews the Pascal Theatre Company staged a site specific play performed at one of these camps, Trent Park in north London, and published The Secret Listeners, edited by Julia Pascal and Thomas Kampe (Pascal Theatre Company, 2013).

The oral history team were very sad to learn of the death of Herbert Levy, who generously contributed an important collection of interviews about Jewish refugee experience to the Sound Archive in the mid-1990s (Herbert Levy German Jewish Refugees Interviews C958).

Access to National Life Story recordings

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. An overview can be found at www.bl.uk/oralhistory/collections.

All National Life Stories interviews are catalogued on the British Library’s Sound & Moving Image Catalogue http://sami.bl.uk, which provides detailed content data about individual recordings. NLS recordings can also be discovered through ‘Explore the British Library’ http://explore.bl.uk, the Library’s main catalogue which provides a more comprehensive way for users to search within the Library’s collections of books, journals, datasets and sound recordings.

Access oral history recordings

The Listening and Viewing Service in 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 computerised 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.

National Life Stories and Oral History currently provides online access to 1730 oral history recordings from a selection of 25 collections via British Library Sounds http://sounds.bl.uk (at present the Art and Photography collection is only accessible to those in Higher and Further Education in the UK).

Edited clips of the audio and video interviews for An Oral History of British Science, (as well as relevant interviews from Leaders of National Life and NLS General Interviews) can be accessed via the Voices of Science web resource http://bl.uk/voices-of-science. Launched in 2013, Voices of Science 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.

Social media

You can now 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 http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/sound-and-vision
Architects’ Lives and Artists’ Lives: An overview

Cathy Courtney, Project Director, National Life Stories

“I was really more interested in painting. The scholarship that I sat for was History, but I immediately switched subject to Architecture, not because I was particularly interested in architecture but really because there was a certain element of drawing involved in it and so on.”


2015 marks the twentieth anniversary of Architects’ Lives and the twenty-fifth year of Artists’ Lives. The quote from Sandy Wilson, whom some in the NLS team remember as a presence in the Library at St Pancras in its early days, underscores the many links between the two projects. Wilson drew and painted as a fine artist throughout his life as well as in his role as an architect, and enjoyed long friendships with several leading artists. He was a significant patron (when recounting his purchase of Peter Blake’s painting of the Beatles just before one Christmas, he remembered Blake referred to him as ‘Sandy Claus’) and published accounts of the different methods he witnessed whilst sitting for portraits by Ron Kitaj, William Coldstream and Michael Andrews. Wilson was an influential Trustee of Tate; much of his own art collection can be seen at Pallant House Gallery in Chichester, Sussex, in a modern extension to the original Queen Anne-style building which Wilson designed with the architect Mary Jane Long, his colleague in professional life and his second wife.

Hugh Casson (1910–1999), architect and Director of the Festival of Britain, became equally known for his watercolours; other architects early absorbed the rhythms of a painter’s life through their relatives – Nicholas Grimshaw’s grandmother and Edward Jones’ mother were both painters. Reversing the influence, the sculptor Tim Scott trained at the Architectural Association before making the switch to fine art, as did the photographer and artist Humphrey Spender, who was later to commission a house from architect Richard Rogers. Other links in NLS’s life story recordings occur between client and architect, for example Charles Saumarez Smith’s Artists’ Lives recording details the process, when he was Director of the National Portrait Gallery, whereby architects were shortlisted to design what became the Saumarez Smith’s Architects’ Lives commission of the Ondaatje Wing at the Portrait Gallery in 2000. Saumarez Smith remembers the evolution of the National Portrait Gallery’s Ondaatje Wing, which opened in 2000. Saumarez Smith also sat for a portrait by another participant in Artists’ Lives, the painter Tom Phillips.

“When it came to recording Jeremy and Ed – which I felt was important because they were the architects of the Ondaatje Wing and because the Portrait Gallery had a sense of its own history – the obvious person to commission was John Lessore … He devoted a lot of time and energy to thinking about an appropriate composition and did it in the old backyard behind the Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery and the finished painting – for which there are many, many sketches and studies – he showed Ed sideways, like a sort of Renaissance angel, and Jeremy frontways in front of the model in the backyard, so it’s a portrait which has quite a lot of layers to it in a very intelligent and interesting way. “Ed and Jeremy were always very sweet in viewing me as part of the process of composition of the Wing. … I liked them very much, I got on very well with them, I admired them and I gave them a great deal of freedom but simultaneously, because I’d been trained as an architectural historian, I was deeply, deeply interested in the process and involved with it, and sympathetic to what they were trying to achieve and I now realise much more than I did realise at the time that that’s a very unusual client relationship… So Jeremy and John hatched this plot that I should appear in the portrait but I said I would only appear in it if I was in the background. So I’m a slightly shadowy figure…, which is why I don’t really think of it in the sequence of portraits I’ve sat for. … I’m an accessory, I’m not the subject of the portrait.”

Artists are well used to reading ground plans of galleries and other exhibiting spaces and some, such as David Tremlett, collaborate closely with architects, taking buildings – exteriors or interiors – as a canvas for their work. Tremlett’s practice has taken him across continents, leaving behind wall drawings, sometimes ephemeral, often permanent, sometimes small scale, occasionally vast. An extensive venture is the Castelbocchio project in Italy, where his work covers the exterior of buildings throughout an entire farm (see photo p. 23). Tremlett’s work in Italy has included the rare commission to draw on walls designed by Palladio, for a recent project in Portofino, where the authorities wield strict control over the external appearance of buildings, he has been privileged to cover an exterior, confining his palette to the approved colours of the locality. There are just a few of many instances where the sister projects, Artists’ Lives and Architects’ Lives overlap.

In the following pages, Niamh Dillon, lead interviewer for Architects’ Lives, has selected extracts to give a taste of the project’s scope and some of the themes which bind the recordings together. An article by Geraint Franklin contributes his perspective on joining the NLS interviewing team, comparing life stories with other approaches, whilst tutor Helen Thomas explains how Architects’ Lives broadened her students’ understanding of the value of a sound archive. The next section demonstrates something of the relationship of Architects’ Lives to the wider spread of NLS projects, and Michael Bird’s article centres on a sculptor who first trained as an architectural draftsman, Lynn Chadwick.

Artists’ Lives and Architects’ Lives are dependent on the talents of the NLS management team as well as the skills of our interviewers, all of whom play a vital part. Artists’ Lives is run in association with Tate Archive. Many photographs in this Review were taken by Sandra Lousada, herself recorded for An Oral History of British Photography. Artists’ Lives is also dependent on the skills and energy of the Trustee, Bill Knight. We are very grateful to them both and to others who have contributed images. NLS is greatly assisted by advisory committees for its projects; for Artists’ Lives and Architects’ Lives we have been particularly fortunate in the fidelity of those involved. We are indebted to our many funders. Major supporters have been the Monument Trust (Architects’ Lives), the Henry Moore Foundation, the Yale Center for British Art and the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation (Artists’ Lives). Most of all the achievement of the projects lies with our interviewees.

Artists’ Lives Founding Advisory Committee: Alan Bowness, Judith Bumpus, Caroline Cubitt, Mel Gooding (Chair), Beth Houghton, Margaret Thornton

Artists’ Lives Current Advisory Committee: Alan Bowness, Sonia Boyce, Penelope Curtis, Caroline Cubitt, Adrian Glew, Mel Gooding (Chair), Lisa Le Feuvre, Richard Morphet, Clive Phillpot, Andrew Wilson

Charles Saumarez Smith remembers the evolution of the National Portrait Gallery’s Ondaatje Wing, which opened in 2000. Saumarez Smith also sat for a portrait by another participant in Artists’ Lives, the painter Tom Phillips.

