Lifestories
Review and Accounts
2008/2009
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 to ‘record first-hand experiences of as wide a cross-section of present-day society as possible’. As an independent charitable trust within the Oral History Section of the British Library Sound Archive, NLS’s key focus and expertise has been oral history fieldwork.

For more than two decades 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 Archive’s catalogue at www.cadensa.bl.uk and a growing number of interviews are being digitised for remote web use. Each individual life story interview is several hours long, covering family background, childhood, education, work, leisure and later life.

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

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Chairman’s Foreword

In one of our City interviews in 1995 Nick Durlacher, then Chairman of the London International Futures Exchange, remarked that traders were involved in business that could exceed “their true net worth and capital resources. That’s great when everything’s running for you and brings lots of success… But when things turn stormy, people see that the Emperor has no clothes.”

I am sure that he would say the same today, but in stronger terms. In the midst of the current financial and economic crisis it is worth restating the important role that oral history can play in documenting historical change through personal experience. Oral history helps us to see not only past events as they happened, but also the present through the prism of the past. The internal world of London’s thriving financial centre that we captured between 1987 and 1996 in our interviews through one of our first projects, City Lives, may have largely disappeared but the origins of more recent events can be gleaned from the archived recordings. Events such as ‘Big Bang’ in 1986, the Lloyd’s of London debacle, and the collapse of Barings Bank in 1995, which seemed so significant at the time, can now be assessed in a new context. What better time, then, for our new partnership project with The Baring Archive to gather thirty interviews about the rise and fall of a merchant bank within living memory?

Another sector that has undergone significant change over recent years, particularly since privatisation in 1989, has been the water industry and we are pleased to have received sufficient funding for a short series of recordings with long-serving staff in the industry. It is an area that has hitherto been almost entirely ignored by historians. We are grateful to the handful of water companies that shared our belief that a collection of interviews might redress that gap: Wessex, Cambridge, Yorkshire, Northumbria and Scottish Water. As with previous National Life Stories projects focusing on industry – food, steel, oil and gas, and the Post Office – this will be a top-to-bottom project with an emphasis on long-serving staff.

Although we attract support from the business community we remain committed to collecting life stories from the broadest range of British society. All National Life Stories projects are scoped to gather recordings from both managers and workers, from the well-known and the unknown, from the vocal and the rarely heard, from a balance of gender and background. And where we are not the most appropriate body for carrying out this work, or where funding is difficult to come by, the British Library’s oral history section (of which we are part) works with external partners or commissions interviews from its own slim resources. Much recent oral history work in the areas of health and disability, for example, has been achieved through this model of working.

Like many charities National Life Stories faces difficult financial challenges and continues to rely on the generosity of grant-making trusts, corporate and individual donors for all its work. The British Library has provided invaluable support, which in the current climate is more important than ever.

On behalf of the Trustees my thanks go to each one of our staff and volunteers for another year of achievement, and to our donors who have made it possible.

Sir Nicholas Goodison
Chairman of Trustees
Review of 2008
Rob Perks, Director, National Life Stories

Collections and projects

Despite the vital role that water plays in all our lives, it is a sector almost entirely undocumented by historians. Very few key players involved in the enormous post-war changes in ownership and technological advances have been interviewed, let alone the lesser-known engineers, maintenance men, tunnellers and water quality staff. Over the past year we have been able to raise sufficient funding to carry out a short series of recordings with people working in the UK water industry. **An Oral History of the Water Industry** will focus initially on five water companies, representative of urban and rural supply (Yorkshire and Wessex), differing scales of activity (Cambridge and Northumbria), and non-privatised businesses (Scottish Water). The project will gather life story recordings reflecting the period up to the 1973 Water Bill (which reformed over 1,500 water and waste organisations into ten water authorities); the impact of privatisation (in England and Wales) in 1989; and the more recent regulatory changes around water quality and the environment.

**The Legacy of the English Stage Company** (supported by the John Hodgson Theatre Research Trust) is detailed elsewhere in this Review and has progressed to include interviews with directors connected to the Royal Court Theatre, amongst them Michael Geliot, Max Stafford-Clark, Donald Howarth, Ann Jellicoe, David Gothard, Bill Gaskill and Stephen Frears. The collection complements the interviews that doctoral student Liz Wright has been recording in partnership with Wimbledon College of Art (University of the Arts London) for **An Oral History of Theatre Design**.

**Authors’ Lives** has been amongst our most active projects: over twenty interviews have been completed and later in this Review project interviewer Sarah O’Reilly reflects on developments so far. The longest and most in-depth recordings have been with Booker Prize-winning novelist Penelope Lively (30 hours), novelist and playwright Michael Frayn and biographer Michael Holroyd (27 hours each). In agreement with the Arts Council of England, which part-funded the project, we were keen to ensure that poets were not neglected and recordings have now been completed with James Berry, R V Bailey, Alan Brownjohn, U A Fanthorpe, Anthony Thwaite and Allen Fisher. Support from the Booker Prize Foundation has usefully enabled us to interview some younger novelists, notably 2008 shortlisted authors Linda Grant (**The Clothes on Their Backs**) and Philip Hensher (**The Northern Clemency**).

Our interviews with **Chefs** have continued, thanks to the generosity of Sir John Craven. Niamh Dillon has gathered recordings with Michel Roux (to join an earlier interview with brother Albert); Alastair Little (whose eponymous Soho restaurant opened in 1985, serving ‘British’ food from an open kitchen); Pierre Koffman (head chef at La Tante Claire); Michel Bourdin (who retired as head chef at the Connaught in 2001 after 26 years); and Cyrus Todiwala of Café Spice Namasté, who brought his particular style of Indian cuisine to London from Bombay in 1991. This recording adds to existing interviews about ethnic food in Britain which we hold in the archive.
Our fundraising campaign last year for Crafts Lives was extremely successful and prior to her maternity leave interviewer Hawksmoor Hughes added a further nine recordings, including ceramicist/potters Kate Malone and Robin Welch, jeweller Charlotte de Syllas, artist-goldsmith Kevin Coates (funded by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths), textile weaver Barbara Mullins, and Floris van den Broecke (funded by the Furniture History Society), who was design director of Ercol Furniture and Chair of the Royal College of Art for Furniture Design.

In conjunction with the Oral History Society and the Victoria & Albert Museum, we have begun to major international conference for July 2010 focusing on oral history, art, craft and design. The conference will draw on our long experience of recording visual artists, and will take place as our Artists’ Lives reaches a total of 300 interviews. Recent additions have included Alasdair Gray and Tim Scott (the latter funded by The Henry Moore Foundation). The Rootstein Hopkins funding gave us the flexibility to record Harold Cohen when we learned he was over from America for his London show, whilst Hester Westley’s relocation to America permitted her to complete Derek Boshier’s interview on his home territory in California since it hadn’t been possible to cover all the material during his visits to Europe. Boshier’s recording has been supported by the Yale Center for British Art. Our linked series of interviews with art professionals funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation included Anthony d’Offay and Nicholas Logsdail.

Amongst our other fieldwork projects we added interviews with social work pioneers Kay Carmichael and David Donnison, with Kathleen Jones (Professor of Social Policy at York University between 1965 and 1987) and Michael Barrett Brown (who coined the phrase ‘fair trade’) to the Pioneers in Charity and Social Welfare collection.

Recordings with Geoffrey Goodman (former industrial editor, columnist and assistant editor of the Daily Mirror), Max Hastings (editor of the Daily Telegraph and the London Evening Standard), Ann Leslie (foreign correspondent for the Daily Mail) and Katharine Whitehorn (Observer columnist between 1960 and 1996) were added to An Oral History of Barings. For a future Legal Lives project three pilot interviews were carried out by Paula Thompson with Harriet Creamer, one of the City’s first ‘knowledge management’ lawyers; Lady Hale, Britain’s first female law lord; and Sir Sydney Kentridge, who is perhaps best-known as the lawyer at the inquest into the death of Steve Biko. We expect to get underway with An Oral History of British Science during 2009, beginning with two of the four planned thematic areas: Made in Britain (applied sciences and engineering) and A Changing Planet (earth sciences). Fundraising continues for the remaining strands: The Factory of Life (biomedicine) and Cosmologies (maths, astronomy and physics).

Partnerships

Building on our successful City Lives project, completed in 1996, we have forged a partnership with The Baring Archive to create An Oral History of Barings. Through thirty interviews drawn from every level of the bank, the project will explore the nature of a traditional merchant banking business, the development of Barings’ corporate financial services in the 1950s during a period of mergers and acquisitions in British industry, and the emergence of fund management in the 1960s for pension funds and private individuals. In the 1970s and 1980s Barings diversified internationally and, through Baring Securities, became involved in the new markets of Latin America, South-East Asia and Eastern Europe. Whilst its collapse and acquisition by ING in 1995 was a pivotal point in the history of banking in Britain, it is Barings’ broader story that this project will explore. In the light of recent financial events the timing for this project is propitious.
**Tesco: An Oral History** concluded with a ‘market stall’ at the Tesco company conference at London’s ExCel exhibition centre to promote the CD publication, *The Tesco Story: From Barrow to Beijing*. Over 2000 copies were given out on the day and many more have been circulated within the company. We hope to make the full digitised recordings publicly available over the next year.

