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, 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 an online 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’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.

**National Life Stories**

**ARCHIVE ASSISTANT**
- Elspeth Millar (from April 2009)
- Susannah Cole (to April 2009)

**TRANSCRIBERS**
- Susan Hutton
- Susan Nicholls

**VOLUNTEERS**
- Claire Fons
- Sarah Griffiths
- Sophie Ladkin
- Audrie Mundy

**PROJECT INTERVIEWERS**
- Dr Harriet Devine (Legacy of the English Stage Company)
- Niamh Dillon (Architects’ Lives, Chefs)
- Dr Alison Gilmour (Oral History of the Water Industry)
- Dr Katharine Haydon (Oral History of Barings)
- Dr Thomas Lean (Oral History of British Science)
- Dr Paul Merchant (Oral History of British Science)
- Sarah O’Reilly (Authors’ Lives)
- Dr Hester Westley (Artists’ Lives)
- Dr Elizabeth Wright (Oral History of Theatre Design, Crafts Lives)

**FREELANCE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWERS**
- Martin Barnes (Oral History of British Photography)
- Dr Penelope Curtis (Artists’ Lives)
- Rachel Cutler (Oral History of British Athletics)
- Stephen Feeke (Artists’ Lives)
- Barbara Gibson (HIV/AIDS Testimonies)
- Prof Mel Gooding (Artists’ Lives)
- Alistair O’Neill (Oral History of British Fashion)
- Lydia O’Ryan (Oral History of Theatre Design, Artists’ Lives)
- Monica Petzal (Artists’ Lives)
- Shirley Read (Oral History of British Photography)
- Jenny Simmons (Artists’ Lives)
- Paula Thompson (Legal Lives)

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Robert Wilkinson
(An Oral History of Oral History)
Dr Jon Wood
(Artists’ Lives)
Victoria Worsley
(Artists’ Lives)
It was writer and biochemist Isaac Asimov who remarked, paraphrasing Isaac Newton, that “There is not a discovery in science, however revolutionary, however sparkling with insight, that does not arise out of what went before: ‘If I have seen further than other men, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.’” This year we launch the most ambitious programme in our history to document ‘what went before’ — An Oral History of British Science. It has been in gestation for five years and is now underway thanks to the generosity of Arcadia, the charitable foundation of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, who have agreed to support the first two strands of the programme, ‘Made in Britain’ and ‘A Changing Planet’.

Over the next three years we will capture British scientific discovery and innovation through up to two hundred life stories, not only with the notable and the famous, but with lesser-known figures too. For the first time we will be complementing audio recordings with video footage, featuring scientists with apparatus or in significant locations. A new project website has already been launched as the first step to establishing a new history of science web ‘hub’ at the British Library, at the heart of which will be the new oral histories. More funding will be needed for this and, even more importantly, for the remaining two programme strands addressing biomedicine and cosmology.

With this new departure for NLS, alongside seven other active fieldwork projects and a growing number of partnerships, the moment seemed right to review both the charity’s financial arrangements and its staff structure. We believe the changes we have made will position us better to meet the fiscal challenges that lie ahead, and respond effectively to restructuring within the British Library itself, initiated to respond to shifts in public user expectation.

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. As well as the Arcadia Fund I would especially like to thank the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, The Baring Archive, The Rootstein Hopkins Foundation, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Henry Moore Foundation and the Friends of the British Library.

Sir Nicholas Goodison
Chairman of Trustees
Review of 2009

Rob Perks
Director of National Life Stories

Collections and projects

After five years planning and fundraising we began a major new programme, the first of its kind in the UK, An Oral History of British Science. The Arcadia Fund is generously supporting two of the four thematic strands (Made in Britain and A Changing Planet) over the next three years, and the British Library’s Curator of the History of Science, Katrina Dean, is co-directing. This is the largest single grant that we have received and it has enabled us to recruit four new team members, including Tilly Blyth, on secondment from the Science Museum as Senior Academic Consultant, forging an exciting new partnership between NLS, the British Library and the Museum. Tom Lean was appointed as interviewer for Made in Britain and Paul Merchant for A Changing Planet. A project advisory committee is in place and the interview programme is well underway as Tilly details later in this review. A public launch in February 2010 coincided with a new history of science blog and website, www.bl.uk/historyofscience, which will provide online access to the audio and visual interviews, with transcripts, as the project develops. The remaining two science strands, Cosmologies (maths, astronomy and physics) and The Factory of Life (biomedicine) remain unfunded.

Together the four themed strands will add interviews with 200 scientists to the national collection, using the life story methodology to document not just the key moments and famous breakthroughs but the influence of early life; the evolution of ideas, beliefs and morality; relationships – how teams function, competition and collaboration amongst scientists; failures and setbacks; how funding, commercial pressures and policy-change impact on day-to-day science; cultural differences – the impact on UK science of emigré and refugee scientists; the role of lesser-known figures; the day-to-day humdrum and grind of science in the laboratory or in the field; and how science is recalled and narrated: the role of story, memory and oral tradition, the passing-on of knowledge.

Now entering its third year, Authors’ Lives has been gathering pace with thirty interviews complete or underway at the end of 2009. Historian Antony Beevor, novelist and journalist Howard Jacobson, children’s writer Michael Morpurgo, poet P J Kavanagh, and novelists William Trevor, Jane Gardam and Ian McEwan have been amongst the most recent recordings. Continued funding from the Booker Prize Foundation allowed us to interview Ión Trewin, editor, author and publisher, and the current Man Booker Literary Director, as well as Beryl Bainbridge, frequently shortlisted but not yet a winner. Our earlier interview with Hilary Mantel gained greater currency when she won the 2009 prize for Wolf Hall. She was amongst the speakers at Ways With Words, the Darlington Literary Festival, in July where we ran two sessions relating to Authors’ Lives, one involving Graham Swift discussing the deposit of his own archive at the British Library, and another chaired by Penelope Lively in which project interviewer Sarah O’Reilly reflected on the process of being interviewed with biographers Victoria Glendinning and Michael Holroyd. The session led to an excellent piece in the Daily Telegraph and Victoria presents her own perspective later in this review. Authors’ Lives received grants in 2009 from the John S Cohen Foundation, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Friends of the British Library but we still require further funding.

As Artists’ Lives reaches its three hundredth recording we have added interviews over the past year with leading printmaker and painter Norman Ackroyd, and the painter Stephen Farthing, Rootstein Hopkins Chair of Drawing at the University of the Arts London, together with a short recording with Eric Wishart, accountant to the late Ian Hamilton Finlay probing an aspect of the artist’s life not usually explored. Clive Phillpot initiated a supplementary recording with activist artist Gustav Metzger for the latter’s retrospective Decades: 1959–2009 at the Serpentine Gallery; and Hester Westley completed her recording with painter and collagist Sheila Girling. We are grateful to the Yale Center for British Art for its support for this and the Ackroyd recording. Our recording with former art student and teacher John Jones (himself no stranger to oral history, having conducted tape-recordings with some of the leading American Abstract
Dixon Jones’s refurbished Floral Hall at the Royal Opera House.
Expressionists) complements his donation of a 1959/60 recording with Harry Thubron (1915–85, an artist and pioneering art school educator, principally working at Leeds College of Art, whose students included Norman Ackroyd). We have run training days for Tate's conservation department to help them with the recordings they have begun to make with artists whose work is in their care, and have advised the Association of Art Historians on their new oral history project to document their own organisation. In addition to her own interviewing, Project Director Cathy Courtney has been busy assembling extracts for a new CD publication about drawing, sponsored by the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation.

Architects' Lives has made good progress in the past year. Interviewee Michael Wilford worked with James Stirling on several seminal projects such as the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, and, following Stirling's untimely death in 1992, on the Lowry Performing and Visual Arts Centre in Salford, and the British Embassy in Berlin. Jeremy Dixon, whose practice Dixon Jones has concentrated on arts and university architecture, discussed working on Somerset House, the National Gallery and the Royal Opera House. Interviewer Niamh Dillon travelled to Paris to record Gabi Epstein, formerly of Shepherds Epstein Hunter and now in his nineties, most famous for Lancaster University. She has also been recording David Gray, known for post-war public architecture, much of it educational; and Ted Cullinan, Royal Institute of British Architects gold medallist in 2008, whose achievements include the Fountains Abbey Visitor Centre, the Centre for Mathematical Sciences in Cambridge, and the Weald and Downland Gridshell. Paul Thompson completed a recording with architectural writer, historian and NLS Advisor Mark Girouard, an authority on the country house and biographer of James Stirling. Catherine Croft, Director of the Twentieth Century Society, joined the project's advisory committee, and continues to work with us on An Oral History of the Courtaulds at Eltham Palace.