Photo page 11: Architects’ Lives: Architects James Gowan (on telephone) and James Stirling. © Sandra Lousada


Photo page 13: Artists’ Lives: Artists’ Lives Founding Advisory Committee: Alan Bowness, Judith Bumpus, Caroline Cubitt, Mel Gooding (Chair), Beth Houghton, Margaret Thornton
Architects’ Lives: Twenty years on
Niamh Dillon, Project Interviewer, National Life Stories

Architects’ Lives was established in 1995 to document the life and work of architects and their associates across the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Presently there are over 120 recordings in the collection. Participants are chosen for their breadth of experience: the aim is to represent key figures alongside those whose experience is significant but under-documented. From 2014, with a generous grant from the Monument Trust, eighty-two of these recordings have been digitised and made available online at http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/architects-lives

Earliest memories date from the 1930s, when the influence of Modernist ideas and European migrant architects were beginning to alter attitudes to the built form in Britain. The impact of the Second World War and its aftermath is documented across the collections, but for those beginning their architectural studies or career in this period the impact of the welfare state bringing massive programmes of health, education, and housing, created great opportunities and challenges for young architects. Phillip Dowson, one of the founding partners of Arup Associates, remembers that “it was a time of enormous optimism because there was no question in any of our minds about the importance that architecture had to play in the reconstruction of a devastated land.” The influence of the state on public sector projects continued until the 1980s when Conservative governments reshaped attitudes towards its role: as state intervention continued until the 1980s when Conservative governments reshaped attitudes towards its role: as state intervention declined, the private sector became much more important in commissioning projects.

Each recording is an audio biography and captures not only a variety of aspects of their practice, whether an unbuilt project, a process or a design retrospectively. As each controls their own narrative, architects can highlight the connection between personal interest and work to emerge in a unique way. For example, when asked about his inspiration, Derek Sugden – a partner of Arup Associates with Sir Philip Dowson – describes his love of classical music, his work on innovative concert halls and opera houses is seen in a different light, his personal interest informing his work.

The scope of the collection encourages a range of perspectives to emerge of leading figures and projects, providing different insights into both. Leecaster Engineering Building, designed by James Stirling and James Gowan in the late 1950s, was a seminal building in the early post-war period. Recordings with James Gowan and Michael Wilford, a young assistant in the practice, describe testing new materials and the construction process, while Michael Hopkins, who visited the building as a student, recalls his reaction to the new forms and materials. Each recording is an audio biography and captures not only what someone says, but also how they say it. It is a quite difficult thing to do, but it is a brilliant vehicle for teaching architecture.

Architects often do not know early on what their profession will turn out to be. Their route into architecture is varied, sometimes through chance, sometimes intent. As the recordings begin in childhood, architects are able to reflect on early contact with different buildings and spaces and the effect of these. Here we explain how they first became consciously aware of buildings.

Gabriel (Gabi) Epstein, born into a middle class Jewish family in Duisburg, Germany, in 1918. His father Harry was a lawyer and the family owned a department store. Gabi Epstein first became aware of architecture when his family commissioned the architect Erich Mendelsohn to modernise and enlarge the family department store. Gabi recalls:

“...I was seven or eight, I remember him, he was in the street, in front of the department store, he was making some sketches and I was standing next to him, and I thought it absolutely marvellous that there was this guy making sketches on a piece of paper that eventually would become something big and real. And that stuck in my mind for many years.”

After the accession to power of National Socialists in Germany the Epstein family and Mendelsohn migrated to Palestine in the 1930s where Gabi became Mendelsohn’s assistant:

“...He had his office in the Old Windmill in Jerusalem, and after I finished school he said, ‘You come next week, and you bring a white coat’ – architects wore white coats in those days. ‘And you will sharpen pencils’. So I came next week and I did sharpen pencils and I began to do some drawings. ... and I also made copies, there were no copying machines, you had blueprints, and that meant I had to take the drawing which was on tracing paper, put it into a frame which had glass in the front, and you took it out in the sunshine and counted so many seconds, then took it in, rolled it up and put into a vertical box with ammonia and that caused it to develop.”

On Mendelsohn’s suggestion, Gabi Epstein later studied at the Architectural Association, and spent his working life in the UK. In the same period, but in a different location, Ted Cullinan’s early exposure to buildings and construction was also to provide an impetus for his later career:

“I loved looking at things and that was partly due to my uncle Mervyn. He didn’t want me to be a doctor like his father and my brother; he wanted me to be an architect like his cousin, Morley Horder, a late Arts and Crafts architect. So Mervyn did a great deal of indoctrination on me in the 1930s, and although I wanted to be a deep-sea diver until I was five, after that I wanted to be an architect. So I looked at everything. And I still do.”

Education

In the early years of the twentieth century architectural education became more formalised, with training at a university replacing apprenticeships in architectural offices as the usual route into a career. Students were taught architectural history and engineering, as well as technical drawing and design. At the Architectural Association the ‘crit’ system meant students had to stand and present work in front of a ‘critical jury’. Some recall this as a gruelling experience, finding the public presentation of their work difficult. Jeremy Dixon, a student at the Architectural Association in the 1960s remembers:

“...the crit is the fundamental vehicle of judgment and learning and frankly it is a brilliant idea. You do a project for weeks or months and at the end you have a final crit: that means you put all your drawings up on a wall in a rather gloomy hall downstairs. This is a very dramatic moment because you have to stand up and describe your scheme to your fellow students, to visiting critics, to people from other years, so if it is a high profile project there might be about fifty people in a semi-circle around you. You feel very nervous, and it is a quite difficult thing to do, but it is a brilliant vehicle for teaching architecture, absolutely brilliant. I have a theory that it is one of the really dangerous things that happened in the
very active post-war period: that somewhere like the AA taught young people brilliant advocacy, and they went into local authorities and got all the big housing schemes. So a lot of the very troublesome work (associated with this period), I think was an inherent problem with the kind of persuasion which they had learnt through this process of advocacy in the crit system.”

Rab Bennetts comments on his experience training in Edinburgh in the 1970s:

“There is something about the crit system that makes it appear that individuals create works of fine art rather than craftspeople creating team-based artifacts. And it is a fine art, but it has a huge practical dimension.”

Rab testifies that there could be tension between the individual as a designer and the necessity to learn to collaborate as part of a team. Life story recordings allow architects to assess the broader impact of architectural education. For many, the influence of other students was as important as that of tutors and, lasting friendships – and future partnerships, both professional and personal – were sometimes formed.

Drawing and the creative process

The recordings permit an understanding of the design process and how each architect approaches the brief. The process is deeply personal, but for almost all of those interviewed, the physical experience of drawing by hand is one of fundamental importance. Michael Wilford, who began his architectural career in the office of Stirling and Cowan when they were constructing Leicester Engineering Building, and continued to work with James Stirling on various projects in Britain and Germany, emphasises the importance for him of drawing by hand:

“For me the process of design is one of evolution and exploration. Drawing, with a pen, pencil or charcoal, is critical to liberating the imagination in designing a building. There is something fundamental between what is going on in the mind, the imagination, and how that imagination is being transformed through the hand, onto an image which is appearing on a piece of paper. Also, what is appearing on the paper, feeds back through the hand, into the brain. So there is a dialogue between the mind and the image. I don’t see how that can be reproduced or substituted by any other mechanical or electronic means. I need to be able to spread out six or seven sheets which have options on them, and then make judgments, build on what I see there. Being able to draw on the paper, draw over it, get reactions to it, is absolutely vital to the process of designing a building.”

Michael’s extract illustrates the tension between the manual, craft skill of drawing, and the technological changes that have affected the production of drawings. The link between the hand and the idea is made by several architects of the pen and ink generation, who stress the liberty of the hand moving and ink generation, who stress the liberty of the hand moving over paper. The process of technical drawing has changed fundamentally in the last sixty years. In the post-war period all drawings, from sketch designs to production drawings, were drafted by hand; the introduction of computer-aided design and, more recently, three dimensional modeling, now makes the computer an essential tool.