**Dissemination**

A documentary by Sue Giovanni and Jules Hussey, *Margaret Mellis: A Life in Colour* (also issued on DVD) made extensive use of Mel Gooding’s 1993/4 *Artists’ Lives* interview with the Scottish artist, and accompanied a retrospective of her work at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Norwich. Mellis suffered from Alzheimer’s disease and the film-makers were not able to work directly with her, highlighting the importance of her contribution to *Artists’ Lives*. The audio interview poignantly reconstructs her life, supported by readings, images and archive footage. Another *Artists’ Lives* interview featured in Andrew Lambirth’s book, *Nigel Hall: Sculpture and Works on Paper* (Royal Academy of Arts). Biographer Georgina Ferry drew heavily on Katherine Thompson’s twelve-hour interview with Nobel Prize-winning molecular biologist Max Perutz for her book *Max Perutz and the Secret of Life* (Chatto and Windus). The British Library published the long-awaited *The British Book Trade: An Oral History*, edited by Sue Bradley and based on over 80 interviews from the *Book Trade Lives* project. This is a great achievement, which one reviewer has described as ‘required reading’.

Broadcast use of the oral history collections continued to grow during 2008. Five editions of BBC Radio 4’s *Archive Hour* drew on British Library oral history recordings. *City Lives* interviews featured in a March broadcast, *Britain’s Business Problem*, narrated by Robert Peston; and recordings from *Lives in the Oil Industry* were included in a programme marking the twentieth anniversary of the Piper Alpha North Sea oil rig disaster. Later in this Review BBC producer Monise Durrani reveals how the programme team used the archive interviews for *Piper Alpha’s Legacy*. NLS’s *Oral History of the Post Office* was also used in a series of five radio programmes aired over the summer – *The Last Post* – about the effects of changes in the post office network on local communities.

As part of a continuing programme of retrospective digitisation of the collections, sixty-six interviews with Jewish migrants, refugees and survivors of the Holocaust from our *Living Memory of the Jewish Community* collection were made available in their entirety on the web for the first time to mark Holocaust Memorial Day. They join several hundred interviews already available to the further and higher education community through the Archival Sound Recordings project (http://sounds.bl.uk/), including most of the *Artists’ Lives* collection, *Architects’ Lives* interviews, and some science interviews. The growing presence of our interviews online, some of them searchable through Google, is beginning to raise some interesting ethical issues for us, not least reactions from interviewees’ family members, as Mary Stewart investigates elsewhere in this Review.

**People**

Over the summer I was lucky enough to be awarded a research break to investigate business and corporate oral history. During my absence Mary Stewart ably stepped into my post. She was assisted by Elspeth Millar, who has since left to take an MA in Archives and Records Management at University College London; and Susie Cole, who succeeded Elspeth as our Archive Assistant. Hester Westley emigrated to the US but continued to interview for us. *Crafts Lives* interviewer Hawkins Hughes departed to have a second baby, Roisin, and hopes to return to the team later in 2009. We welcome Alison Gilmour (*An Oral History of the Water Industry*) and Katharine Haydon (*An Oral History of Barings*).
Oral history at the British Library: what else has been happening?

National Life Stories represents an important part of the British Library’s oral history fieldwork activities but there are many other things happening in the oral history section.

Oral history staff deal with around 40% of all the public enquiries that come into the Sound Archive: some 4100 of 9400 in 2008. We welcomed visitors from all over the UK and overseas, continuing to act as the national centre for oral history in Britain, through fact sheets and expert guidance. We also gave 42 talks, presentations and training sessions on a wide range of topics, including two 2-day training sessions for a new Heritage Lottery Funded project Unheard Voices: Interviews with Deafened People, led by national charity Hearing Concern Link. The resulting interviews will be deposited with the British Library and involve the innovative use of speech-to-text technology. We hosted an ambitious event organised by the Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum focusing on the HLF-funded Moroccan Memories in Britain oral history project (also archived with us); and co-organised a major day conference about oral history in museums – First Person: New Approaches to Oral History – in conjunction with the Museums Association in the British Library Conference Centre, attended by 134 people. We contributed edited recordings to both the British Library’s Taking Liberties and The Sound and the Fury exhibitions; and researched and wrote 47 new subject pages for the British Library’s new-look website, taking a Library-wide lead.

Sarah Griffiths joined us on placement from London Metropolitan University as part of an MA in Information Services Management, working on a deposited collection of interviews with craftspeople, and we have accepted several other donations including some seafarers’ interviews, recordings with the pupils of potter Bernard Leach, two separate collections of broadcast interviews with members of the Communist Party of Great Britain and with the Chinese community, and an Open University programme of interviews with overseas-trained South Asian geriatricians. A previously-deposited collection of accent and dialect recordings – Voices of the UK – will be the subject of a new web resource, thanks to a Leverhulme grant. This is one of several collaborative projects with the British Library’s Social Sciences team.

In terms of fieldwork, interviews with Paul Graham, Morris Newcombe and Sandra Lousada were added to the Oral History of British Photography collection; and Louise Brodie continued to augment Down to Earth: An Oral History of British Horticulture, making recordings with orchid expert Henry Oakeley, gardening writer and journalist Anna Pavord and Gilly Drummond, English Heritage Commissioner and President of the Association of Gardens Trusts. An interview with Roger Black, Olympic 400 metre silver medallist, joined forty-eight other interviews in the Oral History of British Athletics collection. In 2009 the Oral History Society (and Journal) celebrates its 40th anniversary: a small number of recordings with the key surviving pioneers have been commissioned to mark the movement’s achievements.
Authors’ Lives: In Their Own Words

Sarah O’Reilly, Project Interviewer, National Life Stories

Though they lived well into the era of recorded sound and radio, it is unlikely that we will ever hear the voices of Thomas Hardy, A E Housman, D H Lawrence or George Orwell, for attempts to find recordings of these four lost voices of English Literature have always ended in failure.

Future generations, it could be argued, won’t be faced with the same problem: today broadcast archives are full to bursting with authors’ voices. But in fact it is the very presence of such short, publicity-led recordings that masks a serious problem. As a nation, we have remarkably few recorded in-depth interviews with writers reflecting on their lives as a whole; we lack a comprehensive collection of biographical interviews with even our better-known fiction writers, let alone those many technical and specialist writers, campaigners and literary journalists who are not household names.

Interviews for Authors’ Lives began in October 2007, with a focus on literary novelists, poets and biographers. Our aims are two-fold: to create a publicly-accessible archive of in-depth life story recordings with British writers, and, in doing so, address some of the key shifts in authorship over the last half century. The project itself is also a well-timed complement to the recently completed oral history of Book Trade Lives.

Although a small number of those interviewed for this project have published their autobiographies, and a far greater number have been the subject of newspaper profiles or radio broadcasts, the Authors’ Lives interview will probably be the first time that the writer has been asked to sit down and narrate, at length, the story of his or her life. How do they react to the challenge?

Nabokov wrote about the relationship of thinking, writing, and speaking, thus: ‘I think like a genius, I write like a distinguished author, and I speak like a child.’ His statement is instructive in what it reveals about the difficulty of transforming thoughts into speech. Will authors, whose habit is the written word, feel this difficulty more than most?

Here is Michael Holroyd, interviewed in 2007/08, describing the differences between writing and speaking:

“I much prefer to write because I can think what I’m really going to say. I can cross out some sentences, reform them, perhaps contradict them and get something about which I think ‘that’s got something of it’, whereas when I speak like this it’s hit or miss. To really express what I feel needs time and thought in order to get it exact in all its contradictions, and layers of light and shade… I’m a written word person rather than a spoken word person. If I have to go to literary festivals and speak I think, ‘What on earth am I doing playing a trumpet and beating a drum when there’s my book [to do it for me]?’. I don’t really enjoy just speaking. I think I parody myself.”

Aside from his description of the hit-and-miss nature of the spoken word, Michael Holroyd alludes to another facet of authorship today which may inhibit the author’s ability to talk freely. It is the drum-beating, trumpet-playing promotional activities that surround the publication of a book, and push the writer to the fore.

The rapid growth of the literary festival and the explosion in the popularity of the literary biography indicate that we are living in what Coleridge called an ‘Age of Personality’. According to William Hazlitt, writing in the early nineteenth century, the poet Thomas Gray was so terrified ‘at the bare idea of having his portrait prefixed to his works’ that he ‘probably died from nervous agitation at the publicity into which his name had been forced by his learning, taste, and genius’. Today writers cannot afford the luxury of nervous agitation. The buzzword amongst publishers over the last few years has been the author ‘brand’, that nebulous concept that compels an author to make him or herself available at every opportunity for public readings, literary festivals, radio shows and television appearances (should he/she be so lucky). Thomas Gray may have been terrified, but he had seen the future.

And of course it is the very public nature of twenty-first century authorship that may encourage a certain weariness in the ever-patient writer when another interviewer appears on the horizon waving a recording device. As public figures, authors know that the details of their private lives are of interest to journalists and readers. Many quite understandably question why the public’s interest is directed towards their person rather than their books. Others may be reticent when discussing their private lives. After all biography, as Oscar Wilde remarked, ‘lends to death a new terror.’