Liz Wright, having successfully completed her collaborative doctorate on post-war British theatre design, stepped in for the maternity absence of project interviewer Hawkmoor Hughes, to maintain momentum with Crafts Lives. Her focus has been textile artist Michael Brennand-Wood whose work draws on contemporary and historical sources to explore three-dimensional structure, pattern and line; Michele Walker, quiltermaker and author of The Complete Book of Quiltmaking and The Passionate Quilter, who uses traditional quilling techniques to create work encompassing themes such as memory and identity; and Pauline Burbidge, well-known for her large-scale quilted textile wall hangings and range of functional Quiltline quilts that both find inspiration in the natural landscape.

Since we completed our main food sector programme we have been fortunate, thanks to the generosity of Sir John Craven, to have been able to record some more Chefs, and Niamh Dillon has completed ten interviews, most recently with Fergus Henderson, whose St John restaurant in London epitomises his philosophy of 'nose to tail' eating; with Swiss-born chef Anton Mosimann, whose skills earned two Michelin stars for the Dorchester Hotel and who now has his own restaurant in London; and Brian Turner, well-known as a TV chef but with a background at Claridges and the Capital Hotel.

An Oral History of the Water Industry has also made good progress across the five participating water companies (Wessex, Northumbria, Yorkshire, Cambridge and Scottish Water), who were joined by Southern Water. Interviewer Alison Gilmour has been tackling topics as varied as land drainage, water chemistry, dam management, plumbing and engineering as well as talking to senior management including Sir Fred Holliday, former Chairman of Northumbrian Water. We have plans to complement these recordings with some involved in regulation and environmental control.

Partnerships

News headlines about banking and finance over the past year have ensured that our Oral History of Barings has continued to attract attention including press interest, notably an article in the Financial Times, ‘The corporate memory-makers’, which investigated company oral histories. Since the project, in partnership with The Baring Archive, started in March 2009, interviewer Katharine Haydon has recorded a range of former Barings staff charting the post-war history of the bank, including Nicholas Baring, John Bolsover (CEO Baring Asset Management), Daphne Chidwick (a long-serving secretary), Richard Comben (Barings foreign exchange), Jim Peers (Barings plc Company Secretary), Trevor Salthouse (the butler at Barings) and Sir Miles Rivett-Carnac (Chairman of Baring Securities), who sadly died before the interview could be completed. Inevitably the bank’s collapse in 1995 is featuring prominently but the broader details of people’s lives and careers are also being carefully gathered.

In conjunction with English Heritage we will be undertaking a small set of interviews to complete An Oral History of the Courtauds at Eltham Palace with English Heritage staff about their work on the restoration of the 1930s Art Deco property leading up to its reopening in 1999, and with a member of the Royal Army Educational Corps – which was based at Eltham Palace between 1945 and 1992. We plan to edit clips for use both on the web and onsite at Eltham Palace.

Dissemination

The NLS team has had a good presence at conferences over the past year. At the annual conference of the Oral History Society at Strathclyde University Glasgow in July, Mary Stewart facilitated a session exploring the layers of meaning uncovered when we listen to interviews; Niamh Dillon led a workshop with Sue Bradley on editing and publishing oral history; Liz Wright presented a paper about her interviews with theatre designers; and I gave a tribute to US oral historian Studs Terkel. Mary and I both spoke at the Oral History Association’s annual meeting in Louisville in Kentucky in October; and Sarah O’Reilly presented a paper entitled ‘The Unedited Life: The use of oral history in The British Library’s Authors’ Lives project’ at a conference at Kings College London on ‘The Work of Life Writing’. In my new capacity as Visiting Professor at the University of Huddersfield I gave a keynote paper on oral history and sport at a two-day international conference, ‘Sport and Oral History’.

Demand has increased for audio in public displays and exhibitions. Collection items featured in the newly-opened People’s History Museum in Manchester, and later in this Review are details of exhibitions at the York Art Gallery on the St Ives artists, and at the National Theatre about the work of theatre designer Alison Chitty. A Lives in Steel interview also featured in an award-winning documentary Lines of Flight: Everyday Resistance Along England’s Backbone (Sal Brown and Martin Wood). And Richard Demarco’s memories of his childhood as an Italian in wartime Scotland were used by Wendy Ugolini in her book Experiencing War as the Enemy Other: Italian Scottish Experience during World War Two (2010), an example of the versatility of an interview recorded primarily for one purpose – Artists’ Lives – being used for another.

People

The expansion of the NLS team brought about by the science project, added to increasing pressures on staff resources and annual enquiry levels running at nearly 4000, encouraged us to review our current structure. As a result we realigned senior staff responsibilities so that Mary Stewart becomes Deputy Director with increased project and financial management, Cathy Courtney becomes Project Director, and Elspeth Millar has a new full-time role as Archive Assistant, taking on much of the day-to-day duties previously carried out by the Administrator. This replaces the post which Susie Cole occupied before she left in April to take a job with John Lewis as a web copywriter.
Oral history at the British Library: what else has been happening?

Oral History, the journal of the Oral History Society, celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2009, the inaugural meeting having taken place at the British Institute of Recorded Sound (which became the British Library Sound Archive) on 13 December 1969. Over the last few years we have been documenting the pioneers behind our movement through An Oral History of Oral History. Interviewees have included Thea Thompson who worked with her then husband Paul on the first large oral history programme in the UK at Essex University from 1969, entitled ‘Family Life and Work Experience before 1918’ (British Library collection reference C707). Jerry White was inspired by the historian Raphael Samuel to start interviewing and went on to write several important oral history books including Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East-End Tenement Block (1980) and The Worst Street in North London: Campbell Bunk (1986). Interviewer Robert Wilkinson also talked to Elizabeth Roberts about her pathbreaking work on women’s lives in three North West towns which led to an important regional oral history archive and two books. Maggie Mackay at the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University is an important link to the earlier leaders of Scottish oral history who are no longer with us; whilst Alun Howkins reflected on the early days of UK oral history in the 1970s, interviewing at Headington Quarry near Oxford and agricultural workers in Norfolk. Colin Bundy recalled his time as a lecturer at Manchester Polytechnic, interviewing women in service and pawnbrokers, as well as the beginnings of the North West Sound Archive. Elyse Dodgson, a former NLS trustee, Oral History Society committee member and Director of the Royal Court Young People’s Theatre, shared her memories as part of our separate project The Legacy of the English Stage Company.

Amongst other new acquisitions in 2009 were fifteen interviews from Middlesex University for the Hornsey College of Art Oral History Project, focussing on the sit-in of 1968; and BBC radio producer Andrew Whitehead deposited a fascinating collection of interviews with political radicals including members of the Communist Party of Great Britain and key figures on the British Left such as E P Thompson, John Saville, Phil Piratin and Denis Healey, plus members of the Anarchist movement, members of the British Union of Fascists, and a recording with a policeman present at the Battle for Cable Street in 1936. We also received 164 audio cassette interviews with artists recorded between 1988 and 2006 by writer Andrew Lambirth. Interviews with Willie Landels (editor and art director of Harpers & Queen); collector David King, who specialises in the Soviet Union; Ray Williams, who worked for Conde Nast between the 1950s and the 1970s; Guardian photographer Denis Thorpe; and John Bulmer, a pioneer of colour photography in the early 1960s working for the Sunday Times Magazine from the very first issue until the 1970s, were added to the Oral History of British Photography. We also commissioned the first of a series of interviews with social activists from Louise Brodie who recorded Jonathon Porritt, environmental campaigner and former Director of Friends of the Earth; Bruce Kent about his key role in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; Ivan Hattingh about the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF); and Baroness Mary Warnock, who has chaired inquiries into human fertilisation and embryology, animal experimentation, and special education.

Broadcast use of our collections continues. For fifteen years between 1964 and 1979, at one o’clock every Tuesday lunchtime, Joseph McCulloch, the Rector of St Mary-le-Bow Church in the City of London, invited a well-known public figure to debate an issue of the day. The resulting recordings formed the basis for a BBC Radio 4 Archive Hour, The Bow Dialogues, presented by Joan Bakewell. We also made our first podcast about political speeches for Campaign! Make an Impact, an initiative aimed at encouraging Key Stage 3 and 4 students to research historical campaigns and gain skills in public advocacy.