During Edward Jones’ recording, he spoke of how, when designing, there is an inherent tension between precedent and innovation, particularly in an urban context:

“There is a tension between the ideas of precedent and invention, and one oscillates between those two poles. Of course the work wants to be grounded in a culture that is recognisable on the one hand, but on the other hand it doesn’t want to stagnate, so those forces are pulling in slightly differently directions. That is the tension between being a creative architect; I think you have to walk that line between those different pressures.”

Buildings and construction

In the immediate post-war period, building materials were still scarce, which had an impact on the speed of regeneration. However, new construction techniques and materials, particularly concrete and glazing systems, as well as pre-made components, altered procedures and the built form. Rab Bennetts discusses the relationship between the ideals of the Modern Movement and the technical requirements of construction:

“The post-war period when buildings started to be built in a modern way, in volume, across the world, was a pretty tricky period because the technology had not yet caught up with the idealism. And there were particular issues about framed buildings, flat roofed buildings, transparent buildings, which were central to the artistic ideals of Modernism, but were causing horrendous technical problems. So the biggest single technological change has been the realisation that you can’t just detail buildings and build them in those ways. You have to respect the thermal conditions and energy consumption. The technical durability of a building is the biggest single change: to make sure buildings can’t corrode, they don’t fall down, the roofs don’t leak and the materials don’t degrade.”

Michael Hopkins recalls how, in his student years, the construction materials were not always considered the most important aspect of the design. For him and his fellow students, the interaction of space and people was more significant. Later, during the restoration of a ruined medieval church guildhall in rural Suffolk, he began to consider the forms created by traditional materials, and how the form of buildings was determined by the materials used:

“In the process of this restoration one got really interested in how things were built. Before then, at the Architectural Association, one was interested in spaces in relation to each other physically and socially. This was one of the driving factors of one’s architecture: the social agenda and the spatial agenda. What things were made of, we couldn’t care less. But this building, a framed house in timber, really turned us on to how things were made and why they were made. Buildings looked that because they were made in a certain way.”

Jeremy Dixon and Edward Jones, who had met as students at the Architectural Association and collaborated on early projects, went on to form a partnership, Dixon Jones, in the 1980s. A site visit to London’s National Portrait Gallery was the inspiration to create a new space revealing a hitherto inaccessible view across one of the city’s most symbolic spaces. Edward Jones:

“We had a look around the National Portrait Gallery and realised that the circulation from the ground floor was non-existent. There was no encouragement to go above the ground floor. And then Jeremy and I went up to the top floor, and said, ‘This is fine but can we go on the roof, please?’ And they said, ‘No, that is for pigeons and repairmen.’ We went up and then you saw that view. There was imperial London, with all the institutions in front of you that people in the National Portrait Gallery had made their reputations with. It was itself a national portrait. There was Nelson, there was the Ministry of Defence, Big Ben, there was the Houses of Parliament, all there in front of you. A view that you’d never seen because you’d only see it from the ground. This was revelatory. That somehow decided what we would do, and we decided it should be part of the project.”

Life stories allow exploration of the evolution of commissions. Jeremy explains that to unlock the potential of the roof space, which at that time belonged to the National Gallery, negotiations had to take place between the heads of both Galleries. His vivid account depicts Charles Saumarez Smith, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, shaking hands with his counterpart at the National Gallery, Neil MacGregor, on the roof as they looked over London and exchanged land. 

Architects’ Lives charts how architecture changed in Britain over the course of the last century. New forms and types of building represent the altering political landscape, with forms created by new technologies and ways of working. As we move into the future, it is important not to forget the past. Angela Brady, born and trained in Dublin and only the second woman to hold the Presidency of the Royal Institute of British Architects (2011-13), captured the successful campaign to save Preston Bus Station from demolition in 2014. Although built for regional transport, its use of concrete and striking form symbolised a particular period in architectural history, underlining how the less obviously prestigious may often be the carriers of history:

“Architecture is not a fashion statement…. there are significant buildings that are part of our architectural history, culture, and time, and people often look at it with the eyes of today, not thinking that in thirty years’ time it might be worth something. But if you rip out those pages of history, you will have a blank chapter.”

Architects’ Lives documents the past, captures the present and will continue to chart the ever-evolving future.
An Interviewer’s Perspective

“On my first visit to the site, a donkey cart arrived on site, Paul Koralek recalls the 1960s building site of the Berkeley,"

“Well it's like good cooking, not one flavour stands out above all the senses. Here is Adrian Gale on his childhood experience of a suburban building site:

The architect's preoccupation with material culture and the intrinsic properties of objects can make for a rich evocation of the dimensions wrong, so you do it again and redo the dimensions, and blah blah blah blah. It's an ongoing design drama, dilemma, problem, predicament, everything!”

As a buildings historian, listening to architects (and their clients, colleagues and contractors) is a central element of researching post-war architecture. Most of the recorded interviews I do fall into two categories: single-session research interviews, and life stories for NLS, which have their own distinctive approach. The above extract from Neave Brown’s NLS recording captures how vividly the creative process can be re-lived in a life story. The listener experiences the iterative pattern of design, with its doldrums and breakthroughs. Even in transcribed form, speech rhythms and inflections come across with force and clarity.

Recording architects is a distinctive experience. The setting will often be on a clean white sheet of paper which is a challenge but also it’s actually saying ‘come on!’ – it’s actually inviting you to make a mark (pause). And it’s still, that image, it's still there.”

The architect’s preoccupation with material culture and the intrinsic properties of objects can make for a rich evocation of all the senses. Here is Adrian Gale on his childhood experience of a suburban building site:

“Well it’s like good cooking, not one flavour stands out above all the others, but there was a melange of aromas. And the building in a way, as it goes through the construction process, changes its smell.”

Paul Koralek recalls the 1960s building site of the Berkeley Library at Trinity College Dublin:

“Oh my first visit to the site, a donkey cart arrived on site, dragging a carload of drain pipes, and walked onto the wet concrete … slowly sinking into the wet concrete. And that was the sort of technological level of a Dublin site. At the same time it was all very human. They cared about trying to produce quality.”

A programme such as Architects’ Lives allows a complex map of educational, professional and social networks to be charted and an exploration of the wider relationships with artists, exhibition designers, landscape architects and journalists. Through one-to-one conversations we gain a picture of the team-working ethos of the Modern Movement, expressed, for example, through the ‘unit system’ of the Architectural Association, the autonomous design groups of Hertfordshire or the London County Council or the emergence of multi-disciplinary practices such as Arup Associates.

Connections can also be forged between the personal and professional spheres of an architect’s life. In his NLS recording Andy MacMillan explains how his childhood experience of a Glaswegian tenement gave an insight into designing sociable spaces:

“You noticed this thing about the tenant door, for instance, opening onto the street, it's really a wee street inside the building with front doors off on each level. And you learned about ‘close mouth’, the mouth of the entry which was called a close, or the top floor where there was more light and the people up there talked to each other, and then they also talked to the people below… It was a hierarchy of types of gossip.”

“Now, when we came to build the student halls of residence in Hull University we noticed that a stair was a place where everybody could meet, and therefore we made the landings a bit bigger so that a group of people could talk on the landing while other people went up the stair. We also discovered more people are likely to talk to each other in the kitchen than in the common room … So we realised there are more factors than just the simple functional factors when you are building a building. You’ve got to know how the people use it. You’ve got to know how the people find their way about.”

As this story suggests, social and cultural context is central to an NLS recording. Modes of dress express professional self-identity but, like all unspoken social conventions, can prove hard to track across time and place. A further quote from Andy MacMillan, a lead designer at the Glasgow practice of Gillespie, Kidd & Coia, discusses how architects dress:

“Scruffy! [laughs] No, casual, we dressed more casually than engineers, and certainly engineers dressed more casually than quantity surveyors. … My wife once walked up a hill with her sister-in-law, and she said to her ‘that bloke up there’s an architect, and I’ll tell you something else, he’s an Edinburgh architect!’ … The Edinburgh crowd were a tweedy crowd, the Glasgow crowd had blue suits because they were working with business men, and that was the basic difference … And we were known as Jack Coia’s teddy boys!”