Then there is the thorny problem of the relationship between the life and the work. Writers work in an area in which self-expression is key, and yet historical perspectives on the relationship between an author’s life and work imply that ne’er the twain shall meet: Roland Barthes, who killed off the Author in the 1960s, argued that aspects of the writer’s biography, his or her personal attributes, had no relevance to the meanings that could be distilled from the work, so that ‘to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text’. Today the publisher’s disclaimer continues this tradition of separating creator from creation, arguing that ‘all characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to a real person, living or dead, is purely coincidental’ [my emphasis]. It says, in effect, that there is no continuity between the world that the author inhabits and the world he or she creates in books.

Yet authors themselves have contradicted this view on record. Patrick White referred to childhood as ‘the purest well from which the creative artist draws’ whilst Authors’ Lives
interviewee Nina Bawden has written that ‘A writer’s work may be a coded autobiography.’

To discover why individuals have accepted the invitation to take part in Authors’ Lives has been fascinating; to see why they have declined to do so, even more. Here is Philip Pullman in a letter dated 14th January, 2008:

“\[Anthony\] is afraid I’m rather sceptical about the value of biography when it comes to literature (although I admit it doesn’t stop me from reading biographies)... This is compounded by a wariness about exposing my own life: the things that have been important to me are private and almost inexpressible, and I fear that to put them into words would force them into a sort of fixed and public deadness so that all their potency for me would be lost... When the time comes I shall write a memoir, but I shall take care to make most of it up...”

Philip Pullman highlights an important issue: how can Authors’ Lives encourage writers to speak about their own lives, when putting their experiences into words may destroy the potency of the very thing that they draw on in their writing?

Here is interviewee Anthony Thwaite, talking about the writing of a poem:

“I do find the arrival of a poem is a great mystery to me. It is usually that some sort of noise in my head with a few words attached comes and I think ’What is that?’ I may write it down fairly soon or I may just leave it and see if other bits attach themselves to it, but it’s not a conscious process; it’s a process which you can easily foul up, either by being distracted or by getting it down too quickly, too early, too soon... but occasionally something happens and the thing coheres and the words come together, the sound of it and the noise. But it’s extremely difficult to talk about, and the more I talk about it the less likely it appears that it will happen...”

Anthony Thwaite appears to support Philip Pullman’s comments about the dangers of trying to articulate a process which resists articulation. He begs the question: how can these interviews shed light on creativity, and its relationship to experience, when it’s so difficult to talk about directly?

Over the past eighteen months, some answers to this problem have surfaced. Here is Victoria Glendinning speaking about the difference between writing biographies and writing novels:

“I began writing biography out of diffidence and cowardice. Writing a novel seemed a more dangerous thing to do... It is much more self-revealing, even if you’re not writing about people like yourself at all, because you’re laying yourself open in a completely different way. In biography you’re hiding, acting, impersonating...”

Suddenly the question of where the life and the work intersect is orientated around genre: the choice of genre reveals something about the life and mind of the author that conceives the work; similarly the work reveals something of the author through the very form in which it’s delivered to us. Here is biographer Michael Holroyd again, reflecting on his choice of form, and the areas of human experience that it has led him into: “When you write biography, all biography tends to end sadly... so in a way I have given myself a series of exercises in order to confront death”.

Even more interesting is P D James’s belief that authors are at the mercy of their chosen forms. Here (in an edited extract from her interview) she describes the solace that detective fiction can offer to a reader, and writer, of the genre:

“The form is often quite nostalgic. If you’re reading some of the earlier books you are taken into a different world, a more ordered world, a safer world. Despite the fact that you are dealing with murder, you’re back in this English village with the well-known characters, and in the end a terrible crime will be solved and peace and order restored... You know that virtue is going to be rewarded and evil punished... so [detective fiction] has that ability to provide some kind of solace – both for those who write it and for those who read it... I think there was in my character a wish for order and reason, a pattern, a need for control; I think that need is very strong in me... and of course this is a very controlled form of writing. I don’t think we choose our genre, I think the genre chooses us.”

Here we have an example of the interplay between life and work; a revelation about where the impetus to write comes from which is the very thing that these recordings hope to capture. Over the next few years we hope to find many more answers.
An Oral History of the Courtaulds at Eltham Palace

Catherine Croft, Project Interviewer and Director of the Twentieth Century Society

When I was first asked to go to Eltham Palace to work on this project, the south east London suburb of Eltham was notorious as the place where the racist murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence took place at an otherwise undistinguished bus stop in 1993. This tragic story epitomises the extent to which the area has changed since the era which I was setting out to investigate – the Eltham of the 1930s – and the distance between Stephen Lawrence’s life and surroundings and those of another very different Stephen.

The 1930s story is fabulous: in 1936 textile magnate and film financier Stephen Courtauld and his glamorous wife Virginia (‘Ginie’ was a divorced marchesa by her previous marriage to an Italian aristocrat), built their luxurious Art Deco showpiece home as a setting for fashionable house parties, and to help them to cultivate friendships with influential, fun and famous people. They used a young pair of architects, Seely and Paget, to graft an unusually modern set of rooms (complete with lots of bathrooms and a central vacuum cleaning system) onto the remains of a medieval royal palace which was originally Henry VIII’s boyhood home. John Seely was the son of the 1st Lord Mottistone and later inherited the title. It was the firm’s first major project and an inspired bit of patronage.

Some of the interiors were fitted out by Peter Malacrida (for the firm White Allom), who was later dropped by fashionable patrons when his fascist sympathies became unpalatable. For three brief years until the outbreak of war, an initiative to Eltham Palace must have been the most coveted weekend option for this specific social set that enjoyed motoring down in fast cars to sip cocktails, swim in the pool, play tennis, gaze out over the gardens and try and avoid being nipped by Virginia’s pet ring-tailed lemur Mah-Jongg. They hung on for a while during the war, trying to keep up the morale of themselves and their friends and providing a safe bolt hole for leading figures including Conservative politician Rab Butler. By the beginning of 1945 they had had enough and packed up, initially for the Scottish Highlands, and when this proved too cold and damp for Virginia, to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), where Stephen died in 1967. Ginie moved to Jersey in 1970 where she died in 1972.

English Heritage took over Eltham Palace from the Royal Army Educational Corps in 1995 and carried out an exemplary physical restoration – led by their enthusiastic and charismatic curator Treve Rosoman. At the opening in 1999 and in the months that followed, many people who had known Eltham in its heyday came back to have a look, and the team at the house collected their names and addresses and stayed in touch, sometimes exchanging Christmas cards. Some of these were party guests, the pretty and witty young people that Virginia and Stephen had collected around them, some were the children of staff and servants, and some were the family members that Rosoman had contacted when sourcing information about the original furniture and fittings. This group was aging fast, and although Treve himself was able to recount many fascinating anecdotes he had gleaned from the group, it was felt that an oral history project should be commenced as soon as possible to ensure a full and accurate record as soon as possible.

The brief was then to try and gather as wide a range of experiences and angles on life at Eltham as possible. Treve was especially keen that I find out about the cars (not a subject I naturally warmed to) and (much more appealing to me) the behaviour and character of the notorious lemur and a group of three dogs which appeared to have wreaked havoc not just with the guests but across the whole of Eltham. Caesar the Great Dane was famous for stealing sausages from the butcher’s shop during war-time rationing. With a personal background as an architectural historian, and having previously worked on the Architects’ Lives series, I assumed initially I would be amassing
Ginie's pet lemur, Mah-Jongg, in his own deckchair on board the Virginia in 1935.

Information about the Palace itself – extra details about the décor, the way the rooms were used and how people perceived the building. Although some of this emerged, it became clear that this was not going to be the most valuable part of the project. Of course, I got extra facts about where pre-dinner drinks were served, accounts of parties that mentioned the general ambience, but most people remembered most vividly the people they had met, and the recordings became more about inhabiting the building once again, and understanding the complex characters of Stephen and Virginia and the details of their relationship.

The participants were extraordinarily generous with their time and, because these were more specific recordings than full life stories, they could focus closely on a very narrow part of their life’s experience, and one that was not necessarily central to their own stories. One of the most moving and important conclusions of the exercise for me was that although it became clear that by today’s standards Stephen and Virginia could be seen as judgmental and even manipulative they had an enormously positive impact on the lives of a huge number of people. They were clearly both extremely good company in very different ways to so many people.

As a byproduct I extended some of the recordings to talk about other parts of the participants’ lives, and especially valued hearing about Joan Spence’s experiences as a land girl, and Lady Butler’s tales of her affair with Rab Butler, before their marriage – and her accounts of Eskimo women washing their hair with human urine. Sadly Lady Butler died in February 2009, and as far as I can ascertain this is one of the most extensive recordings to have been preserved.

In 2008, unaware of the progress of the project, English Heritage revamped the Eltham audio tour (it now features the actor David Suchet) without making use of the recordings. Happily, we have now edited some short excerpts from the recordings for tour guides and hope that extracts from the testimony can be used in the house and other publications in the future.
The Legacy of the English Stage Company

Harriet Devine, Project Interviewer, National Life Stories

It is just over fifty years since my father, the actor and theatre director George Devine, founded the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Its aim was to become a ‘vital modern theatre of experiment’, one that would produce a new style of drama, ‘hard-hitting, uncompromising… stimulating, provocative and exciting’. When John Osborne’s Look Back in Anger opened in the first season, to be greeted by a mixture of disgust, bewilderment and excitement, it was clear that the company had begun to achieve its ambitions, and, more than fifty years later, the English Stage Company still produces plays that are vital, contemporary and challenging. Its influence has been far-reaching and it has changed the face of theatre in Britain and throughout the world.