Finally, the British Library received two major awards in 2009 in recognition of its innovative and wide-ranging programme of activities to address the needs of staff and users with disabilities. The Employers’ Forum on Disability (EFD) awarded the Library the top rating of ‘platinum’ in the 2009 Disability Standard award – part of a major benchmarking exercise where organisations nationally were assessed on their progress in meeting the needs of people with disabilities. Our work on disability oral history, particularly around mental health, cerebral palsy, and acquired profound hearing loss (APHL), featured in the bid.
Using Artists’ Lives interviews in ‘St Ives’ at York Art Gallery

Laura Turner, Curator of Art, York Art Gallery

York Art Gallery’s 2009 summer exhibition, ‘St Ives’, featured paintings, sculpture and ceramics by artists who lived and worked in and around the famous coastal town from the 1940s to the 1960s. This was an exciting time for artists as St Ives became a centre for the avant-garde in England and attracted international attention. Some of the artists whose works we included in the exhibition also feature in the Artists’ Lives collection. We decided to include some short extracts of artists’ recollections about their work and their association with St Ives as additional interpretation for visitors in the exhibition using MP3 players and headsets with push button options. After visiting the British Library at Boston Spa, Yorkshire, and listening to a number of recordings, we chose extracts from interviews with Wilhelmina Barns-Graham (1912 – 2004) and Terry Frost (1915 – 2003). In total we included six or seven short extracts from each interview, each a few minutes long. These extracts were a fascinating insight into the artistic community in St Ives and visitors responded with enthusiasm to the recordings, prompting comments such as ‘inspirational’ and that they really ‘brought it to life’. As the curator of the exhibition, I found the recordings were invaluable for contributing to my own knowledge and understanding of the period, adding something more personal than I could gain from publications. What I really love about the recordings is that you get a real sense of the character of the artists, and Terry Frost’s interview illuminated his exuberant personality – his interview is full of laughter and witty stories. The inclusion of the recordings in our exhibition helped us to add another layer of interpretation, illuminating the exchange between artists and providing visitors with a very tangible way of connecting with the art on display.


Elizabeth Wright, Project Interviewer, National Life Stories

Theatre designers develop individual approaches to practice, and this exhibition at the National Theatre in London in February 2010 gave insight into the design process of award-winning theatre designer and NLS interviewee Alison Chitty. Director of the renowned Motley Theatre Design Course, Chitty has designed for the theatre for forty years in many different performance spaces, from small studios to international opera houses, and also for film. Using landmark productions to show how Chitty works, the exhibition followed her process, from the first sketch book to final designs, offering a unique opportunity to view work normally only seen in the studio, rehearsal room and workshops.

Having recently completed a PhD on British Theatre Design, I edited extensive excerpts from my long life story recording with Chitty. These audio clips featured in a series of six innovative audiovisual displays, alongside drawings, models and photographs from productions of ‘Billy Budd’, ‘The Minotaur’, ‘The Voysey Inheritance’ and ‘Ecstasy’. Visitors to the exhibition watched scenes from the film ‘Naked’ and – at the flick of a switch – listened to an excerpt from Chitty’s life story recording explaining her vision for the set and costume design in the same moments.
Twenty Years of Artists’ Lives

Cathy Courtney
Project Director, Artists’ Lives

Astonishing to those of us who were part of its fragile birth, 2010 is an anniversary for Artists’ Lives, clocking up twenty years of activity during which time there have been periods of intense interviewing and sloughs of frustration (mostly linked to the funding position) and a few moments when, for lack of support, we feared we would have to stop work entirely. Artists’ Lives began, and continues to be run, in association with Tate (where copies of the recordings are housed), and it was at what is now Tate Britain that the first Advisory Committee meeting took place, nine years before the new British Library building opened at St Pancras.

In an act of faith, The Henry Moore Foundation provided seed money for our first five recordings and has since given crucial and sustained support, enabling us to initiate a continuing programme of life-story recordings with sculptors. The Henry Moore Institute holds copies of these, which are in active use, particularly by PhD and other scholars, and the relationship has been further strengthened through a number of the HMI staff becoming valued Artists’ Lives interviewers. Another important long-term friend to the project has been the Yale Center for British Art, which both funds an annual recording and provides Artists’ Lives with an international presence. Alongside help from individual donors, vital rescue has come at varying times from the Elephant Trust, the Pilgrim Trust, the Arts Council and the Gulbenkian Foundation (allowing us to initiate our Art Professionals series within the wider project) and in 2006 the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation, which had earlier sponsored a series of interviews, recognised the significance of the work and awarded us a major grant to ensure that the next phase of recordings could be secured.

At the outset of the project in 1990, there was a degree of mutual suspicion between the worlds of art history and oral history, the one uncertain of the authenticity of the spoken word as scholarly evidence and the other (with its roots in documenting the accounts of the dispossessed and marginalised) regarding artists as elitist and already privileged in terms of making their voices heard. In taking its place within NLS and its philosophy of using life story methodology to capture social history, Artists’ Lives is unique in this country in building an extensive body of recordings (at the 300 mark at the time of writing) of such length (mostly 10 – 12 hours, many far longer) with visual artists and in contextualising each person’s career within their wider autobiographical experience. Reviewing the recordings in search of extracts for the CD on drawing, I have been struck by the inadvertent conversation between artists – reflecting, for example, on one another, on art school education (as students and as teachers), on relationships with dealers and national galleries, and on what it means to be an artist in this country. It is a moving experience – perhaps the more so for hearing the voice alone rather than being confronted with the person.

Artists’ Lives, of course, owes its existence to the dedicated interviewers who have undertaken the recordings. Mel Gooding, Judith Bumpus, Andrew Lambirth (who has also kindly donated to the British Library many of the tapes he made with artists for the purposes of his articles and books), Melanie Roberts, Lydia O’Ryan and Jenny Simmons were among the freelance interviewing team early on. More recently Linda Sandino, Anna Dyke and Hester Westley have successfully worked either on a full-time or part-time basis alongside myself and have contributed in important ways to the execution and shaping of the project.

Current Artists’ Lives recordings are ‘born’ digital but for the first phases of the project NLS recordings were made on cassette tapes. In autumn 2006 the British Library, with support from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), launched Archival Sound Recordings, which made available online 4,200 hours of recordings from the Sound Archive to higher and further educational users. As part of the first phase of this project, over one hundred Artists’ Lives interviews were digitised and have been made available via www.sounds.bl.uk. Non-higher education users can access details of all recordings on the website when researching onsite at the British Library in London and Yorkshire. Using funds in hand from the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation, the remaining Artists’ Lives recordings have also been digitised, enabling users to access unrestricted recordings with efficiency and for the digital masterfiles to be securely stored in the British Library’s Digital Library mass storage system.

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

Judith Bumpus, whose death was announced in March 2010, was a much-valued founder member of the Advisory Committee. She will be greatly missed.

The following extracts on the subject of drawing represent recordings with artists from the earliest phase of Artists’ Lives to those that are ongoing at present.
Recorded in 1990 by Mel Gooding (C466/02). Remembering his tutor at Central School of Art, A S Hartrick, Rothenstein’s recording reaches back to the nineteenth century.

“Hartrick was in with van Gogh, in the early summer of one year when he was studying in Paris... Anyway, he’d rented a room, and he didn’t need it for the summer. He’d had it whitewashed and cleaned, and meeting van Gogh one evening, it occurred to him it would be useful to van Gogh, as it would be empty for August. So he said, ‘Would you like it?’ And van Gogh was delighted... The room was in one of those little streets on the Left Bank, leading down to the river, and the window overlooking the street, was just the job for van Gogh, because he loved making notes of anything that excited him, you know, a woman carrying a bundle of faggots, or an old horse trotting down the street with sacks of coal, or whatever it was. But Hartrick said, ‘What was so interesting, was really this train of events.’ It started, really, I suppose, with his poverty. He really did have no money, and he wanted to use big, big things to draw with, so he’d get hold of candle ends, and he’d melt them down in a metal spoon, and he liked to use either red, scarlet, or blue powder, and that gave him a big chunk of wax crayon that he carried in his pocket. And Hartrick, I gather, used to sit with him quite often, in the evenings, over a drink or something, and if van Gogh saw something that excited him, the first thing that happened was, he’d... begin to hiss, and then he’d feel in his pocket for one of these balls of chalk, and he would automatically start drawing, as if some automatic pilot had simply taken over the machinery of his life. So he would draw anything to hand, an evening paper left lying on the table, or a doily, anything, a scrap of paper: so he’d hiss away, and would be absolutely absorbed in trying to record something that excited him. Well, when he got this room, with these beautiful whitewashed walls, and saw these exciting things going on down there below, in the street, he, I’m sure without thinking, I’m sure it was not deliberate, that he would see an old horse, an old lady, a group of children, or whatever, and he’d immediately feel for his chalks, and begin to draw, so he started to fill up the spaces round the window, and as he filled them up, he began to draw on the wider areas, away from the window. And when Hartrick got back in September, whenever it was, he came into the room, he opened the door, and there was this animated frieze, from window to wall, from wall to window, of things he’d seen at the street... So this was Hartrick’s visit to bid van Gogh goodbye, because he wanted the room back. And the next morning, van Gogh turned up with half a dozen canvases, and he put them along the wall, beside each other and said, ‘You have been so kind to me, I want you to take one of my paintings.’ Well, among the things he had popped up was ‘The Sunflowers’... Anyway, Hartrick said to me, ‘You know, I couldn’t stand his work. It would have been agony to me, to have to walk away, or hang up one of them, or to live with it.’ I said, ‘Look, Vincent, I can’t accept one of your paintings. You need to sell them. Take them to your brother, Theo, and see what he can do with them.’”
Deanna Petherbridge, born 1939

In conversation in 2002 with Linda Sandino (C466/152)
Petherbridge describes how the medium in which she created an important body of work on the Greek island of Sikinos was determined by its subject matter.