Geraint Franklin is an oral history interviewer for Architects’ Lives, and an architectural historian with Historic England. He is currently working on a study of the architects Howell Killick Partridge & Amis, to be published in 2016 by Historic England.

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“She came up for some Valentine’s Ball with some pal of hers from Reading and he was on the same staircase as me and we had a little party on the staircase and we met. And that was it… She was very beautiful and I just fell for her and she fell for me… You weren’t supposed to have girls in the rooms. When Marianne came to stay we had to hide her. It was one of those instantaneous things. She’s sixteen, seventeen, I’m nineteen, twenty, whatever. We just fall for each other.”

John Dunbar’s memory of meeting Marianne Faithfull, his future wife, bears out Andy MacMillan’s view (above) that wider staircases in universities would have social implications. Dunbar attended Churchill College, Cambridge (built 1959).
During the autumn of 2014 I ran a seminar course with a group of undergraduate students from the CASS Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design about to embark on their dissertations. These students came from a range of disciplines including graphic design, film studies, silversmithing, fine art and architecture. Our aim was to visit different archives around London to challenge the premise that “Archives and libraries can seem to be forbidding, academic and even boring places, to which only a privileged few are allowed access by their stern custodians. You need to know the secret codes and rules to follow before you can enter; and before that, you have to know exactly what you want. For creative and visual people these may seem insurmountable or irrelevant hurdles, but in truth an archive can be like an enchanted but dark, dense forest full of useful hidden points and thought-provoking secrets, a place in which the entire imaginative world of your dissertation can take shape.”

As I researched the archives we were to visit, I talked with colleagues and friends about their own positive experiences. It was Edward Botton, architect at the Architectural Association, who introduced me to Niamh Dillon and Cathy Courtney at NLS, and they were immediately enthusiastic about the challenge. My personal engagement with oral histories had been limited to my own, untrained attempts at interviewing for specific research projects, and coming across the creative work of others: hearing snippets used in artists’ work – such as ‘The British Library Architects’ Lives‘ series, available online free, an extraordinary resource for all. Researchers are able to listen and learn straight from the architect, for current and future reference. Projects such as PoD: From Source to Salespoint or Lives in Steel explore the impact – physical and psychological – of factories, supermarkets and industrial sites. City Lives, which NLS ran between 1987–1997, witnessed the fading dominance of the traditional finance houses and old boy networks, as the culture of the financial sector changed radically, expanding globally in complexity and upwards into edifices such as the Lloyds building and the skyscrapers of Canary Wharf.

Andrew Forge, for Architects’ Lives, encapsulates beautifully how the spaces we experience become internalised. Comments across the span of NLS recordings embody reflections on this theme, whether memories of childhood or maturity. Projects such as the Architects’ Lives series, available online free, is an extraordinary resource for all. Researchers are able to listen and learn straight from the architect, for current and future reference. Projects such as PoD: From Source to Salespoint or Lives in Steel explore the impact – physical and psychological – of factories, supermarkets and industrial sites. City Lives, which NLS ran between 1987–1997, witnessed the fading dominance of the traditional finance houses and old boy networks, as the culture of the financial sector changed radically, expanding globally in complexity and upwards into edifices such as the Lloyds building and the skyscrapers of Canary Wharf.

Michael Frawy, in his Authors’ Lives recording with Sarah O’Reilly, emphasises the epiphany he experienced in 1951 in relation to contemporary architecture. Later, he was part of a co-operative, including the architect Christian Summers, which resulted in a series of Modernist houses in Blackheath.

“Modern architecture seemed a break with the past. It seemed clean and it seemed to suggest that human beings could impose themselves on the world, could make a world that reflected reasonable principles. The Modern Movement was very anxious to get away from the idea of decoration. They felt that the house should simply be a series of curlicues and knots and bells and whistles put on top of life, but that the very structure, the very shape of the building, should reflect something of the activity and the way of life of the people who lived in it. The slogan of Le Corbusier was ‘A house is a machine for living’. I was very taken with this idea that one’s outward style should be an expression of what one was and the way one lived. I’ve become much less rigid over the years in my views about this and see the point of decoration more, but all the same I think this is not an unworthy aim.

“One of the things I’d greatly admired when I was at school was the Festival of Britain, this great burst of new design and great architecture. I went from school when I was in the sixth form in a very lofty and condescending frame of mind, thinking I’d just look in for an hour or two to see what everyone was making a fuss about, and I was stunned by it, absolutely bowled over by this world of brightness and colour and form, things designed to reflect the use to which they were being put. That was my moment of conversion to modern architecture, and I think it was for a lot of people. As time went by the colour and the whizz of the Festival began to look shabby and was swept aside, but at the time it was a revelation. It was such a bleak period after the war, everything in short supply. So much had been damaged or left to run down because there weren’t the materials to keep the buildings up, so to suddenly have this bright, bright design world was a miraculous experience. I went altogether three times to the Festival and spent, each time, the entire day there, just walking round with my mouth open, gazing, gazing, soakin’ it in.”

Sandra Lousada, then an apprentice photographer, was taken by James Stirling and James Gowan to the site of their controversial new Engineering Building at Leicester University in 1961. Sadly, NLS was unable to invite Jim Stirling to make an Architects’ Lives recording before his early death, but we have been able to build a mosaic of memories from those who knew him. Interviewed for an Oral History of British Photography Lousada recalls:

“It was the first modern building I’d ever been into as a building site and the first modern building that I was taken round and explained to me... It was a very geometric building ... and these two boys ... took me up to see ... the science block of Leicester University. It had labs... and a factory-like roof of glass, rows and rows of roof lights. Then there was this huge tower. It was all in this dark brick that a lot of Leicester houses are built in, local materials. While they had a site meeting I was allowed to walk around and photograph whatever I wanted. ... It was the first time anybody talked to me about what they did as an architect.”
architects, to work on buildings… I was very lucky because I was picked up by several very distinguished architects, very established, who felt I was a protégé of theirs, so that was great. One of them was William Holford, Lord Holford. He gave me a lot of great work very, very early on in my career. Brave man….

“My first really big (commission) was the lettering for the then new London Bridge and these were almost one metre high letters carved into granite and I went down to Bodmin Moor where the granite was being quarried and worked on these letters in the quarry and I was down there for about six weeks carving these big letters. And it taught me a lot you know. When you’re working on that sort of scale you never see the piece set out in front of you, so you have your scale drawing showing where everything goes and after that you’re wandering around a quarry dealing with these massive lumps of stone and each one is different but marked up so you have to be very careful about getting measurements and each part of the word on the right stone in the right place, because when the stones are all assembled like a jigsaw… I knew that if I got it wrong it would be very, very serious.

“It said ‘London Bridge’ twice on each pier, so when you go under the bridge you can see these big letters… During the construction of the bridge, which I went to see to get a feel for the style of the lettering, I learned one thing. I learned the bitter, bitter rivalry in the construction industry between engineers and architects. Both thought the other were fools, and I remember it was so clear in this bridge because the engineers – I can’t remember their name but they were a very distinguished firm - designed and built this beautiful pre-stressed concrete bridge across the Thames, very elegant, very thin, very economical and that was that. And then Holfords, the architects, came along and they clad it in granite which made it much more sturdy, much more like a conventional London bridge. And it was so ironic because I’d thought the cast concrete bridge was beautiful and I thought these people were vandals but I remember the architects saying to me, ‘Engineers have no visual sense, they’re just mechanics really’, but they weren’t because they were expressing natural laws in form and it was very beautiful."