The British Library Sound Archive not only holds a recording of Devine (in conversation with Irving Wardle, who kindly donated the material) but also, since the early 1970s, has made audio recordings of most productions staged at the Royal Court. Related material includes life stories with two key designers working at the Court in the 1950s – Margaret (‘Percy’) Harris of Motley and Jocelyn Herbert – the body of recordings made by the University of Sheffield Theatre Archive Project and NLS’s Oral History of Theatre Design with interviews conducted by Elizabeth Wright. NLS was keen to build on these foundations and, with funding from the John Hodgson Theatre Research Trust, in spring 2008 I began a series of life story recordings with directors whose early careers had been marked by their work at the Royal Court Theatre.

My previous interviewing experience had been focused recordings no longer than two hours in duration, for a book, Looking Back: Playwrights at the Royal Court, 1956–2006. NLS’s recordings, I discovered, are quite different, covering the entire lifespan of the interviewee, and can last anything from ten to twenty or more hours. It has been fascinating to delve into the childhoods of these people, to hear about their family backgrounds, their education and their paths into working in theatre, the highs and lows of their careers and the experiences of their later lives.

Among those recorded have been the writer and director Ann Jellicoe, the first woman to direct a play (her own) on the main stage of the Royal Court in 1959; just as important to document was her account of setting up the Colway Theatre Trust in Dorset to perform community plays. William Gaskill, who was one of the people who took over the running of the Royal Court after George Devine’s death in 1966, has also been interviewed, as has Max Stafford-Clark, who ran the theatre from 1979 to 1993 and now has his own innovative company, Out of Joint. A recording is underway with Anthony Page, who began his career at the Royal Court and was for a period joint Artistic Director; his recent theatre productions include Ibsen’s Rosmersholm and he is known to television audiences through his direction of George Eliot’s Middlemarch for the BBC. I am also in the process of interviewing the film director Stephen Frears, who started as an assistant director at the Royal Court in the 1960s, and has gone on to direct award-winning movies such as Dangerous Liaisons.
and The Queen. Everyone’s memories of working for the English Stage Company have been full of fascinating and invaluable insights into the running of that ground-breaking company, and it has been rewarding to explore the degree to which the ESC’s founding values remain active in subsequent generations.

There have been wonderful and unexpected glimpses of other worlds, such as David Gothard’s memories of appearing, when an East Anglian schoolboy, in a production of Benjamin Britten’s 1958 opera Noyes Fludde, or Peter Gill’s vivid account of growing up in a working-class Catholic enclave of post-war Cardiff. From Michael Geliot, who went on to found and run the Welsh National Opera, I have learned about handling temperamental singers and conductors as a very junior director at Glyndebourne Opera House, and I much enjoyed Max Stafford-Clark’s account of coaxing a play scene by scene out of the hugely talented young writer, the late Andrea Dunbar, whose chaotic life on a northern council estate frequently threatened to overwhelm her ability to write about it. From Donald Howarth’s recording I learned about life in South Africa under apartheid in the 1970s.
An Interviewer’s Perspective

Words Made Fresh: Voices in the Archive
Hester Westley, Project Interviewer, National Life Stories

My association with and appreciation for NLS began with my research at the Courtauld Institute of Art, where I completed a Ph.D. thesis that integrated techniques of oral history to discuss the institutional history of St. Martin’s sculpture department in the 1960s. As a young art historian eager for unexplored material, the Artists’ Lives archive was an undiscovered country. Unlike the often poorly recorded and agenda-driven Q-and-As that characterised my early academic forays, the NLS testimonies were revelatory: expansive in detail and subtle in nuance, they offered the stories behind the accepted historical narrative. Almost literally, the archive became a living body of evidence, elusive and supple, clearly unwilling to conform to orthodox understandings of artistic events or the players who feature in them.

Not until I was given the opportunity to join the NLS team as project interviewer was I in a position to consider fully the issues underpinning life story recordings. My first, tentative, interview was with the Paris-based British artist Stephen Gilbert. As his importance as an artist has yet to be comprehensively documented, the nonagenarian Gilbert’s testimony plays a two-fold role: at once, it reminds us of the essential contribution to future scholarship that Artists’ Lives provides as it captures for posterity the voices of artists awaiting their proper recognition. With Gilbert’s death in 2007, his testimony stands as much more than an untapped resource; it is the haunting voice of a sensibility shaped by two world wars and touched by some of the most influential modern movements of the twentieth century.

From Cathy Courtney – who listened attentively and meticulously to both interviewer and interviewee – I learned how to tease out memories, when and how to respond to potentially charged topics, and, significantly, how to understand a single person’s monumental task of making sense of his or her own life.

When treating artists whose personal histories depend on their own self-valorisation, these issues are particularly germane. Egos and reputations are always part of the game, but artistic legacies increase the stakes considerably. One of my greatest delights in the garnering of NLS testimonies was unraveling the multiplicity of perspectives towards a particular event. Recently, I was fortunate to interview a cross-section of art world personalities from the same generation, so narrative connections and contradictions abounded – and often colourfully so.

In the same way that the Artists’ Lives project has ensured that artists can now speak for themselves, so too has the Art Professionals project given voice to some of the major figures who have done much to define the terms of the late twentieth-century art market. This autonomous project has been made possible by the generous funding of the Gulbenkian Foundation; under the umbrella of Artists’ Lives, the Art Professionals recordings have opened up a new terrain of historical exploration.

Rather than urging artists such as Richard Wentworth, Howard Hodgkin and Derek Boshier (among others) to ‘reveal’ their art practices, my objective with Art Professionals had a different focus. My efforts were directed to an understanding of the mechanics of Britain’s multifarious art industry. These recordings are infused with a different urgency, since they capture the potentially paradigm-shifting moment when the contemporary art world reverberated from 2008’s global economic downturn.

The interviews range widely. On one hand, I recorded the deliberations of Anthony d’Offay, Britain’s high profile gallerist turned philanthropist. This sweeping conversation recounts d’Offay’s trajectory from his childhood to the impetus behind his multi-million pound bequest of contemporary art to the nation. On the other hand, I heard the reflections of Robin
Klassnik, the inspired director of Matt’s Gallery in a recording that untangles the triumphs achieved by and obstacles facing this unique not-for-profit public gallery. Other recent interviews have included the candid recollections of Nicholas Logsdail, director of the internationally renowned Lisson Gallery, as well as the perspectives of art critic, Guy Brett, whose voice reveals a very different set of imperatives in the pioneering work of artists who refute the mainstream. In all, these recordings offer collectively a wealth of new and vital material that enhances our understanding of the trajectory and tensions of the British art scene from the 1960s to the present day.

From listening to the archive’s materials, I have learned that in these recordings, as in conversation, a single inflection of voice can shift entirely the meaning of a statement. From my experience as an interviewer I have learned that oral history renders history not from the historian’s perspective but from the subjects themselves; for that reason, we are no longer talking about flattened historical perspective but one that is endlessly renewing; instead, we have words made fresh.
Since I joined National Life Stories in 2006, part of my role has been to act as the first port of call for numerous enquiries from interviewees past and present, and also from their families. In most cases, a family member contacts us after a relative’s death. Sometimes they have discovered the tapes or transcript in their relative’s possession and wish to know more, but frequently it is to seek a copy of an interview which they have not heard before. I have become increasingly intrigued about what these family members think about the recordings that arrive neatly packaged on their doorsteps because although almost every interviewee will have a family who might listen to their recording, we receive very little feedback from this large potential audience. Occasionally we receive letters or phone calls in which a family member explains their reaction to the life story recording, such as this from the widow of an interviewee:

“I read the resume and as that caused me no problems I couldn’t resist trying a tape. Whilst actually listening I felt happy and at home and even heard myself saying to him ‘oh don’t waffle so.’ But oh dear afterwards. Questions and comments and no-one, no-one to answer to them.”

Letters like this made me reflect more deeply about what families think about the recordings they hear. How did they react to hearing their relative’s voice? Did they hear the content they expected, and – possibly – did they hear things that they wished they hadn’t? How should we as an archive consider the family as an audience for the oral histories we collect?

On a number of occasions a relative has expressed apprehension at listening to their family member’s voice, but, in absolute contrast, I have also had requests for recordings precisely so that a relation can again hear their late relative speak. Martin Pick, son of late Book Trade Lives interviewee Charles Pick, had listened to the life story interview to prepare for his father’s memorial service and in an interview I recorded with him many interesting points emerged. First, Martin explained how his father’s failing health is apparent:

“How do you know something had changed [in Charles’ health], just by listening?

You can tell on the tape that he is having to make a big effort, increasingly. And you can tell from the point of view that it is more difficult for him to concentrate for longer periods on a topic. He diverges a lot of the time from what he’s originally been asked about, something we all tend to do. I think it was more evident. And I think there is an increasing sense of frailty that comes across to me. His voice is just weaker, softer and – in a way – it’s rather attractive as a tone. It’s the sort of voice that would lead the person interviewing him to ask more searching questions.”

Second, Martin reflected on both his father’s unpublished memoir and the oral history recording:

“I was wondering if you thought the recording brought anything different to your perception of Charles’ life, rather than the written memoir?

Yes, well you get the tone of voice, the inflection – if you know somebody well – you pick up on what you know they don’t want to deal with. And that gives you some good clues, really.”