“For years and years and years, one of my favourite walks has been to go to sit on a particular promontory of rock and look down at the terraces and there’s something about their terracing which is enormously poignant for me. First of all it’s a terracing which has been built with incredible labour and now it is fallen into disrepair because nobody farms any more. Sikinos will disappear – the made Sikinos – because it’s not a natural landscape, it’s a made landscape of human endeavour beyond belief, of actually building up rocks and filling them with bits of really tough soil… There are only low trees or knarled, very low to the ground trees because the wind is very very strong, for example grape vines are never pinned up in Sikinos, they just grow on the ground. And so you lose quite a lot of grapes in the hot earth… So cherished trees on Sikinos like a lemon tree are very carefully built within a complete little stone house. There’s a little stone that’s usually curved, and so my drawings were very much about curved forms at this time… following the natural contours of the land and these curved walls that are built around a lemon tree. Traditionally these lemon trees were built with a little circular very high stone wall, so that they were just open to get the maximum sunlight but they couldn’t get the wind. And attached to each lemon tree would be a little cistern which, again, had to be dug into the ground and lined with stones and lined with a plaster which is made out of sand and whitewash… so that the tree could be watered… next to the cistern would be a roof, perhaps in order to build a roof you’d also have a little kelleri… like a cellar, where you would have your animals or you would store something or other… Wonderful, everything… all these connections are always very very closely made. There’s something incredibly poetic… in this economy of means which was always involved in these communities, everything served multiple purposes and everything was filtered through in a… cyclical series of relationships which is extraordinarily beautiful. I think it was those principles which I tried to incorporate into my work. And I started to think that in drawing, using pen and ink, I was doing an equivalent. Pen and ink is very austere. It’s black and white. And also because I’ve always used architects’ pens, it’s not about gestural (I’ve changed slightly now)… but for years and years and years I was interested in architects’ pens making a very thin and controlled line, not a great gestural emotive line but a controlled line and this seemed to me… an artistic equivalent of this absolute economy of means… There was very much an ideological reason why I started to draw in pen and ink.”
Harold Cohen, born 1928

Recorded by Cathy Courtney in 2008 (C466/289). Since the 1960s when he moved to California to teach at the University of California, San Diego, the painter Harold Cohen has worked with computers to generate his work, writing his own pioneering programmes. Here he describes his first encounter with the new technology and the first drawings he achieved.

“When I went to America I was doing all the spotty paintings. That changed fairly radically because I became involved in computing almost as soon as I got there… Everything I did from that point was computer generated… The first ones I did were rather simple line drawings… At that point the only computer on campus was the campus computer, which was a big mainframe that you weren’t allowed to see or get near. You worked on it by using punchcards to enter a programme. You handed the punchcards over the desk to an operator and you probably got them back the next day with whatever your output was, or more probably a diagnostic saying what you’d done wrong and no output. So it could take several days to get the simplest thing done. But that was the computer, it was a CDC 3200… Controlled Data Corporation and it was a 32-bit computer. So my first computing was done in those terms… Who was using that computer? Physicists mainly. I’m quite sure I was the first person from the arts – or humanities either for that matter – who set foot inside the place… I’d already developed the notion of a kind of painting that started from developing a set of rules, in a sense I was primed for that experience.”
George Ewart Evans and His Legacy to Oral History

Rob Perks, Director of National Life Stories

Writer and oral historian George Ewart Evans – widely regarded as the ‘grandfather’ of British oral history and whose centenary we celebrated in 2009 – always said that the term ‘oral history’ reminded him of ‘the filing cabinet of a well-equipped dentist’. His preference was for ‘spoken history’, the title of his last book published shortly before his death in 1988. By then, although it was the term ‘oral history’ that had prevailed, his place within its canon was secure.

Although we know George began interviewing his neighbours in 1952, the earliest sound recordings we have date from 1956, borrowed his first Midget portable open-reel tape-recorder and recataloguing the open-reel recordings. In 1956 George from the BBC in Norwich, its battery power giving him freedom and the British Library Sound Archive and we have recently been digitising the last from 1977. Around 200 are in the care of the British Library, amongst early oral historians, many of whose recordings are notable for their awful technical quality! George’s are generally good, partly perhaps due to his wartime wireless experience in the RAF, but also due to his determination to record not just information about the past but the sound of his interviewees voices: an important key to understanding his work.

In fact the connection between Evans and the British Library goes back to the origins of what we now call the oral history movement in the UK. It was on 13 December 1969 at the British Institute of Recorded Sound in Exhibition Road in London (BIRS later became the National Sound Archive and now the BL Sound Archive) that the first oral history conference was held in Britain. Fifty people attended, amongst them George, who agreed to join Theo Barker from Kent University, Stewart Sanderson from Leeds University and Paul Thompson from Essex University in forming a committee which published the first issue of Oral History: an occasional news sheet and went on in 1973 to establish the Oral History Society. George’s remarks at that first meeting, published in an article entitled ‘Flesh and blood archives’, still read forty years later as good sound advice to any budding oral historian: the importance not of asking a lot of questions of your interviewee but of listening; the value of preparation but of not allowing this knowledge to intervene in an interview; the benefits of following digression; and of making a high quality audio recording so that accent and dialect might be heard. His maxim ‘plenty of time and plenty of tape and few questions’ remains as relevant today as it was in 1973: a legacy of practicality and sound common-sense.

George had been honing his skills as an interviewer for more than a decade before NLS Founder Paul Thompson and his wife Thea, both from Essex University, approached him, introducing him to that term ‘oral history’ (which he hadn’t heard before). Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay, The Horse in the Furrow, The Pattern Under the Plough, and The Farm and the Village had all been published by Faber before that 1969 meeting, Paul has always credited George as a key influence, particularly on his groundbreaking project ‘Family Life and Work Experience before 1918’, but early issues of Oral History reveal that George’s freewheeling open-ended approach to interviewing was slightly frowned upon by some social historians and sociologists, who regarded more structured questioning and quota sampling techniques as
more ‘scientific’. At an early oral history conference on ‘the problems of oral history’ at Leicester University in 1972, the question of how structured an interview should be was hotly debated, Evans insisting that ‘we cannot make a monolithic structure of the interviewing technique’.

By the mid-1970s Evans was feeling increasingly out of step with the direction in which the Oral History Society was moving. The key point of departure, it seems to me, lay in George’s inclusive approach to history: he was by instinct someone who favoured inter-disciplinary ways of thinking and was wary of oral history splintering away from mainstream history, regarding oral history as a technique not as a new branch of history. He disliked academic boundaries, each with their own excluding language. But most importantly George maintained a clear association with folklore or folk life studies, and with the anthropological and linguistic research approaches of the earlier part of the century, particularly identifying himself with the work of the Irish Folklore Commission; with work carried out by Eric Cregeen and others at Edinburgh University’s School of Scottish Studies from 1951 onwards; at the Welsh Folk Museum from 1957; and also with the dialect work at Leeds University. It was within this ambit, rather than sociology and social science, that George placed himself.

A hint as to exactly what this had meant for the development of British oral history comes in an interview with Paul Thompson in 1996 in which he remarked tellingly that it was the oral history movement’s early interest in folklore that was ‘less interesting in the long run’. Others have spoken of the growing ‘dominance of sociologists’ in the oral history movement at that time. In 1976 George wrote that he had become ‘a bit disillusioned with oral history as it has developed in Britain and had ‘lost any enthusiasm I had for the movement’, and by the late 1970s he had drifted away.