Another aspect of William Holford was revealed - on the subject of the appearance of the Central Electricity Generating Board’s (CEGB) pylons which pepper our countryside:

“Andrew Derbsyhire was the Board’s consultant architect and he came to my office one day and he said to me: ‘Why do your (electricity pylons) towers all look so miserable?’ I said, ‘What do you mean look miserable?’ ‘Well if you think of the smiley face, your cross-arms all appear to be down in the mouth. Why don’t you turn them the other way so they look to be smiling?’ So I put this to my structural engineers and they thought this was a wonderful idea! A new design… It was accepted… They are now literally all over the country and I see them when I drive around, even in Scotland, but if I talk to anybody they haven’t the faintest idea what I’m referring to in my smiling towers. But I like to think it’s something I have left for posterity on the system. [laughs]”

From Derbsyhire’s own recording with Catherine Croft for Architects’ Lives the listener can gain insight into how the architect’s aesthetic values evolved. As a child, he lived in, a suburb of Chesterfield, a country setting. He’d been very inspired by the way, in particular because he’d always wanted a modern factory in a country environment and look absolutely wonderful, and it was a tapping I could see the light in the sky, I went off to experience these wonderful noises of the engines and the liquid gold."

Writer Fiona MacCarthy’s account of the values her late husband, the flatware designer David Mellor, wished to achieve for his new factory underlines the social considerations fundamental to his brief to the architect, Michael Hopkins:

“In 1990 David was moving his cutlery works into a purpose-designed factory designed by our great friend Michael Hopkins. This was a move partly because David was outgrowing the works in Broom Hall in Sheffield, and partly because he’d always wanted a modern factory in a country setting. He’d been very inspired by the way, in Switzerland, modern industrial buildings would be put in a country environment and look absolutely wonderful, and he thought that he could do it too. Not so easy in the Peak District National Park, but fortunately David found engines which pump the air round… these gas engines were in an engine house quite near the blast furnace… were most impressive great things. They were about the size of a two story semi-detached house, about eight cylinders each, the cylinders must have been a metre in diameter. And the noise they made was absolutely fantastic! Thundering. The whole building vibrated when they were running. So it was an interesting closed cycle, system, where the air blown into the furnace produces the heat that makes the gas that turns the engine that blows the air.

“How did you understand that process? Did someone show you on site?

“It was in my science books. Very clear diagrams of blast furnaces, so I knew what was happening. But it was the sensitive experience that illuminated the knowledge that attracted me to the whole business. So whenever there was a tapping I could see the light in the sky. I went off to experience these wonderful noises of the engines and the liquid gold.”

Many people included in Crafts Lives collaborate closely with architects. Here, Richard Kindersley, interviewed by Frances Cornford, remembers an early commission to provide the lettering for the new London Bridge, which opened in 1973.

“I was interested in two things. One was architecture and also the materials that buildings were made from and I wanted to use my work directly into the materials of the building. I felt stone was a bit old hat so I was really keen to work in concrete in particular because that was a very fashionable material, the New Brutalism and the Festival Hall and all those buildings and I found that very exciting and I did a lot of work working in concrete and my vision was to work with concrete and my vision was to work with my visions was to work with...”

"Sir William took a real interest in things… He was interested in improving the appearance of power stations. One of the first things he wanted to was, ‘How do we colour cooling towers?’ That was one of the odd tasks that was given to me... So I looked into this and wrote a paper and recommended that the... most practical and certainly the most economical way to do it would be to put coloured cement in the concrete. Which is what we did for the first time at High Marnham, where we put in a reddish khaki colour. Which was fine and it lasted. The architects in the Board then went mad and they made their reputation at..."

“Now, when this tapping process occurs, if it occurs at night the whole sky is lit up with a bright orange glow over the furnaces… I would immediately get on my bike and rush off to watch the thing happening. …Watching this process was an absolutely magical experience. The heat and the bright light, this naked iron, golden stream, going into the sand. Marvelous. …When the gas has been cooled after heating up the incoming air, it then goes to power gas supply industry in the UK: a formative experience;”

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a derelict gasworks in the village at Hathersage, which is right in the middle of the Peak District, a wonderful country area, and because it was a problem site due to the contamination caused by it being a gasworks David managed to get planning permission to build. I was very excited about the factory, which was built on the base of the old gasworks. Michael had the idea of using the original concrete foundation. It made sense in terms of cutlery production because the processes in making cutlery work around a circle. It was a huge success as a building, it won lots of awards and it's a very amiable sort of building. It's built in traditional materials. It's a stone building with a spectacular steel structure roof covered in lead, which again is a traditional local material, but which also looks very beautiful. And that lead roof led on to another of Michael's buildings, which was the next commission he had to redesign Glyndebourne opera house. So when you go to Glyndebourne you can see a similar, but much larger, lead roof which started in Derbyshire.

“David was very (William) Morris-like in his views of the environment. Morris wrote a pamphlet ‘A Factory as it Might Be’. David felt that environment was terribly important for people making things….He felt that the environment was terribly unhealthy and spiritually uninspiring. David wanted to show that there because the environment was terribly unhealthy old Sheffield steel-making, cutlery-making environment important for people making things….He felt that the environment was terribly unhealthy environment. Morris wrote a pamphlet ‘A Factory as it Might Be’. David felt that environment was terribly unhealthy environment. Morris wrote a pamphlet ‘A Factory as it Might Be’. David felt that environment was terribly unhealthy environment.

Those working from home often had more control over their environment. Fiona MacCarthy for Authors’ Lives

“I’ve always had a retreat, a separate little writing place to the main family home. First of all this was in Sheffield, where I can remember writing ‘Eric Gill’ in the converted stable block near the house. Then in the early 1990s we moved to Derbyshire where I had, still have, a big cabin, which is a glorified garden hut, a timber building up on a hillside. That’s where I wrote ‘William Morris’ and, more recently, ‘Burne-Jones’. Now I have a new equivalent because I’ve moved from Hathersage, and today I have a stone house which is again a working house, where I am about to start my new biography of Walter Gropius. It’s a Modernist house, full of my Modernist books, but it’s not part of the main house.

It’s a separate building, and I have to make a little journey across a courtyard to open the door of that house, and then I feel in my Modernist mode when I get into the room. So these houses, these various spaces, where I’ve written my books are terribly important to me. I like the feeling of isolation. I don’t have a phone in those work places. People can in an emergency bang on the door but I don’t encourage it. I don’t encourage visitors.”

Interviewed for Artists’ Lives, writer and critic Mel Gooding’s emotions are captured on leaving his home of forty years, the place where he and his wife had brought up their sons and where Gooding had written his many books, articles and poems:

“[Bringing up a family and entertaining friends] gives a house … a series of reverberations and resonances as if it’s a kind of sounding chamber for all the noises of one’s life, and so leaving it was quite a thing for us … It was a very lived-in house and … things in it had kind of accreted round us and created a small universe. It was a wrench when we left it. … Most of my books and other stuff was written in that back room study which overlooked the garden and a lot of texts or little poems … were written from, as it were, from that space … if you knock about it a house which becomes part of you, is part of you, it’s the whole ‘mise en scène’ of your life and then you move to someone different with a different set of rooms and so on, you feel as if you’re in a different play.”