As a son listening to his father’s recordings, Martin was able to detect layers of meaning that would not be apparent from reading a transcript, but also which an outside listener might never detect. In our interview he illuminated many of the intersections and disconnections between the life stories recorded by an oral historian and the stories passed down between family members. Charles revealed in the recording the emotional impact of the pivotal moment in his childhood when his own father went bankrupt. Reflecting on the new information he had heard in the interview and the effect the interview experience had upon his father, Martin remarked:

“I think [interviewer] Sue Bradley’s persistence in coming back to wanting to understand what he wasn’t revealing about the family did have an impact because after the last interview she did with him he said to me – by then he was living in Sussex by the hospital after being diagnosed with the brain tumour – he said to me ‘I want to talk to you about my childhood.’ And then he broke down and he said ‘it was so painful and I’ve never been able to talk about it and I want you to know how terrible it was’.

This example shows what the recording process can reveal and hide from both the external listener and family members. It also demonstrates the impact that recording a life story with an outsider can have on an interviewee and how family information can be transmitted, long after the recorder has been switched off. There is no way of knowing whether Charles would have discussed his childhood with Martin had the recording not taken place, but Martin certainly links the two directly. He sums up the experience of listening:

“...I think it is useful for me not just in learning how to use and access primary source material, but also in providing another perception of my father in various different contexts... I’ve been going through a process of empathetic understanding with someone I never fully understood when he was alive. Although I think that you never really fully understand anyone, I think I have gained in depth of understanding through what has come out of these recordings.”
The role of the archive for Martin was, in a practical sense, finished once the tapes were in his family’s possession. This is an entirely understandable position, but one that provokes some questions for archivists and curators. If a family member holds copies of the recording, where copyright has usually been assigned to the British Library, there is potential for use of the material without acknowledging the wider context in which it was recorded.

More importantly, as libraries and archives seek to digitise and make life stories available via the internet and, as is likely, contact between the archive and the interviewee grows tenuous, ethical issues arise. The confidence expressed by one interviewee in 1989 that her husband would never listen to the nine cassette tapes she had recorded is not one that I think we would hear from an interviewee today. In a digital recording a listener can identify a specific section of the interview from the written documentation with comparative ease. In cases of retrospective digitisation although an interviewee may have specified no access restrictions to their life story, they – and the interviewer – might never have envisaged it being made available to such a wide audience. Martin had no qualms about the release of his father’s recording but I imagine not all family members would feel as comfortable about the potential for their relative’s life story being released to so many listeners outside the Library’s walls. Nonetheless, for the three hundred digitised life story recordings made available via the internet for the Archival Sound Recordings project (www.bl.uk/sounds) only ten interviewees objected to the inclusion of their life stories. The ethics of providing access to life story recordings on the internet – particularly in cases of retrospective digitisation – needs further exploration if, as curators and archivists, we are to balance our responsibilities to our interviewees with the important drive to widen access and increase the use of the many oral histories we hold.
Using the Archive

A Strange Eventful Journey
Cathy Courtney, Project Officer, National Life Stories

Although NLS approaches its continuing fieldwork through specific, themed projects many users coming to the British Library Sound Archive on-line catalogue experience the recordings differently. Most frequently, a user will come to the catalogue with a focused subject for research in mind and will use a single name or theme as their key word to interrogate the catalogue. The key word will trigger a search across the entire holdings of the British Library Sound Archive (over three million items), throwing up a list of options that transcend individual projects and whose original formats may range from wax cylinders to high quality digital .wav files. Whilst many will want to confine their area of investigation quite tightly, another approach is to allow the recordings themselves to lead the ear and mind on a journey which will throw up richly contrasting opinion and multi-faceted perspectives on a given subject and, quite possibly, carry the researcher to a place he or she had no thought to arrive at when they first typed in their search word.

Working on his most recent book, A Strange Eventful History: the Dramatic Lives of Ellen Terry, Henry Irving and Their Remarkable Families, the biographer Michael Holroyd might have keyed in the name of actor Ellen Terry’s son, ‘Edward Gordon Craig,’ and discovered a range of examples of Gordon Craig (1874 –1966) recalling his life in recordings made between 1952 –1960. As well as these entries, there are on offer a spectrum of speakers reflecting Gordon Craig’s influence on subsequent generations, among them David Gothard’s life story for The Legacy of the English Stage Company, Bryan Kneale’s contribution to Artists’ Lives, Ralph Koltai’s interview with Lydia O’Ryan for An Oral History of Theatre Design and Edward Thompson, a publisher included in Book Trade Lives. In turn, those wanting to understand Holroyd’s approach to his subjects could arrange to hear the CD of his 2006 British Library lecture The Power of Wishful Thinking: Shaw, Henry Irving and Ellen Terry and, in due course, the life story Holroyd has recently made with Sarah O’Reilly for Authors’ Lives, or they might opt to listen to Holroyd in action as the chairman of a series of debates hosted by the Royal Literary Society, also part of the British Library holdings.

A taste of the biographer’s own influence may be gleaned from Albert Irvin’s Artists’ Lives interview with Anna Dyke, where Irvin speaks of reading Holroyd’s book on Augustus John. Extending the journey by typing in ‘Augustus John’ as the search-word will throw up, alongside many references in Artists’ Lives, entries for the ceramicist Ursula Mommens (Crafts’ Lives), for Kathleen Hale (of Orlando the Marmalade Cat fame), who was not only painted by John but also chased round the table by him and fended off his lustful approach by bursting out laughing, for Val Williams’ conversation with John Somerset Murray for The Oral History of British Photography, and Hugh Casson’s contribution to Leaders of National Life with his memories of John as a client when Casson began his career as an architect. Casson’s name is itself one of the most frequently referenced on the Sound Archive catalogue, and the collection includes recordings with the architect, photographer and teacher, Margaret Casson née MacDonald (his wife), and Freda Levison (her sister, an anti-apartheid campaigner who helped shelter Nelson Mandela), so that the trio reflect something of their family interaction as well as their individual stories.

A similar chain can be traced by keying in the surname ‘Jellicoe’ which, amongst others, will lead to recordings with the playwright and director Ann Jellicoe, her uncle, the landscape architect, Geoffrey Jellicoe (Architects’ Lives), and her husband, the photographer Roger Mayne (An Oral History of British Photography). Anyone wanting to determine whether there is a link with Earl Jellicoe of Battle of Jutland fame, who is mentioned by Haruko Fukuda in her City Lives interview, can find the answer in Ann’s representation in The Legacy of the English Stage Company, whilst those keen to see her act can watch the video.


Michael Holroyd.
of Ann performing a version of her play, Western Women, at the British Library in 2008. Roger Mayne is one of the figures remembered in Sandra Lousada’s life story made for An Oral History of British Photography where she recalls being among the first to see his seminal images of Notting Hill Gate in the 1950s spread out in his flat in the days before he had a studio. Another figure to emerge in Lousada’s recording is the formidable bookshop owner and notably tough employer, Christina Foyle, who was herself recorded for Book Trade Lives, as was her son, Christopher. Lousada was sent to photograph Christina with her beloved dog and caught her in a very different mood from the person David Storey encountered after he’d made an inflammatory speech at one of Foyle’s carefully selected gatherings – he was banned from ever attending another of her literary events. (Storey, a novelist, playwright and painter, fits into so many NLS categories that it was eventually decided his on-going recording be accessioned under General Interviews.)

Catalogue entries encompass hidden traps – not every entry for Roger Bannister is a reference to the athlete although many are – including BBC recordings of the man himself recollecting the four minute mile. There are also the clergyman and social worker, Nick Stacey remembering Bannister’s company at Oxford (Pioneers in Charity and Social Welfare), a selection of references in An Oral History of British Athletics and Judith Hockaday in the Wellcome Trust Course Oral History Interviews discussing his subsequent career as a neurologist. But the character with the same name mentioned by Don Ruth (Food: From Source to Salepoint) is in fact another person, a partner in a fish merchandising business. Similarly not every Robert Maxwell entry refers to the man under investigation when George Nissen (City Lives) headed the regulatory body, IMRO, after the notorious newspaper proprietor was found to have raided his employees’ pension fund. Other recorded references to the owner of the Mirror include Andreas Whittam Smith (An Oral History of the British Press), Peter Hofman (An Oral History of the Wine Trade) and Miriam Freedman and Micky Jackman from The Holocaust Survivors Oral History Project.

In most NLS projects, two or three individuals tend to surface repeatedly in conversation whether or not they themselves made life stories. These are sometimes well-known characters – Jack Cohen in Tesco: An Oral History or Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin, in Book Trade Lives (who also crops up in Down to Earth: An Oral History of Horticulture in Richard Mabey’s recording and in An Oral History of The Post Office where he is remembered by David Gentleman) – yet they are just as often not public names but characters who emerge little by little via a number of speakers. One such is the mighty Bill Knapman, whose personality can be gauged by cross-referencing the material in Food: From Source to Salepoint. Rising to be part-owner of a substantial chain of butchers’ shops, Knapman went from poverty to riches and back again, along the way treating visiting bank managers to a tour of the cold store and keeping them talking there whilst he was himself protected by his thermal underwear. In the good days, we learn of his regular Friday drives with his wife to the local fish and chip shop when the couple would repair to their luxurious car to eat their meal hot out of the paper. By the stage that the listener hears that the aging Knapman was technically bankrupt when he keeled over at work and died, his fall feels like a mini Grecian tragedy. Despite not being a speaker himself, his presence is as vivid as any in the archive.