In fact in the long run, as oral history gained confidence as a methodology, it was George’s technique that was gradually adopted by Thompson and others, and remains the way that many oral historians tend to operate today (though a questionnaire-based interview style persists amongst some social scientists). For our own fieldwork at National Life Stories we have found the long open-ended life story interview gets more often to the core of a person, and everything that George believed about informality and voice retains resonance with us. Thirty years on it’s interesting to note that many aspects of George’s philosophy and approach that were unfashionable at the time have since come to command greater respect. Some oral historians for example were initially critical of his interest in folk tradition and myth, such as his work on hares and horse ‘magic’, but through the work of Italian oral historian Alessandro Portelli and others, we have come to see more clearly the importance of fictional elements, storytelling and myth in oral narratives. And with the coming of the internet and what it offers in terms of access not just to transcripts of interviews (as has been most common over the past thirty years) but to the audio itself, there has been a revival of interest in the essential oracy of oral history: in recognising that the historical source is the tape and not the transcript. We are also debating ways of using text that more closely resembles the oral, just as George strove to do through his own transcription of the voice. In many ways we are rediscovering the voice, reconnecting its folklore roots, and putting the oral back in oral history. I think George would have approved, as he wrote: ‘the main components of history are not things but people’ and listening to those people is the key.

This is an edited and shortened version of a lecture given in Blaxhall Village Hall, Suffolk, on 25 July 2009, as part of the ‘George Ewart Evans 100 Celebration’.

A new edition of Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay with new watercolours by David Gentleman was published by Full Circle Editions in April 2010.
As soon as I started as Project Interviewer in March 2009, the benefits of this oral history project were immediately apparent. An initial review of the existing historiography on the development of the water industry revealed that, despite the centrality of water in our daily lives, this sector has been little documented by historians. Present-day concerns over the sustainable provision of water, climate change, international ownership, and pricing are accompanied by only a limited body of literature. The title of this piece is therefore apt, as An Oral History of the Water Industry has started to reveal aspects of this vital industry that have been hitherto hidden from written history.

The project comprises thirty in-depth life story interviews with both current and former employees of six UK water companies, who have generously funded the project. The sponsorship from Cambridge, Northumbrian, Scottish, Southern, Yorkshire and Wessex has enabled NLS to start to build an archive which explores the histories of companies with differing scales of activity, both rural and urban services, as well as various types of ownership. So far the project has included interviews from all levels within the company structure: from plumber to asset manager to chairman. The inclusion of such varied life stories allows the collection to preserve the diversity of experience in the water industry.

One of the aims of the project is to explore technological change within the water industry. In her recording, Sue states that the basic principles underpinning sewage treatment have remained relatively static, but the technology used to complete these processes has changed markedly, in particular the instruments and techniques used within the laboratory:

“We had to produce a lot of data to actually monitor the treatment works itself, so my main tasks were to go out onsite, collect samples, bring them back to the laboratory and do the analysis. We did a lot of analytical work on a day-to-day basis; because we needed to produce the data to satisfy all the regulatory bodies. Also, I think it’s one of the reasons that I was taken on, it was known that the works were becoming overloaded and struggling to meet the effluent quality that we needed to show Bath Corporation, who would in the end be the ones who decided whether or not the money was spent to extend the works. We needed the data to prove that this is what we’re having to treat, that’s what we’ve got to produce at the end of the day, and these are the results that show that the plant is struggling. I also had one very, very vital job to do, during the season when it was appropriate, because the works itself had some of the most beautiful flower beds, lining the drive down to the laboratory, and dotted around the works there were rose beds and my first job on a Monday morning, never mind about sampling the sewage, was to go out and dead-head the roses. [laughs] It was, seriously!”

Every week we had to do a complete analysis of the sewage as it went through every stage of the treatment process, i.e. we had to analyse the crude untreated sewage as it came in, basically to establish its strength by various tests. We had to examine it again after the first stage of real treatment which was primary sedimentation to get rid of all the organic matter, that was to see how well the primary sedimentation tanks were coping. We then had to test the final product, the final effluent as it left the site, to make sure it met with the standard that was set by what was then the Bristol Avon River Authority. Depending on which parameter you were looking for, sometimes the method involved boiling a sample and testing the condensate that came off, or drying a sample and measuring the weight of solids that were present. The actual analytical method depended on which parameter you were looking for; it varied for every single parameter. But it was all good old-fashioned hands-on chemistry. You know, as I say, it involved a lot of boiling things up, or drying things over a water bath and adding various reagents to develop a colour that you compared against a standard. There was no such thing as auto analysers in those days. You didn’t stick a sample in one end and a piece of paper with the results on came out at the other. It was all, you know, test tubes and boiling things up over a Bunsen burner.”
The contribution of this project to the history of the industry goes beyond the technical developments which have shaped the provision of water and wastewater services. The recordings also offer insight into the ways in which British organisations were managed in the post-war period and their subsequent transformation which saw the shift from municipal provision of services to the creation of ten Water Authorities after the 1973 Water Bill, and the privatisation of ownership in England and Wales in the early 1990s, which has now, in turn, led to many cases of international ownership. In part a consequence of changing ownership, but also reflecting wider political developments including the growing influence of the European Union, we are also considering the changing methods of regulation of the water sector, which remains one of the most highly regulated industries in the UK. Sue’s testimony reflects such developments when she discusses how the Bath Corporation was reorganised to help form the Wessex Water Authority, and the subsequent establishment of Wessex Water after privatisation. When Wessex Water Authority was formed in 1974, Sue was an Area Chemist and she describes the changes this brought for water regulation:

“I suppose one of the biggest changes that came was when it was decided that having river management under the same roof as the people who were say ‘polluting’ the rivers i.e. sewage treatment, was a bit like the gamekeeper being in bed with the poacher. So that side of Wessex was split up and became at that time part of the National Rivers Authority, which then became the Environment Agency. And that was when major restructurings started to take place. The first major change was that the then National Rivers Authority wanted their offices back where we were all based, just on the outskirts of Bath, so we all got shunted off elsewhere, and that’s when the job really started to change in essence.”

Furthermore, in Sue’s role within Wessex Water’s Technical Support Group following privatisation, she was a primary contact between the water company and the Environment Agency thus giving the listener insight into the development of regulation and the way in which water companies interacted with regulatory bodies on a day-to-day basis.

By using a life story approach, this project not only reveals the organisational, technical and regulatory change in the water industry, but can also be used to explore the human engagement with this vital resource, including public attitudes towards water and the impact on its consumption as well as fluctuating public perceptions regarding pricing and ownership. Indeed, Sue recalled that she had never seen a sewage works until the day of her interview with Bath Corporation. She also reflected upon the public’s relationship with water, using examples of her interactions with customers of Wessex Water:

“Some members of the public can be very difficult to deal with. As I say, they’ve got this complete blank that there is [laughs] any connection between what they do in their own homes and what goes on in the sewage works. … We used to go round, we had like a Wessex Roadshow in the early days to introduce people to this new wonderful organisation to whom they were going to pay their money, and one of the questions we were invariably asked is ‘Why do we have to pay for the water out of our taps? It comes out of the sky, free. Why do we have to pay water rates?’ To which our answer was, ‘Fine … you want to drink untreated water that’s full of bits, you go ahead. Fine. Don’t let me stop you. If you want to drink water that you’re happy to let you and your children drink knowing that it’s not going to give you malaria or cholera or anything else. I suggest you pay your water rates and leave it to us.’ You know, again, who repairs the water main that brings the water to your house or would you like to go and use a well down at the bottom of the street? Because it’s hidden, so much of it, you know, sewers, water mains etcetera, because you can’t see it, you tend to forget that it’s there. One of the very earliest films that Wessex ever brought out summed it up nicely, it was called ‘Taken for Granted’, and it is. You know, you turn on your tap and water comes out. You flush your loo and everything disappears.”

Uncovering this human engagement with water is important. Not only is this industry’s development hidden from history, but water as a resource remains to some extent physically hidden from us as consumers: the vast network of Victorian sewers is hidden below our feet; sewage treatment works are situated on the outskirts of towns and cities; when we turn on the tap we do not necessarily think about where the water has come from or where it goes. At NLS we hope that as the project progresses, the recordings will play a part in changing this attitude – for consumers now and for researchers of tomorrow.
Reflections on a life story
Prue Leith, restaurateur and novelist, with Niamh Dillon, Project Interviewer, National Life Stories

In 2008 Prue Leith recorded a sixteen-hour life story interview with Niamh Dillon as part of NLS’s series with Chefs. Nearly two years after completing the recording, Niamh was intrigued to discover Prue’s reflections on the life story process in this shorter follow-up recording.