As NLS is housed in the British Library, it seems fitting to end with a quotation from its architect, Sandy Wilson, who was engaged on the project for over thirty years. Here, interviewed for Architects’ Lives in 1996, we gain a glimpse into his more romantic side:

“I should say a little bit more about that courtyard that we spoke about, because, one of the major changes that has happened during the evolution of this design, is that it is being decided that St Pancras should be the place where the Channel Tunnel will emerge, and that means two things. Firstly it means that this building and its courtyard will be almost the first things visitors from the Continent will see, which of course brings the status of the whole building and its courtyard up onto a totally different level, which previously had been judged by many people as being a little bit, sort of back and beyond, you know, ‘Who goes down Euston Road?’ was the sort of question at one time. Now the whole world will go down Euston Road. And it also means that the courtyard, which is going to be open to the public, will take on activities and memories and associations, quite new layers of meaning will be added to it than just as a library. And I have little fantasies that, boy meets girl from Paris under the clock in the (laughs) courtyard of the Library. Which again will be marvellous.”
The eavesdropping researcher
Michael Bird on Lynn Chadwick's Artists' Lives recording

In the autumn of 2011 my publishers asked if I’d be interested in writing a book on the sculptor Lynn Chadwick. With his birth centenary in prospect in 2014, the moment seemed right for a reappraisal. Chadwick’s was a big career – between the late 1940s and his death in 2003 he produced more than a thousand individual sculptures – but, in terms of his reputation, the needle had stuck circa 1960. His triumph at the 1956 Venice Biennale, where he followed Henry Moore in winning the International Prize for Sculpture, was behind him; decades of unflagging production and innovation, accompanied by persistent critical marginalisation, lay ahead.

At this point I’d written quite a lot about modern British art, but most of this work concerned painters and paintings. I had not done extended research on either post-war sculpture or Chadwick himself (a fairly usual state of affairs for the full-colour monograph writer). I did, however, have one ambiguous qualification that none of the authors of the half-dozen previous books on Chadwick shared: I had never met him.

A personal connection, a friendship even, with the subject of your writing can be a mixed blessing. I was glad to have spent as much time as I did with Sandra Blow while working on my book on her in 2003–4. I learned a great deal about painting, about looking – about that world of sensation and intuition in which words have no currency but for which (for that very reason) a writer must always retain a valid passport. I was also glad, however, that seven years earlier Andrew Lambirth had interviewed Sandra for National Life Stories. The memories and anecdotes she recounted to me were, in many cases, close to their recorded versions, but the detail had noticeably blurred, like a photo in sunlight. Comparing the quotes in my notebook with the transcript of the NLS interview, I usually found the latter sharper, more eloquent and almost certainly more accurate.

One of the first research resources I checked before signing a contract for the book on Chadwick was the list of Artists' Lives recordings. Chadwick was there, which meant that, however patchy the paper trail (he was unforthcoming with journalists and left few letters, writings or notes), I had a way in. There exist other recordings of Chadwick in old age and retrospective mood, including an interview by Andrew Causey for BBC Radio 3 and a long biographical interview by his friend and advocate Dennis Farr, both of which are usefully constructed around the landmarks of Chadwick’s artistic career. Cathy Courtney’s interview for Artists’ Lives covers this ground too, but it has the added, invaluable dimension – part of the project’s formula – of time and attention given to other sides of life, such as childhood, relationships and emotions. The quality of this attention feels open-ended and unprescriptive. The responses it elicits from the artist come as close as possible to unguarded thinking aloud.

The eavesdropping researcher hears things that pass the friend by. I was able to gauge Chadwick’s reticences and try his statements for size against verifiable facts with an almost forensic freedom. And I guessed that, had I been able to talk with him myself, in his grand, liminal, vaguely dangerous domain at Lypiatt Park, I would never have got this close. Chadwick was a charismatic, difficult man whose trust was hard to win – for men at any rate (it was a very different matter with women) – and easily lost. Moreover, as an artist of great but undervalued achievement, he inspired the kind of resolute, indignant loyalty that (I know from experience) plays tricks with interpretative judgement.

After listening to Chadwick talk – or rather not talk more than he could help – about such episodes as his mother’s alcoholism, the suicide of Frances, his second wife, or his sense of being ‘quite happy being lonely’ as a child, I can’t say that I had a better understanding of the formal or technical aspects of his sculpture. But I did eventually form a strong, wordless conception of where it came from – a motive, in effect, to fit the act. And I found myself liking him more, perhaps much more, than I imagined – had I met him in person – he might have allowed me to.

Artists’ Lives recordings aren’t therapy sessions. Chadwick was encouraged to talk illuminatingly about particular sculptures, groups and series, and about the different phases of his career. His comments on the gazing stance of The Watchers, for example, revealed what I felt to be something essential in his art: how a closed, reticent form can project a powerful sense of spatial and psychic elsewhere, Easter Island style. Where dates, names and factual statements were concerned, Chadwick’s testimony couldn’t be relied on – but this hardly mattered. The sense of connection that grew through hours of listening, of reading and searching transcripts, became a constellation magnetic field for innumerable other pinpoint details of research.

Would it have been better still to have seven hours of Chadwick on film? I don’t think so. The intimacy and immediacy of the voice in isolation is of a different order. It objectifies the subject far less than film. It retains silences, hesitations and unexpected openings up with greater clarity. It lays down a thread through the labyrinth – a set of clues to, in Rilke’s term (born of many, many hours’ listening to artists), the ‘inutterable’ endeavour of art.


Lynn Chadwick welding the armature for Stranger III in the chapel at Lypiatt Park, 1958. Photograph by David Farrell.
Margaret (Peggy) Roberts (1916 – 2014)
Interviewed by Mary Stewart, 2008 – 2009

Known as Margaret in her professional capacity, Peggy Roberts was a specialist in pre-school and primary education, whose long and varied career as a teacher and later a trainer for teachers included two periods in Australia (1953-58 as Principal of the Adelaide Kindergarten College and 1963-67 as Head of Hobart Teachers’ College) before she took up her final role as Head of Child Development at the Institute of Education in 1967. Although she officially retired in 1981, Peggy was active in the community well into her nineties, through her connection with Trinity Church in North Finchley, long association with the Girl Guides, commitment to the United Nations, volunteer work for homeless and refugee charities in her local area and her continued involvement with the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (Organisation Mondiale Education Prescolaire: OMEP).

After Peggy returned from her first period in Australia in 1958, she spent a formative year with a ‘Ds and Es’ class in 1958. After Peggy returned from her first period in Australia in 1958, she spent a formative year with a ‘Ds and Es’ class in a primary school in Tottenham, a time which she explained to have been very sad for them as they had put a great deal into it and it showed me I needed to work with the parents as well as the children.

“...I ended up teaching very ‘backward’ children who had been discarded by the classes A, B C until ‘Ds and Es’ was where they ended up. I’ve got very live experiences of what happened with those children when I met them for the first time... We were in a stepped classroom in those days... it’s like a theatre and the (seats) go up so that you can see the children at the back... Then I made my first mistake with them... I gave them large pieces of drawing paper and told them that they could write what they liked on it. And they sat and looked at me, and I can remember them all staring at me in silence... And then ken - who was always a great helper - he put up his hand and said... ‘Please Miss, we can’t write it unless you write it on the board first.’ And then I thought, of course they can’t write anything, they’re ‘Ds and Es’... So [Ken] said, ‘if you look in the cupboard you can see pencils of exercise books with all our writing.’ So I got these out and had a look at them and they were all sanctimonious sentences that their teacher... had written on the blackboard and they couldn’t read any of it. So I said, ‘Never mind, we won’t do any writing, but you... can draw what you like... you will tell me your story, I will write it on your drawing and you will read it.’ And I remember writing down in my record they did manage to read it because they were very good at drawing and some of them did wild animals, buildings, cars and aeroplanes... And of course because they had been thinking about it when they were drawing, they could remember the story: it wasn’t reading in the ordinary sense, but what it did was to build up their self-esteem that they could do something.

“And I told them afterwards, ‘Well we’re going to do reading and maths and writing in the morning and in the afternoon we are going to have workshops. We’re going to get the room ready and you’re going to bring anything you’d like to do in the workshop. And from then on... we worked in collaborative ways... And I’ll use his painting of a German Jewish parents who had come to the UK in 1933. Some of the family died in the concentration camps. He attended the Perse School where he first learned to love English and drama. During National Service he gained a commission in the Royal Artillery and became in his words “a sort of crypto-Englishman who can pass for white, but at heart, deep down, I have always known myself to be nothing other than a German-Jewish intellectual.”