Knapman’s downfall was largely due to the expanding might of the supermarkets, whose growth is well documented in the Food project, but other traders, though similarly edged out of business, survived remarkably well due to the high value of the freeholds of their premises which they capitalised on leaving the trade. The role of property in underpinning British businesses (including the supermarkets themselves) and its impact on the lives of individuals in the second half of the twentieth century is an example of a theme which can be explored across the various Sound Archive holdings. Whilst NLS interviewers consciously jog the memories of those making life stories, they are collecting something less overt at the same time – a flavour of the zeitgeist of the period in which the interview is taking place. The mood underlying the City Lives recordings collected between 1987–1996 from those in Britain’s financial capital, for example, is unlikely to return again in our lifetimes if at all. It was already diminishing when the project ended as the tightly knit relationships within the Square Mile began to unravel as companies migrated to Canary Wharf, was further dented by the impact of the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and has vanished entirely in the light of the credit crunch. When Barings Bank fell in 1995 the sudden demise of a much respected, apparently rock-solid city institution was perceived as a shocking one-off event; not so today. As NLS embarks on its new Oral History of Barings Bank, our interviewer might well begin her research by turning to the Sound Archive Catalogue.
A Broadcaster’s Perspective

Life Stories on the Radio
Monise Durrani, Producer, BBC Radio Scotland with Mary Stewart, NLS Administrator

On 6 July 1988 a massive explosion on the Piper Alpha North Sea oil rig killed 167 people. It was the worst offshore oil accident in the history of the industry. Monise Durrani, a producer for BBC Radio Scotland, used extensive interview extracts from NLS’s Lives in the Oil Industry collection for a BBC Archive Hour programme – ‘Piper Alpha’s Legacy’ – broadcast in July 2008 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the disaster. In this interview with Mary Stewart, Monise discusses how she went about making the programme.

Mary: Had you heard of Piper Alpha before?
Monise: I grew up in Scotland and it was such a big thing. I was in primary school when it happened but I do remember the news stories and, as everyone I spoke to for the programme did, those images are just the sort of thing that’s kind of burned in the memory of anyone who was in Scotland at the time.

How did the [programme] planning process take place?
It was along two lines – well three if you like. We had the British Library Archive to think about and then also the huge wealth of BBC Archive, particularly BBC Scotland Archive, and I think that was one of the key reasons that we, rather than any other bit of the BBC, ended up making those programmes, because BBC Scotland has of course done so much about the oil industry over the last twenty years and since the North Sea oil industry began. Then with a programme like this there are always new interviews to record as well. So it was searching through the indexes of the Lives in the Oil Industry collection, looking through what BBC Scotland had and then thinking about who we could talk to for the programme, both in terms of memories of people involved at the time and people who could give an overview of how Piper Alpha had affected the oil industry since.

Just thinking about the Lives in the Oil Industry collection, how did you decide which interviews you might want to listen to?
I printed off the tape summaries and they completely filled a folder – such a density of information. I think it was around May so it was quite a nice time of year, so I actually took the folder and I sat out in the park in front of the Scottish Parliament with a highlighter pen and I looked for mentions of Piper Alpha and highlighted them. I narrowed it down from there thinking about what was the most relevant and what would complement what the BBC Archive I’d looked at had and the people I was planning to talk to. I looked at the access restrictions, you know, there was no point in asking for a tape that I wasn’t going to get.

How useful did you find the content summaries?
Very. I suppose what they don’t tell you is how fluently someone talks, but they were incredibly useful because it’s such a large collection you do need that level of detail to be able to make sense of it.

And with the mentions of Piper Alpha within the content summaries, how did you make a judgement about what material might be appropriate for your programme?
I guess the thread of the programme was thinking about recollections of the disaster itself, but then how the kind of the horror had left a cloud over the oil industry, but also the impact it had had in terms of safety regimes and legislation. So there was quite a clear storyline I wanted to follow. So it was looking for the elements of the collection which had content relevant to that. There were a few mentions of Piper Alpha here and there, but there were some tapes where it was pretty much all Piper Alpha and they were quite easy to pick out. The other thing that was important about Lives in the Oil Industry is that it had representations from different elements of the oil industry as well, because very often with a disaster you can go through an archive and you hear a lot from the victims, but because the Lives in the Oil Industry collection was not specifically about Piper Alpha, what it also had was people from all elements of the oil industry. It wasn’t just the guys who worked out on the rigs. You had people like the PR woman for the oil company, the trade union leaders. So it was a very wide range of voices that I was able to draw on.

What was the process after you’d selected material from the content summaries? What happened next?
The process was that we put in our request and then you were very keen to go and make sure that the tapes I’d requested, the people whose recordings they were, were happy for me to have them. So from my point of view it was a case of anxiously watching the emails and keeping everything crossed for a little while.

How does that experience of needing to get interviewee perspective compare to the other programmes you’ve made?
I suppose that on the whole I work on fairly straightforward documentaries where you’re talking directly to the interviewees anyway, so the fact that they’re happy to have you hold a microphone under their nose, you know, they’re happy to take part in the programme. And the previous archive collections I worked on, although they were both anniversary programmes, they were mainly using BBC Archive which is ours to use mostly unrestricted, so there wasn’t that kind of need to contact people. I would always contact someone if I was re-broadcasting something just to let them know that they might be hearing their voice again. I mean I suppose the only thing that I felt, and I absolutely understand why you did it, and it had an impact on my actions later as
them felt too disappointed and that was why, before the programme went out, I made an effort to talk to not just the people whose clips I’d used, but the people whose clips I’d listened to but I hadn’t used.

And those interviewees that you did make contact with, how did it feel to be talking to them having listened to their voices?
Sort of strange. I mean I didn’t have extensive contact really with any of them apart from Pat Ballantyne and I’d contacted her already anyway because she was the widow of the late Bob Ballantyne who became an incredible spokesperson after Piper Alpha. So there was a lot of BBC Archive of Bob as well and I had wanted to check she was happy with using that, and also because she herself has become something of a campaigner, I was quite interested to hear her opinions. With everyone else it was sort of reasonably brief, ten, fifteen minute conversations to check that they were happy with the idea of my using it and to let them know when the programmes were happening.
Everyone was very keen that the anniversary should be marked, even twenty years on, but there was also a sense from a lot of them that doors were closing and I think that was probably true of the people I interviewed as well, that it’s important to not forget but it’s also important to acknowledge that things in the oil industry have moved on.

How did the interviews from the BBC Archive and Lives in the Oil Industry differ?
They’re very different things. An interview for a programme tends to be more direct and so what you might get is an edited clip or a very polished clip, whereas the Lives in the Oil Industry, because it’s an oral history, is much more detailed and less dictated by the interviewer. In some cases it’s a good thing because you get information that you wouldn’t get elsewhere, but in other cases it’s somewhat tangential to what I was perhaps looking for. So they’re completely different ways of collecting audio because their purpose is different.

Was it what you expected when you listened to the tapes?
To be honest I didn’t request any bits that weren’t directly relevant to what I was after, so with a lot of the oral histories you might have had four tapes of someone and I’d only ask for one and a half. But I was quite surprised to see that every single person interviewed was asked a little bit about their childhood, you know, sort of their background, how they got into their career. So it was I guess very much a life story, which I suppose it is just different from the material I would normally use.

I was interested in this particular Archive Hour, with its mix of the archive, both BBC and British Library/Aberdeen, but also the new commissioned interviews. How did you get a balance between all three of those sources?
I guess it was just a matter of choosing what told the story. Certainly in the way that I’ve made Archive Hours and this is just true for the three I’ve done, is that I’ve tended to use the new material as the guide that takes you through the story. So you have the overview from people who remember what happened but are also there to bring you up-to-date and they’re consistent voices alongside the presenter voice who is taking you through the tale. And then the archive is there to illustrate and to provide pegs for that kind of backbone, if that makes sense. But it is an Archive Hour so it is important to make sure that the archive is used, you know, it would have been possible to go out and just make a programme using a few news clips to kind of evoke the time and then do entirely new interviews, but that’s not what that particular programme is about.

And how did you feel about the final programme?
I was pleased with it. An Archive Hour is much harder work than a twenty-eight minute documentary and I think as a result they tend to be better programmes because it’s a long time over which to sustain a narrative and so if you manage to do that they end up being very good programmes.

My final question is whether in the future you’d be interested in using oral history material again?
Definitely. Because it’s a great resource and as I said, the stories that emerge are there because it’s people talking about things which have happened to them rather than answers that have been solicited for a particular purpose. So you’re going to get records that you wouldn’t necessarily get in broadcasting, so it’s something that we don’t necessarily have in our own archive and its collections which have been made, I suppose because they’re recording lives and not just significant events or themes, it’s a resource that is covering areas which the media doesn’t necessarily do.
Last Words
Gwyneth Dunwoody (1930 – 2008)

Gwyneth Dunwoody was the longest-ever serving woman Member of Parliament, having been first elected for Exeter in 1966. She was Labour MP for Crewe and Nantwich from 1974 until her death, and came from a long Labour lineage: her father, Morgan Phillips, served as General Secretary of the Labour Party between 1944 and 1962; her mother, Norah Phillips was a member of the London County Council and became a life peer in 1964; both her grandmothers were suffragettes. Here Gwyneth recalls her time as a member of Royal Mail’s Stamp Advisory Committee in the 1990s, from NLS’s An Oral History of the Post Office.