Niamh: What was your feeling when you first got the letter?
Prue: Well when I first got the letter, I was just flattered. I said, ‘I’m going to become part of British history, this is amazing’. But the truth is that I am such an egotist that I absolutely love the attention! To have you shut up and listen to me waffling on for an hour all about myself is such a trip. And I absolutely loved it, but I think there was more to the recording sessions than just being able to talk about yourself without somebody kicking you under the table for talking too much. It was almost like a sort of therapy session because I was telling you stuff that I quite often hadn’t told anybody and you were interested in the minutiae of my life, and you were as good as gold. [laughs] ‘Oh that’s interesting’, you say, ‘go on, talk about that’.

I had anticipated before we started that you’d be great on cooking, and social changes, and being a woman in that industry, but I remember amazing answers; every question you were happy to respond to. But you are a busy woman. Did this seem like it would be a big commitment?
No. I mean no, not at all. I just thought great, I loved it and it was like time off.

Was it?
Yeah because I was rushing around from meeting to meeting and we had to struggle to find the time, but what I am quite good at is blocking the time off. And so once they were in the diary they were like little oases of holiday when I could switch off and just not think really, I could just be responsive to your questions without having to do any prep, read any papers, make any mental decisions. It was lovely.

You said something interesting: you said you wanted to be part of history. Did you not think you were already part of history?
No, I don’t think I did. No. I mean occasionally people have said to me, you know, exaggeratedly flattering things like, you changed the way the British eat. But it’s complete nonsense. I certainly have felt that I’m part of a movement to improve British food, thinking being a chef is a proper profession, that learning to cook is as important as learning to eat, and all that. But I definitely had never thought of it in such a grand way as worthy of the British Library and part of history.

What’s the significance of the British Library then?
Oh, the British Library, that’s rather more sacred to me than Buckingham Palace. The one thing everybody knows about the British Library is they have every book worth having, even if it’s one copy. And my husband, as you know, was a writer and he would spend hours and hours in the reading room and used to be taken to see books that you weren’t really allowed to see. And so the British Library for me had always been something of a sacred place, not because I was at all bookish but because people round me that I admired were.

How do you feel being stored next to Marx and Escoffier and a whole host of other people?
It’s absolutely wonderful and in fact the people you’ve interviewed are interesting. Of course I’m flattered; it’s wonderful. Wonderful. I suppose it’s a sort of secret satisfaction because the world has no idea of such an honour bestowed upon me.

Did you tell anyone that you were doing the recording?
I think if I got an opportunity I probably did. [laughs] I would certainly not be shy about it.

And I think our recordings are quite unusual in that they start in childhood. How did it feel to be asked about your grandmother in Simon’s Town [South Africa]?
Well it was lovely. I mean that was like looking through an old photograph book, it was wonderful because in my daily life I don’t think about those things and it was wonderful to start thinking about her and her attitude to my mum, and my mother’s going and getting engaged to two of her sons. I just thought it was just very interesting to have time to reflect on all that stuff which was part of my childhood.

People have quite different reactions to the process. But you seemed to really enter into the spirit of it; I loved the descriptions of Charlie the Zulu cook. You just seemed to have absorbed those memories and have such an understanding of them…
Well one of the things that it did for me is, you know I’ve been dithering about whether my next book should be the first of a trilogy of novels or whether it should be a memoir. Now I’ve just started trying to put together stuff about my South African childhood to see whether I will do the memoir, and I don’t think I would have done it if I hadn’t had those conversations with you because I hadn’t thought any of that was particularly interesting before. I thought there are thousands of people with South African childhoods, and we’ve had great writers and great playwrights all dealing with
stuff like apartheid. But then I thought, actually the minutiae of a privileged childhood are less covered than the dramas of people fighting for justice.

Was your childhood something that you hadn’t really spent a lot of time thinking over?
Well I’d thought a lot about it, but what was interesting about our recording was going back to the minutiae of life: Christmas Day, in a blazing hot country still having English traditions, Dad in a red dressing gown sweating away and cotton wool balls in the apple tree. [laughs] Just so extraordinary!

Obviously we think there’s a value in asking about that minutiae, but what do you think?
Well I think that social history … it’s the Mr Nobody history that is also interesting. We think about the big things, from Smuts to Malan to Strijdom to De Klerk and so forth, but what ordinary people did…I was talking to somebody the other day and he was saying that in Ireland, sixty years ago, you carried your shoes to school because you didn’t want to wear them out. And you had to wear shoes at school. And I then remembered that in Afrikaans schools, even to this day, the tradition is you don’t have to wear shoes in the summer, because all South African kids run around barefoot all summer. So you get very tough feet, I mean my tough feet took years to become anglicised and soft.

So Prue, you turn up at the British Library with a positive attitude towards it, but does that change during the recording process? Is there any point at which you think, what am I doing here or why am I being asked this?
No, I’m always sorry when it’s over. [laughs] No, I like the whole atmosphere of the British Library anyway and you’re fun to be with, it was just lovely. No, I rather missed it.

And did you at any point feel, ‘this is too personal’? Because [the recording] was not just about cooking and the social changes concerning food.
No, there’s nothing in my life that I wouldn’t tell anybody. My only brake on it is feeling that I might be going to upset somebody else. I suppose I’m comfortable enough in my skin, as my mother would say, to be prepared to admit that I’ve sometimes been selfish or egotistical and I’m not going to pretend otherwise. But the bits where I would get uneasy, we just debated and you often said, are you sure you don’t mind this going in because it might cause you problems later?

What were your thoughts once the recording finished?
Well, to be honest Niamh, I don’t suppose I thought about it. The truth is, you know what my life is like, as soon as I was into the next thing, I was into the next thing. You’re making me think of it now and I think back rather fondly of it and I’ve enjoyed this conversation we’ve just had now because you roam all over the place and you can have a proper conversation. And we don’t have enough proper conversation in our lives, do we? And I think conversation is the secret of civilisation.

So if someone was to embark on this and they asked you, ‘Shall I do it? What do you think of it?’ what would you say?
Oh I’d say grab it, with both hands. Don’t hesitate, they might ask somebody else!

For details about how to listen to Prue’s recording in full at the British Library in London and Yorkshire, visit www.bl.uk/listening.
On life stories and biography

Victoria Glendinning, biographer and novelist, reflects on being interviewed for Authors’ Lives

I do not doubt for one minute the value of the National Life Stories programme, but I still don’t know why I said ‘Yes’. It seemed a bit of a challenge. I’m all too quick to voice my opinions, and am quite talkative, but I don’t generally have ‘confessional’ conversations about my life even with best friends, except in times of emotional upheaval such as bereavement. I’ve always been worried by Socrates’ statement that ‘the unexamined life is not worth living’, because I don’t examine mine much, and live it like a novel, not knowing what’s happening next or why, which is probably why I was once a psychiatric social worker, and then began to write biography (and novels). By examining someone else’s life story one gains perspective on one’s own.

I tried to tell the truth in the interviews, as in a court of law. But after the 15-odd hours were over, I realised how arbitrary my account had been. Even though the bare facts can be given with reasonable accuracy, the secondary questions put to me by the interviewer rarely had one simple answer. With no time to think, I had to choose what to say, thereby aborting all the other answers I could have given. In talking about family, friends, lovers, husbands, I could not possibly convey either the complexity of their natures or of my relationships with them. It had to be broad brushstrokes, with much left unsaid, and with the perpetual choice between presenting other people (and myself) either as their best selves or their worst selves. I realised too that I had left one or two extremely important people – important to me – out of the story. Did I suppress them by-mistake-on-purpose?

What one is doing in these interviews is off-the-cuff autobiography, and it’s axiomatic that autobiographers have to select. Biographers are rightly just as interested in what their subjects leave out of their autobiographies as what they put in.

It was disturbing, too, to realise that you cannot tell a story without imposing on it a colour or tone. Someone else, or myself in a different mood, would have cast a quite different light on it. I have been told by significant others that I lack ‘the tragic sense of life’, and it’s true that although I have experienced at least the standard amount of unhappiness, I tended in the interviews to turn what actually were traumatic episodes into comedy. Subconsciously, I was maybe anxious not to shock or frighten or bore my interviewer, who was a very professional, smiling, sympathetic young woman. If the interviewer had been an equally sympathetic elderly man, would some of my responses have been different? Probably. I think now that if I were to use one of NLS’s interviews as part of my research for a biography, I would of course be riveted, hanging on every word – but at the same time trying to remain alive to the relative instability of the evidence.