After Cambridge, where he got an Open Exhibition to read History and English at Oxford College, Tom went into publishing, first joining Thames & Hudson before being appointed managing director of Secker & Warburg, later taken over by the Heinemann Group. He then joined André Deutsch, which he took over from the founder. Although his final years were dogged by ill health, Tom remained active and in 1997 co-founded the Bridgewater Press with Rick Gekoski, the rare book dealer.

Tom Rosenthal published several magnificently written and illustrated volumes on artists such as L S Lowry, Sidney Nolan, Joseph Albers and Paula Rego, remembered here as he sat for his portrait:

“...I learned how to circumvent to some modest extent the BBC’s extreme meanness to its broadcasters. In the early sixties... I was their unofficial arts correspondent. For doing a live broadcast you got eight pounds, if it was a recorded broadcast you got six pounds. If for any reason it was repeated you got six pounds. It meant getting up extremely early... I would read my script so that counted as a live broadcast and get eight pounds. My rent was seven pounds a week so that paid the rent.”

He was a colourful personality with his cigars, red shirts, yellow polka dot bow-ties, imperious beard and high brow (in both senses of the term) giving him an inimitable profile on the intellectual scene. With his wife, Ann Warnford-Davis, a distinguished literary agent, he had two sons, Adam, a surgeon specializing in gynaecological oncology, and Daniel, author of the 50th-anniversary history of the National Theatre.

The last book he produced was a new edition of Rego’s graphic works. He was very proud of the painting she did of him listening to music in a characterful pose which is destined to hang in Pembroke College. Tom was also a passionate collector of art, launching himself with a small work by L S Lowry which he acquired directly from the artist. Here he recalls a visit to Lowery’s studio:

“...”Would you like to come into the back room?’ That being the studio... ‘You’d better mind that posh overcoat of yours.’ The place was freezing... ‘Many of them (the paintings) were leaning up against the wall. It was the hole of holes... I said very tentatively ‘is there anything here you might be prepared to sell?’ [Tom speaks in accent] ‘Tell me which one you might like.’ I pointed to one which I did like instantly... this was the smallest painting in the room and therefore likely to be cheapest.’ What would you pay me for it? My gross pay is fifteen pounds a week... I have three five pound notes in my wallet... It [the painting] was three children standing on a pavement... And then he said ‘it’s not finished you know...I’ll finish it now.’ He had huge hands... he started fiddling with it for about an hour and pronounced it finished... ‘Can I take it away now?’ ‘Oh no, I don’t think you can do that, it’s still wet.’ He was teasing me.”

Tom first broadcast in 1959 and then regularly on the BBC’s Third programme which became Radio 3, also on the ‘Today Programme’ as well as being a contestant on the ‘Round Britain Quiz’. He was a colourfully clothed with his cigars, red shirts, yellow polka dot bow ties, imperious beard and high brow (in both senses of the term) giving him an inimitable profile on the intellectual scene. With his wife, Ann Warnford-Davis, a distinguished literary agent, he had two sons, Adam, a surgeon specializing in gynaecological oncology, and Daniel, author of the 50th-anniversary history of the National Theatre.
John Postgate (1922 – 2014)  
Interviewed by Paul Merchant, 2014

Professor John Postgate, FRS, was an eminent microbiologist, jazz expert and writer of popular science books, including Microbes and Man (1969) published by Pelican in several editions. His work on the biology and chemistry of bacteria took him from the University of Oxford in the 1940s, to the Chemical Research Laboratory in Teddington, the Microbiological Research Establishment (part of the UK Government’s defence research establishment at Porton Down) and the Agricultural Research Council’s Nitrogen Fixation Unit at the University of Sussex, with intervals in America and Africa (the latter to collect anaerobic bacteria that might be used to make sulphur for industry from sewage). He discovered in sulphate reducing bacteria proteins called ‘cytochromes’ previously thought to occur only in oxygen-breathing organisms and took us closer to being able to feed an over-populated world in attempts to develop nitrogen-fixing bacteria, including some of the first successful movements of genetic material from one organism to another.

He was the eldest son of socialist and writer Raymond Postgate and Daisy (nee Lansbury) - daughter of the Labour politician George Lansbury. Childhood eavesdropping on Postgate and Daisy’s conversations between his parents and Margaret and Douglas Cole, Francis Horrabin, Stephen Spender and H G Wells might have set him up for a different career:

“He [my father] was telling me about how the capitalist system worked with the capitalists accumulating all the money […] we would talk about that sort of thing even when I was quite young […]. But the one thing that didn’t click was my scientific interests […] I had a sort of spirit of inquiry that seemed to have emerged quite independently of the family. In fact as I gravitated towards being a scientist, I don’t think they [parents] even really understood much of what I was doing. […] They were on the humanities side almost blinkered and in retrospect some of my father’s ideas about biochemistry and so on were quite bizarre, but then, he let me correct him.”

Interest in subjects alien to his parents and their friends (science and jazz music) were supported by a ‘very good cataloguing type of memory’. Indeed, he understood himself as different to his brother Oliver (animator and creator of children’s programmes including the Engine and Bagpuss), and like other scientists, through the experience of obsession:

“He [Oliver] was affectionate, creative, artistic; I was observant, reserved and analytical in all sorts of ways. Today I would probably have been described as mildly high-grade autistic […] I was just really curious […] and in fact I was distinctly obsessive. […] learning about all the names of jazz musicians and even learning all the chemical formulae and so on took that element of obsession and […] nearly all scientists are obsessives to some degree […] almost embarrassingly so. […] A colleague of mine […] in America was taken to one of these strip bars […] his host took him […] and they started talking about the kinetics of the process of nitrogen fixation and got so totally absorbed that one of the ladies bent down, tapped them on the shoulder and said, ‘Why are you here?’”

The publication of his Microbes and Man was an occasion of childhood background and chosen career to meet across what he saw as an enduring cultural gap in British society:

“I wrote a book called Microbes and Man […] and I remember his [father’s] astonishment to discover that it sold rather well and that he read a bit of it and that I could actually write; it didn’t occur to him a scientist could write English properly […] He did share without doing so overtly the idea that science wasn’t really a subject; the importance and so on. […] And that view lamentably persists to this day among half of the British public.”

Perhaps given this, there was some satisfaction in beating to print, with an essay on the development of jazz music, a pair of soon to be famous non-scientists:

“I had read some books and distilled some stuff from that and wrote an essay on it which I got published while I was still at Oxford (University in the early 1940s) much to the dismay of my friends Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin because they were interested in jazz and hadn’t managed to publish anything, not yet anyway.”

Elsbeth Juda (1911 – 2014)  
Interviewed by Cathy Courtney, 2001 – 2003

“…and Graham rang up late afternoon, he said, ‘Oh Hansy, I can’t bear it. He’s not having it, he doesn’t want it. He hates it. What am I going to do?’ […] Hans said, ‘Well just calm down Graham. Send it to us.’ … We lived in Palace Gate and the Churchill house […] was at the back of our block of flats. And, so it was sent to us, delivered, and we had it in a room which we called the studio […] and it looked very nice, on an easel. And we photographed it. And we were going to pay whatever Churchill, whatever it was … which was quite a lot for us at the time, but it was such a historic thing. […] And so, three days later, another phone call. ‘I’m not allowed to give it to you, it’s got to go back to Hyde Park Gardens.’ So, we delivered it back. And that’s where she [Clementine Churchill] said she burnt it. He was so distressed, having it in the house, so she took it down in the central heating, chopped it up and put it in the boiler.”

The National Portrait Gallery holds several of Juda’s photographs. The archive of The Ambassador is in the Victoria & Albert Museum.