“Well we had great fun where all these men were debating …which of the two Queen’s [stamp] issues were going to be the most important: the one for her birthday or the one for her wedding anniversary and I suggested something revolutionary like asking her [laughs]…which didn’t appear to have occurred to them! And of course they asked her and not surprisingly she said her wedding anniversary which any woman would have said. [laughs] Well I mean I think that was one of the advantages of having someone like me there. I’m coming at it from a different angle, I’m seeing it through a different light…and I had wonderful arguments with some of these professors of art because after all, they would say why they thought a particular artist had done this and I would say well, I think that’s just so-and-so, and that was also helpful I think, in a negative way perhaps, but at least it was helpful. Someone who is trained will look at the image and will see in it craftsmanship, they will see in it choice and balance of colours and, and all sorts of things that I would not be able to articulate or see. I would respond to it, but I would not know necessarily what it was I was responding to. And I think that occasionally their judgements would be coloured, quite rightly, by their experience and their commitment and you had to say to them, ‘well that may be the way that you see it but I don’t know that it would necessarily look like that to the general public.’

We always had a wonderful debate on the Christmas stamps because there was always the battle of the traditionalists like me who wanted very much the kind of images that people want at Christmas… I mean I loved all the sort of medieval ones and I loved the children’s ones. So mine would be, with a small ‘c’, very conservative choices and of course there would be occasions when many of the other members of the committee would want something much more adventurous. I happen to think that Christmas is not a time when people particularly want adventure.”

Peter Collingwood (1922 – 2008)

Peter Collingwood was a world-renowned Master Weaver and the author of key reference books on the techniques of weaving. As a young doctor, he became intrigued by looms in the hospital’s Occupational Therapy Department. This extract describes the challenge of using a steel yarn developed for the motor industry, for a large-scale commission for the Kiryu Performing Arts Centre in Japan (1997).

“To begin with I asked for, I don’t know, fifty kilos of it or something, or twenty kilos, I can’t remember. And a box arrived, and I opened the box and it was still on the floor, and I thought, that’s stupid, they haven’t sent enough, and I bent down and I just couldn’t pick it up because each spool, which was about fifteen centimetres across, was wound with this yarn so was just like a solid piece of metal. So they had sent the right amount and from then on all the difficulties were due to its weight. For instance when I wound it round the warping mill – you wind the warp in a spiral – it just slithered to the floor, in a tangle on the floor so I had to put Velcro on the uprights of the warping mill to stop it slithering. And... if a little end of it went over the table, all the rest of the yarn would follow. It just wanted sort of to obey gravity. It was always trying to fall downwards. And when I started weaving, as you weave a bit you turn the warp on, and as I turned it on, the bit I’d woven was just slowly moved across to the left, and I wound it back and each time it always did that, and it seemed to be because the threads with their twist in them, and were thinking that they were screws that they had to move in a screw-like fashion. So then I had to alter the loom to overcome that. And there were just other things related to weight, which normally I could just sort of do with one hand easily, needed a really strong push with two hands. And you had to wear a mask because soon after I began coughing and getting sore throats because little bits of the steel fibre got off, came off, and then you had to be able to glue it, and normally in a Macrogauze I weave in metal rods with a little bit of weft before and after and that’s glued with Unibond or some paper glue which obviously wouldn’t work on this shiny steel. So I had to experiment with super-glue to get the super-glue of the right viscosity so it would soak into the fibres, and if it was too liquid it would just rush up the fibres and convert the fibres into little rods which wouldn’t bend. So you had to find the correct stickiness of the glue for this job. There were just a lot of little technical things, which made me swear and curse, and eventually I wrote a diary of what happened each day because it was quite a sort of adventure into the unknown because I’d never used it before. Nobody’d ever used it for the sort of weaving I was doing.”

Betty Judge (1919 – 2008)

Betty Judge's father was a civil servant and her mother ran a draper's shop. She attended James Allen's Girls School in the 1930s and during the Second World War worked for the Air Ministry in the Department of Civil Aviation. She married Rupert Judge in 1942 and her son Paul was born in 1949. In this extract Betty recalls the excitement of her sister's birthday party in the 1930s:

“For my sister’s twenty-first birthday she had a party in Piccadilly, at a restaurant in Piccadilly called the Pop Restaurant. It was owned by Joe Lyons, and she had her party there, which was catered for by them of course, and that was quite an event. That would be in 1938…Oh it was beautiful, with chandeliers and, it was quite, like a dream come true, you know, to have all these round tables where we sat, and dancing. And I know I had a new dress for the occasion, and also a lovely black evening coat, black velvet down to the ground, lined with pink satin. And it cost a guinea in the shops, they used to have some shops in the West End called the ‘guinea shops’, everything in them were a guinea. And they were lovely, beautiful, you know, lovely clothes, they really were nice, and this beautiful black velvet coat lined with pink satin, and I wore that that night, with a pink silk dress. I remember that… Oh I remember she had a car, a Hillman, Dad bought her a Hillman Minx for her twenty-first birthday… There was a little jazz band there, we had a little jazz band all in, with the package you know, and a little dance floor. And I was nineteen at the time, and we had our boyfriends there, you know, our current boyfriends. And, family, mostly family, and school friends, and it was a good party… jazz dance, foxtrots and waltzes and quicksteps, and Charleston…[and] what they called Nipps (the staff) with their black dresses and pearl buttons all the way down the front, and little frilled caps with black lace through them… I think we had soup first of all, and then I think it was fish, or meat, and then I think it was ice-cream, fruit sundaes. And coffee and macaroons.”

Fred Yates (1922 – 2008)

Fred Yates’ early oil paintings were often likened to a ‘happy Lowry’ due to the vibrant and bold use of colour in his depictions of intricate figures amid the changing urban landscape of his native Manchester. Having spent five years in the Army during World War Two, Fred began teacher training at Bournemouth College of Art in 1946, but left the profession in 1969 to move to Cornwall to take up painting as a full-time career. He subsequently moved to France, where Jenny Simmons recorded his life story as part of the Artists’ Lives collection. Fred’s interview provides a wonderful background to his working life and the influences behind his style.

On his early influences:

I used to paint in the kitchen… that was a beginning for my life, you know. With no knowledge of modern artists or anything, I used to go to… we were pushed off to Sunday school so my mother and father could have a little rest on a Sunday, and we were only little, about seven or eight, and we always used to go to a lady called Miss Annie, Miss Annie Chadwick in Cheadle Hulme…and she was a very lovely old lady and she did watercolours. Beautiful, traditional landscapes of watercolours and she was my first introduction to painting. …And if I was a bit early she used to say ‘sit down’…and the paintings on the walls of the house was the only art education I had until I was about sixteen…I was influenced by Miss Annie. Pretty little landscapes. Never figures. I never even thought of putting figures in, you know, because they’re very difficult…

Specialising in painting whilst at college:

Unbelievably I looked through the door in the art room, the painting room, where all the real artists were you see, I was frightened. Isn’t it funny what frightened me, it was the formality and the superior quality of life that they were all, you know, probably pretentious artists and I didn’t want to be a pretentious artist. You know, I’d never worked in a studio. So I put myself down for drawing and graphic art, which I was good at you see. So this is one of the things about life. All my life it’s been controlled by other authorities. I’ve never had to make a decision. I’d made my decision I was going to go in for graphic art, went in to see the principal of Bournemouth College, and he said, ‘I have put you down for painting.’ So he made the decision you see. All my life it’s been controlled by other people and how grateful I am – and so I ended up in the art room and they loved me.

Exhibiting his work:

I’ll tell you about the gallery, John Martin. One day I went in his gallery and I got talking and I forgot what I’d gone for and he said, ‘Oh, wouldn’t you like to see your paintings?’ So, ‘Oh’ I said, ‘where are they?’ He’s got two big rooms you see. So I looked at my paintings and the exhibition was like a gypsy caravan, all these lonely little whimsical paintings in different coloured frames, I used to paint my own frames. And then I said, ‘Can I see the other exhibition?’ which was on at the same time. I went downstairs, the other exhibition was downstairs, and they were all black paintings with little scratches on them; it was very modern. I wasn’t alarmed in any way – that isn’t the right word – I accepted what was there, in all good faith, and I suddenly thought, how jealous I would have been if the exhibition downstairs was like mine. And it was au contraire, it was wonderful because he sells both types of paintings and that’s my life, I just was thrilled that on one hand they weren’t paintings like mine, naïve, and on the other hand that I could live happily with his and he could live happily with mine.”