I am also, as a result of the experience, made more aware of the extent to which all biography is a partial art. Responsible biography is evidence-based, and one can research the trajectory of a life and its historical and social background until one is blue in the face. But all this must be interpreted and given meaning if it’s to have any more depth than a railway timetable and, as I found when being interviewed, when it comes to interpretation and meaning there are an infinite number of versions and variables. Jacques Derrida, the largely impenetrable French philosopher, wrote one short and accessible book called Archive Fever (in French, Mal d’archive). It is partly about the limitations of the paper archive – love letters preserved, for example, tell posterity nothing about unrecorded rows and tensions.
or about bitter letters destroyed. He writes too about the ‘psychic archive’ which psychoanalysis seeks to reach – the layers and layers of memories and private associations in a person’s mind, constantly leaking into consciousness. I think of a dripping tap.

The Life Stories project, like writing biography, is emphatically not an exercise in psychoanalysis, though it may catch some of the drips from the tap. Users of the recordings will need what Keats called ‘negative capability’ – the capability ‘of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’.

I’m haunted, both as biographer and interviewee, by T S Eliot’s lines:

‘That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all.’

Some of this material originally appeared in The Arvon Book of Life Writing edited by Sally Cline and Carole Angier published by A & C Black.

Sarah O’Reilly, Project Interviewer, Authors’ Lives

At NLS we talk about recording the ‘definitive interview’. It’s why we adopt the life story approach, and why our interviews can encompass such extraordinary detail (the longest single recording in our collection to date being over fifty hours, although the average is ten to twelve). But I’ve never felt that even our lengthy and careful interviews can capture all the complexities of the lives under review.

As Victoria Glendinning writes, this problem is not unique to oral history. In written biography one learns to suspect the ‘definitive’ life too. In an article published some years ago, the biographer Richard Holmes noted the existence of ten lives of Mary Wollstonecraft, thirty lives of Johnson and two hundred lives of Byron.* How many more would we find if we counted again today? Rather than reassuring us, these numbers suggest that biographical certainty is rare at best.

As an interviewer, I’m aware always that I’m creating a biographical snapshot rather than documenting a complete life. It’s partly to do with the effect NLS interviewer Cathy Courtney (whose letter to Victoria Glendinning resulted in the article above) refers to when she writes of her feeling that ‘the person I am speaking to might, with equal truth, colour their answer to a question very differently on different days depending on their mood, and that the variations of possible responses might sometimes be related to the substance of the question and at other times be influenced by entirely external influences (a premium bond win in that morning’s post rather than a heavy tax demand).’

In biography the writer reviews the evidence from her subject’s life and marshals it into a coherent and meaningful narrative. In the life story interview we ask our interviewees to carry out the same process – on themselves. And though the result may be partial for all the reasons set out above, such partiality is not necessarily a weakness. The suppressions, the colour, the tone of the narrative – in short, the pattern that is imposed by the interviewee on his or her life, in retrospect – is important biographical evidence itself. We are what we remember. Or, rather, how we remember reveals something of who we are.

How many living British scientists can you name? Most people will have heard of the theoretical physicist Sir Stephen Hawking, the evolutionary biologist Professor Richard Dawkins and human fertility expert and broadcaster Professor Robert Winston. Fewer people will have heard of Sir Tim Berners-Lee who co-developed the World Wide Web, or the discoverer of pulsars, Dame Susan Jocelyn Bell Burnell. And perhaps even fewer people would be able to name Sir John Sulston, a major influence on the Human Genome Project or the creator of the first practical stored programme computer, Sir Maurice Wilkes.

Now contrast this to your knowledge of living British artists. From Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst to Antony Gormley, Bridget Riley and David Hockney, many people are familiar with the voices and personalities of these household names. So why does Britain have such a limited cultural memory for science and technology when its contribution to culture, economic competitiveness and social well-being has never been more important?
This division between the ‘two cultures’ of modern society – the sciences, and the arts and humanities – was most notably put forward in 1959 by the scientist and successful novelist, C P Snow. Since then there have been many debates about whether such a cultural divide really exists, or whether there has been a reintegration of the values of literary, artistic and scientific thinking. In the era of the internet, when much of our thinking and debate happens through computing technology, this discussion is as valid today.

But the lack of popular understanding of science, and the shockingly low figures on the uptake of scientific and technological subjects at school and university, makes it clear that as a nation we continue to have an issue with the public engagement with science. Science is commonly perceived to be conducted by a group of people that have little relevance to mainstream culture, and our scientific and technological heritage is rarely celebrated in the way it deserves.

Starting in November 2009, An Oral History of British Science aims to address this, by capturing the voices, memories and experiences of 200 British scientists who have led the world in scientific innovation and advance. From building the world’s first computers and jet engines, to exploring climate change and the Human Genome, the programme will record audio and video interviews to document the role of Britain’s scientists in understanding and influencing our world. The programme is also developed in association with the Science Museum, in a desire to share expertise, collections and resources.

Through 200 interviews, organised around four themes, An Oral History of British Science will reflect the character and emerging issues of science in the twentieth century. Work on the first two of these four themes is generously supported by the Arcadia Fund. Further financial support for the remaining two is still being sought:

- Made in Britain – examines important discoveries in science and technology that have led to new industrial applications, covering computing, applied sciences (such as condensed matter physics) as well as engineering fields (chemical, electrical, civil and structural).
- A Changing Planet – explores the advancement of the earth system sciences in the light of recent concerns associated with environmental and climate change. Interviewees will include climatologists, meteorologists, geologists, geophysicists, geochemists, ecologists, glaciologists and oceanographers.
- The Factory of Life – investigates the transformations that have typified biomedicine, and how new technologies have changed medical practices. Advances in genetic engineering will be central, especially in relation to the rise of ‘big Pharma’.
- Cosmologies – considers new systems of thought that have emerged in correspondence with the development of a number of theoretical fields: mathematics, mathematical physics, cosmology, astronomy, statistics, high-energy physics.

The early scoping study for the programme showed how important this work is. It found that there was a marked absence of significant recordings of scientists. With the exception of work being carried out by Sir Harry Kroto’s Vega Science Trust, by the Peoples Archive (now Web Of Stories) and some Wellcome funding for the oral history of medicine, no significant attempts were being made to record or document British scientists in their own words; and no national co-ordinated programme existed. Shockingly, the study showed that in the last ten years thirty leading British scientists including nine Nobel winners have died leaving little or no archive of their work.

The interviews that do exist have tended to be shorter, focusing on significant discoveries and inventions, rather than a wider understanding of the narrative of a life. Conventional sources, such as newspaper profiles, books or television programmes, have invited great men (and most of the interviews are with men) to talk about amazing events or eureka moments. In contrast, oral history’s strength is in its description of life, routines and human emotion: What was it like to be there? How did it feel to see your ideas come to fruition? How did research life then compare to now? Were there rivalries between colleagues or did developments come from collaborative research?

In many cases the scientists we are interviewing have witnessed incredible discoveries or created remarkable inventions, but the significance of their actions has only become realised over time. As engineer Geoff Tootill describes, the team that built the world’s first stored program computer in Manchester had little idea of the future importance of their work:
“We thought that there would be scope for another one or perhaps two big computers in the UK, and three or four in Europe, and probably half a dozen in the US because they always have big ideas in the US.”

In another interview, with the glaciologist Charles Swithinbank who has spent sixty years conducting research in the Antarctic, we hear about the central role our parents can play in defining our life journeys at an early stage:

“My mother was good at reading stories of adventure and exploration to her children and that definitely had an effect on my life because her message was don’t get stuck in an office like your father... I took the point and wanted something that involved travel and not a routine job with a step-ladder promotion through life.”

An Oral History of British Science will also examine the methods of science. Scientists regularly give an account of their laboratory practice through the publication of scientific papers. This reflects the so-called ‘normal’ operation of science, framed according to agreed standardised conventions and peer-reviewed by the scientific community. But scientific papers do not reflect the culture, routine and beliefs of scientists and they do not illustrate the many factors that influence the production of scientific research in the laboratory. Using the life story approach the programme aims to illuminate the process of science, the intrinsic attitudes of scientists and their relationship with important pieces of apparatus or instrumentation.

The life story approach also gives us the opportunity to look at science from the bottom up and capture the stories of the ‘unsung heroes’ who would never be heard, if it were not for oral history. The programme will uncover the lives of scientists who have traditionally been hidden from history: the laboratory technicians, the women who supported teams and operated technical machinery, the engineers who developed great skill but were never trained in academia.