“I was born on the 2nd of May 1911 in Darmstadt… my father was a German Professor of Philosophy at the university there… I was the second child, and the first one was a boy, who was just as well. And then Freud came one day to visit my father, who at that time was on to ESP [extra sensory perception] and all kinds of things, and obviously psychoanalysis or whatever, and he said, ‘Freud, as you are a Doctor of Medicine, could you bear to go and see my screaming second child? We’ve pushed her behind the double doors, and we can still hear her.’ And so, he went, and he said, ‘Well, what do you feed her on?’ and he said, ‘Well, my wife of course.’ And he said, ‘Have you had her milk examined?’ and my father said, ‘How dare you, look at my son, same mother, same milk.’ Anyway, he suggested she do that, and he said, ‘You’d better give her a wet nurse very quickly and put her in the sun, because the vitamin E of the sun might just about save her.’ Our own doctor was in love with my mother, and he said the baby was just a naughty baby… So, Freud saved my life.”

It was to Elsbeth that Graham Sutherland turned in 1954 to photograph his sittings for the portrait commissioned by the House of Commons and House of Lords to celebrate Winston Churchill’s eightieth birthday. This was the portrait Churchill detested.
Statement of Financial Activities
Year Ended 31 December 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restricted</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
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</table>

**INCOMING RESOURCES**

- Donations: 215,771 1,541 217,312 204,230
- Bank interest receivable: 207 2,170 2,377 3,590
- Investment income: 9,588 17,247 26,835 26,798
- Miscellaneous income: – 20,657 20,657 47,476

**TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES** 225,566 41,615 267,181 282,094

**RESOURCES EXPENDED**

- Charitable activities: 263,480 – 263,480 225,842
- Governance and administration: – 41,367 41,367 72,638

**TOTAL EXPENDITURE** 263,480 41,367 304,847 298,480

**NET INCOMING/(OUTGOING) RESOURCES**

- (37,914) 248 (37,666) (16,386)
- Unrealised investment gain: 8,589 1,664 10,253 98,109
- Transfers: 2,854 (2,854) – –
- Net movement in funds for the year: (26,471) (942) (27,413) 81,723

**Total funds:**

- Brought forward: 666,208 611,373 1,277,581 1,195,858
- Carried forward: 639,737 610,431 1,250,168 1,277,581

Balance Sheet at 31 December 2014

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2013</th>
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<tr>
<td>FIXED ASSETS</td>
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<td>Investments</td>
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<td>Cash at bank and in hand</td>
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<td>461,589</td>
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<td>CREDITORS: Amounts falling due within one year</td>
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<td>(14,917)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NET CURRENT ASSETS</td>
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<td>469,575</td>
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<td>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,250,168</td>
<td>1,277,581</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

The financial statements are prepared under the historical cost convention, with the exception of investments which are included at market value. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice, Financial Reporting Standard for Smaller Entities (effective April 2008), the Companies Act 2006 and the requirements of the Statement of Recommended Practice, Accounting and Reporting by Charities.

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

**OPINION**

In our opinion:

- the financial statements give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company’s affairs as at 31 December 2014 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its result for the year then ended;
- the financial statements have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice;
- the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

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

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

Sir Nicholas Goodison
Chairman of Trustees
Projects and Collections

Leaders of National Life

(C408) [30 interviews]

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

City Lives

(C409) [150 interviews]

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

Living Memory of the Jewish Community

(C410) [188 interviews]

Recorded between 1987 and 2000 this major collection was developed with the specialist advice of leading Jewish historians and complements a number of collections held by the British Library on Jewish life. The primary focus has been on pre Second World War Jewish refugees to Britain, those fleeing from Nazi persecution during the Second World War, Holocaust survivors and their children. An online educational resource based on the collection is accessible at www.bl.uk/services/learning/histcitizen/voices/holocaust.html and full interviews from both collections are available at British Library Sounds. NLS has also worked with the Holocaust Survivors’ Centre to archive and provide access to their collection of over 150 recordings (C830).

General Interviews

(C464) [89 interviews]

This collection comprises diverse interviews additional to the main NLS projects. Interviewees are drawn from many NLS fields including education, medicine, retail, dance and engineering, and embracing leading designers such as Terence Conran and members of Pentagram.

Artists’ Lives

(C466) [356 interviews]

Artists’ 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 the lives of pioneering career women, each of whom made their mark in traditionally male dominated areas such as politics, the law and medicine. Woman in a Man’s World by Rebecca Abrams (Methuen, 1993) was based on this collection.

Lives in Steel

(C542) [102 interviews]

Lives in Steel comprises personal histories recorded between 1990 and 1992 and charts the lives of pioneering career women, each of whom made their mark in traditionally male dominated areas such as politics, the law and medicine. Woman in a Man’s World by Rebecca Abrams (Methuen, 1993) was based on this collection.

Oral History of the British Press

(C638) [19 interviews]

This collection of interviews with key press and newspaper figures was extended with support from the British Library as part of the popular Front Page exhibition in 2006.

National Life Story Awards

(C462) [145 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 Lively, chose winners from 1000 entries in three categories: young interviewer, taped entries and written entries. Melyn Bragg presented the award ceremony, supported by the Arts Council, the ITV Telethon Trust, and European Year of Older People.

Legal Lives

(C736) [11 interviews]

This collection documents changes in the legal profession in Britain, including interviews with both solicitors and barristers, including Lady Justice Hale and Lord Hoffmann. From 2012 we have been developing this area of work in partnership with the Legal Biography Project in the Law Department at the London School of Economics. A scoping study was completed in early 2015 to outline the scope of a wider project and inform funding efforts.

Food: From Source to Salepoint

(C821) [216 interviews]

Between 1998 and 2006 Food: From Source to Salepoint charted the revolutionary technical and social changes which occurred within Britain’s food industry in the twentieth century and beyond. Production, distribution and retailing of food are explored through recordings with those working at every level of the sector, including life stories with those in the ready meal, poultry, sugar, meat and fish sectors; a series with employees of Northern Foods, Nestlé, Sainsbury’s and Safeway; and a series with key 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 2008–2004].

Book Trade Lives

(C872) [120 interviews]

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

Crafts Lives

(C960) [134 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 Brightton, Annabelle Campbell, Amanda Game, Sarah Griffin, Dr Tanya Harrod, Helen Joseph, John Keay, John Margetts.

Lives in the Oil Industry

(C963) [178 interviews]

A joint National Life Stories/Aberdeen 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, with a partnership with Royal Mail, captured the memories and experiences of individuals from the postal services sector – from postmen and postwomen, to uniformed clerical workers, engineers, car drivers and managers. A CD, Speeding the mail: an oral history of the post from the 1930s 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) [17 interviews]

This collaborative initiative between London College of Fashion (University of the Arts London) and National Life Stories documents fashion and its related industries within living memory.

Pioneers in Charity and Social Welfare

(C1155) [24 interviews]

Records the memories and experiences of key figures in social welfare, social policy and charitable endeavour.

An Oral History of Theatre Design

(C1713) [33 interviews]

This collaborative project with Wimbleden College of Art (University of the Arts London) charted developments in post-war British theatre design.

Authors’ Lives

(C1276) [60 interviews]

Authors’ Lives was launched in 2007 with the aim of recording approximately one hundred novelists, poets, writers and editors. A CD, The Writing Life: Authors Speak, featuring extracts from the collection, was published by the British Library (2011) and the audio is available online in the ‘Oral History Curator’s Choice’ collection at British Library Sounds. In 2014 work began on the Women in Publishing project (C1657), to document the work of this campaigning organisation established in 1979 to promote the status of women in the book business through networking and training. The project will record 25 interviews, and nine were archived by the end of 2014.

Authors’ Lives Advisory Committee

Stephen Cleary, Rachel Foss, Dr Maggie Gee OBE, Mark Le Fanu, Dame Penelope Lively DBE (chair), Deborah Moggach, Martin Pick, Lawrence Sal, Jonathan Taylor CBE.
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