Fred Yates interviewed by Jenny Simmons, 2006. C466/234 tape 1 side B, tape 3 side A.
Statement of Financial Activities
Year Ended 31 December 2008

Statement of Financial Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Restricted</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Total 2008</th>
<th>Total 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
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<td><strong>INCOMING RESOURCES</strong></td>
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<td>Donations</td>
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<td>1,736</td>
<td>6,906</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES</strong></td>
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<td>54,873</td>
<td>188,738</td>
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<td>Charitable Activities</td>
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<td>110,932</td>
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<td>Governance and administration</td>
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<td>35,144</td>
<td>35,144</td>
<td>39,427</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</strong></td>
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<td>35,144</td>
<td>146,076</td>
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<td><strong>NET INCOMING RESOURCES FOR THE YEAR</strong></td>
<td>22,933</td>
<td>19,729</td>
<td>42,662</td>
<td>72,666</td>
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**STATEMENT OF OTHER RECOGNISED GAINS AND LOSSES**

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<tr>
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<th>Restricted</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Total 2008</th>
<th>Total 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net incoming resources for the year</td>
<td>22,933</td>
<td>19,729</td>
<td>42,662</td>
<td>72,666</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unrealised investment (losses)/gains</td>
<td>(14,973)</td>
<td>(109,846)</td>
<td>(124,819)</td>
<td>(44,695)</td>
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<td>Net movement in funds for the year</td>
<td>7,960</td>
<td>(90,117)</td>
<td>(82,157)</td>
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<td>Total funds:</td>
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<td>Brought forward</td>
<td>595,698</td>
<td>455,955</td>
<td>1,051,653</td>
<td>1,023,682</td>
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<td>Carried forward</td>
<td>603,658</td>
<td>365,838</td>
<td>969,496</td>
<td>1,051,653</td>
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Balance Sheet at 31 December 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIXED ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td>Tangible assets</td>
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<td>Investments</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL FIXED ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td>416,577</td>
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<td><strong>CURRENT ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td>Debtor</td>
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<td>8,231</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cash at bank and in hand</td>
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<td>631,345</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CREDITORS (Amounts falling due within one year)</strong></td>
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<td>-4,500</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NET CURRENT ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td>635,076</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</strong></td>
<td>969,496</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,051,653</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CAPITAL</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Founder's donation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unrestricted fund</td>
<td>165,838</td>
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<td>255,955</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restricted fund</td>
<td>603,658</td>
<td></td>
<td>595,698</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL CAPITAL</strong></td>
<td>969,496</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,051,653</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 January 2007), The Companies Act 1985, and comply with the Charities Statement of Recommended Practice issued in March 2005.

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 in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practices applicable to Smaller Entities of the state of the charitable company’s affairs as at 31 December 2008 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended and have been properly prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 1985. In our opinion the information given in the report of the Directors and Trustees is consistent with the financial statements.

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

Sir Nicholas Goodison
Chairman of Trustees

PARKER CAVENDISH
28 Church Road
Chartered Accountants & Registered Auditors
Stanmore
Middlesex
HA7 4XR
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) [147 interviews]
City Lives explores the inner world of Britain’s financial capital. Support from the City enabled NLS to make detailed recordings 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 project is a unique record of the complex inter-relationships 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) [187 interviews]
Holocaust Survivors’ Centre Interviews (C830) [151 interviews]
These major collections were developed with the specialist advice of leading Jewish historians and complement a number of collections held by the Sound Archive 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 some full interviews are available on the web at www.bl.uk/sounds.

General Interviews (C464)
[68 interviews]
This collection comprises diverse interviews additional to the main NLS projects. Interviewees are drawn from the fields of education, medicine, retail, dance and engineering, and include scientists, notably Joseph Rotblat, Max Perutz and Aaron Klug; and leading designers such as Terence Conran and members of Pentagram.

Artists’ Lives (C466) [290 interviews]
Artists’ Lives was initiated in 1990 and is run in association with Tate Archive. Collectively the interviews form an extraordinary account of the rich context in which the visual arts have developed in Britain during the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries. Artists’ Lives provides visual artists with a forum in which their lives and work can be documented in their own words for posterity. We are grateful to all our sponsors but in particular to the steady support of The Henry Moore Foundation, The Fleming Collection, The Rootstein Hopkins Foundation and The Yale Center for British Art.

Artists’ Lives Advisory Committee
Sir Alan Bowness, Judith Bumpus, Penelope Curtis, Caroline Cuthbert, Mel Gooding (chair), Beth Houghton, Richard Morphet, Chris Stephens and Margaret B Thornton.

Architects’ Lives (C467) [87 interviews]
Architects’ Lives documents architects working in Britain and those in associated professions. In addition to the main collection, and in association with the National Trust at Willow Road, NLS made a series of recordings documenting memories of Ernö Goldfinger which resulted in a co-published CD Passionate Rationalism (BL, 2004). NLS has also partnered English Heritage to document Eltham Palace and the Courtauld family (C1056).

Architects’ Lives Advisory Committee
Colin Amery, Sherban Cantacuzino, Ian Gow, Jill Lever, Alan Powers, Margaret Richardson and Andrew Saint.

Fawcett Collection (C468) [14 interviews]
Supported by the Women’s Library (formerly known as the Fawcett Society) this collection records 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 (C532) [102 interviews]
Lives in Steel comprises personal histories recorded with employees from one of Britain’s largest yet least understood industries. Interviewees range from top managers and trade unionists to technicians, furnacemen, shearsers and many more. British Steel General Steels Division sponsored both the project and the Lives in Steel CD (BL, 1993).

Oral History of the British Press (C638)
[18 interviews]
This growing 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 (C642)
This nationwide competition ran in 1993 to promote the value
of life story recording and autobiographical writing. The judges,
among them Lord Briggs and Penelope Lively, chose winners
from 1000 entries in three categories: young interviewer, taped
entries and written entries. Melvyn Bragg presented the prizes.
The Awards were supported by the Arts Council, the ITV
Telethon Trust, and European Year of Older People.

Legal Lives (C736) [9 interviews]
This small but important collection documents changes in
the legal profession in Britain, including interviews with both
solictors and barristers. In 2008 three further interviews were
added, including Lady Justice Hale and Sir Sydney Kentridge
QC. We expect to continue to augment this collection with a
view to fundraising for a larger scale project to start in 2011.

Food: From Source to Salespoint (C821)
[207 interviews]
Food: From Source to Salespoint charted the revolutionary
technical and social changes which have 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. A set of interviews with Chefs is now
underway. This project encompasses Tesco: An Oral History
(C1087) [39 interviews] and An Oral History of the Wine Trade
(C1088) [40 interviews].

Book Trade Lives (C872) [118 interviews]
Book Trade Lives records the experiences of those who
worked in publishing and bookselling between the early
1920s and the present day. 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) was
edited by Sue Bradley from the collection.

Crafts Lives (C960) [91 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
Emmanuel Cooper, Amanda Fielding, Rosy Greenlees,
Tanya Harrod, Helen Joseph, John Keatley, Martina
Margetts and Ralph Turner.

Lives in the Oil Industry (C963)
[177 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]
An Oral History of the Post Office, a partnership with Royal
Mail, captured the memories and experiences of individuals
from the postal services sector – from postmen and
postwomen, to union officials, sorters, engineers and senior
management. 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 project 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.

An Oral History of
British Fashion (C1046) [15 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) [14 interviews]

Records the memories and experiences of key figures in social welfare, social policy and charitable endeavour. Funded by the J Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust.

An Oral History of Theatre Design (C1173) [33 interviews]

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

Authors’ Lives (C1276) [19 interviews]

Authors’ Lives was launched in 2007 with the aim of recording approximately one hundred novelists, poets, writers and editors in its initial three years. The project has so far received funding from the Arts Council of England, ALCS and private individuals. Support from The Booker Prize Foundation will enable short-listed authors to be interviewed for the archive.

Authors’ Lives Advisory Committee
Jamie Andrews, Stephen Cleary, Martyn Goff, Mark Le Fanu, Penelope Lively (chair), Deborah Moggach, Richard Price, Lawrence Sail and Jonathan Taylor.

The Legacy of the English Stage Company (C1316) [7 interviews]

Sponsored by the John Hodgson Theatre Research Trust, this series of interviews charts the story of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre. This complements other theatre collections and adds the important perspective of the theatre director.

An Oral History of the Water Industry

With recording starting imminently, this project will record twenty-five life story interviews with staff at all levels within the water industry. Funded by five water companies, these recordings will provide valuable information about one of Britain’s most important and least documented utilities.

An Oral History of Barings

In partnership with The Baring Archive, this project will record thirty life stories over the next two years. Focusing on the history of Barings throughout the twentieth century, it will provide important insights into life and work within the bank – including stories from the family and those working at all levels within the company. This will complement City Lives and document the bank up to and including its collapse and subsequent acquisition by ING in 1995.

Projects in Development

2009 will see the launch of the ambitious Oral History of Science in Britain, which aims to record 200 interviews over the next four years. In collaboration with the British Library’s History of Science specialists, this will be one of NLS’s largest projects to date.

Access

Further information about projects can be found at www.bl.uk/nls. The British Library Sound Archive catalogue at www.cadensa.bl.uk provides detailed content data about individual recordings. Some entire interviews are made available online at www.bl.uk/sounds and these include Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and visual artists and architects (available only to further and higher education users). Contact nls@bl.uk for assistance with any of these services.
How to support National Life Stories

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

Gift Aid
The Gift Aid scheme allows us to claim back basic rate tax on any donation received from individual taxpayers. This means that for every £100 donated we can claim an additional £28 from the Inland Revenue if a signed Gift Aid form is received. A Gift Aid form can be obtained from the NLS Administrator. It needs to be completed and returned to NLS together with your cheque.

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

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

Bequests
Sums left to National Life Stories are deducted from an estate in the calculation of Inheritance Tax and are therefore free of tax. The NLS Administrator can advise on an appropriate form of words within a will.

For further information please contact:
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