We hope that this programme will provide an important archive for understanding British science and technology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; a resource which can then be compared with other archives, letters and scientific publications to build a rounded picture of science and technology. It may also feed into broader narratives of science and technology, such as Britain’s role as a global scientific player, recurring concerns over a ‘brain drain’ and how to create working environments that stimulate innovation. At the programme launch in February 2010, attended by leading historians of science and technology, as well as some eminent scientists and the press, there was a real buzz of enthusiasm for the project.

Ultimately we believe that the personal testimonies of Britain’s scientists will help present and future generations to engage with science, its ideas and principles. A project such as this can play an important role in helping to place our scientific and technological heritage back at the heart of British culture.

Interviewee Max Perutz (1914–2002) was still lecturing in his eighties.

The original Manchester ‘Baby’ computer, c. 1949.

An Oral History of British Science Advisory Committee
Dr Jon Agar, Dr Fay Bound Alberti, Georgina Ferry, Professor Sir Harry Kroto, John Lynch, Professor Chris Rapley CBE, Dr Simone Turchetti.
Oral History of British Science interview Dr Charles Swithinbank using a theodolite during an Antarctic expedition, 1949–52.
The architect David Medd became a furniture maker when he left school and spent the Second World War producing pre-fabricated decoys in a unit at the Camouflage Development and Training Centre led by the designer James Gardner. Both these experiences informed his subsequent career as a specialist in the design of schools. In Hertfordshire County Council’s innovative school building programme of the late 1940s, David and his colleagues consciously put into practice the Bauhaus ideal of combining the working methods of the crafts with industrial production, and his account of this episode conveys the sense of excitement and creative freedom which he found in it.

“We were doing what Gropius was talking about but never actually doing, ie architecture should use up-to-date techniques that should build for society and which combine artists and craftsmen and engineer together ....”

Even in the tight post-war economic climate, they would accept nothing they thought second-rate or inappropriate:

“I remember one chap from [a prestigious paint manufacturer] ... pulling out of his pocket a dirty piece of tracing paper with two or three camouflage colours, cream and eau de nil – we don’t want that [we thought] – ... [Oliver Cox] and I managed to get what are called stainers in the industry, that is the bright, raw colour that they use before you mix it up to make it pastel shades and so on ... and we played around with these ... and we produced our own little Hertfordshire range .... Then we collaborated with this range with the Building Research Station, linked with the colour and lighting there, and we shaped up and expanded this range more formally with internationally-known references so you could use it and not have to call them sky blue and peach melba and all the rest of it, and methodically set out, and we called this range the Archrome range ....

With Stirrat Johnson-Marshall, he arranged with the ceramics manufacturer Adamsez of Newcastle to produce their own range of fittings:

“We found that the sanitary equipment on the market was absolutely no use to us whatever and rather expensive, absolutely square, rectangular basins was a British standard basin for schools with horizontal surfaces which collected the dirt and the overflow faced upward so you could jam things down it. It was dirty and big clumsy taps. ... We used to go up together on the night train ... and ... actually designed new basins, new drinking fountains, new urinals, the whole lot – modeled it with my own hands with the people up there. ...and then you would coat it and glaze it and fire it in the kiln and hope it came out. ... The fire in the kilns was fascinating: the night views of these blazing kilns with all our little bits and pieces inside, it really was designing and making and using absolutely all at once.”

In 1998 David revisited Burleigh Primary School in Cheshunt, designed by his team, and now a listed building, to see the restoration of the decaying concrete exterior undertaken by English Heritage. He found that fifty years of use shed an unexpected light on the architects’ original assumptions:

“It was quite extraordinary because we didn’t think these schools would last very long. The other materials were galvanized steel frames, externally, round the windows and round the doors which had been painted white: all the other steel windows and doors, the frame was galvanized ... fibrous plaster was used for the linings, and precast concrete roof slab. We thought that everything would rot except the concrete – it was the concrete that failed! ... but when it was to be reclad, the cladding was taken from the outside, it was clad again from the outside – all the interior was still there. What one saw inside was really quite revealing – apart from the cigarette packets and beer bottles and things. .... Sometimes the diagonal bracing we saw pieces dangling from the top: it had never been fixed. ... We found that the steelwork ... was absolutely in perfect condition, the fibrous plaster was in perfect condition - fibrous plaster! ... The only thing that had rotted – now how can I explain this in polite language – was the steel framework in the floor supporting the boys’ lavatories: bad aiming had caused leakage through the joints in the floor and when this was exposed the steelwork was badly corroded at those points in each of the three blocks. That was the only steelwork that had to be replaced – very interesting.”
U A Fanthorpe (1929–2009)
Interviewed by Sarah O’Reilly, 2008


In this first extract she talks about discovering Anglo-Saxon literature as an undergraduate at Oxford University:

“At the beginning I couldn’t make out what it was all about... [But] Anglo-Saxon poetry, that was a revelation. Tolkien had recently written Beowulf, The Monsters and The Critics... He said that the way to read it was as poetry, that people had written it not to test your philological ability but because they had something they wanted to say, and that if they wrote about dragons it was because the dragon didn’t necessarily exist, but because it represented something very serious and very dangerous. I loved all this. It made dragons seem serious.

“I particularly liked The Battle of Maldon, the heroic bit at the end, and the end of Beowulf too. The Anglo-Saxons were so good at writing poems about failure. I do think that’s something I learnt very clearly from Oxford. That there was nothing disgraceful about failure, in fact failure was sometimes where you saw the greatest courage. A lot of the people I’ve found myself writing about are failures in one way or another.”

In 1954 U A Fanthorpe turned to teaching and became Head of English at Cheltenham Ladies’ College in 1962. She resigned eight years later in order to further her writing, becoming, in her own words, ‘a middle-aged drop-out’. A number of temporary jobs were followed by her work as a clerk at the Burden Neurological Hospital in Bristol where she found inspiration for her poetry:

“This sounds very pious, but I wanted to tell the truth, to be a witness. That word kept cropping up in my mind. I’d got it from my father. He would always say ‘Imagine you’re the only one who’s seen this, therefore it’s your responsibility to make a note of it, to remember.’ So that’s stuck with me all my life, really. It certainly informed my poetry to begin with, when I saw these sad, pathetic patients with terrible neurological troubles. I thought ‘I never knew that there was anything like this and I don’t suppose a lot of people know, so it’s my responsibility to say what it is like, how it seems’...Being in the hospital, it was as if something important had tapped me on the shoulder and said ‘Look’. So I looked.

“For St Peter’ was the first poem I wrote ... after that I began writing about the patients that I knew best. I felt that what was needed in the hospital was poetry. You see, it was a terribly prosaic place, always a matter of case sheets, of nailing things down. I felt that what was missing was the insight poetry has or, rather, can have.

“My job when people came in was to check their names, addresses, that sort of thing. But sometimes, because it was a neurological hospital, someone would have a fit or would quarrel, because often people with brain damage can be very aggressive. Nobody ever said to me ‘This is so and so, and this is what’s the matter with her’. I had to work it out myself. Quite often I got a glimpse of the case notes, which were the key to everything – to what the doctors thought was the matter with the patient, and what the patient thought was the matter, which was often quite different.

“I had to use my eyes and my ears and I had to translate what I saw into words that meant something to me as a writer. I wanted very much not to be a professional. ‘Professional’ became a hate word for me because it meant having no feelings for the person who’s got the illness, the disease. I got quite angry in a peaceful way [laughs]. I felt this was not how doctors should act. One of the patients came to see the doctor and she said ‘The first thing you need to know about me is that I’m a witch,’ and the doctor said ‘The first thing you need to know about me is I don’t believe in witches’. I thought ‘This is not right. She should take her where she finds her.’ If I had been the doctor I think I’d have said ‘You’re a witch? Tell me all about it’.”

C1276/10, tracks 12 and 16.
Michael Turner (1929–2009)

Interviewed by Sue Bradley, 2002–3

“The first two books – King Ottokar’s Sceptre and The Crab with the Golden Claws – went out, and nothing much happened until, on the front page of The Times Literary Supplement, there was a rave review – and for the TLS to give a lead review to a children’s strip cartoon was unheard of. It was by John Willett, another fervent Francophile, and not only did he bring out the beauty of the drawings, but also the fact that these were really adult books for children, in that the text did not talk down to them. Leslie and I were stunned. Overnight, Tintin became respectable, which gave us exactly what we needed – the entrée to libraries. From then on our Tintin list grew and grew until it included the whole canon.

“The translation was very much a joint effort: Leslie produced the first draft, I worked on it, then we would get together and fight over the final version, which had to be matched to fit the speech balloons, so the word count was crucial. The text would go to the letterer – occasionally we would have to make revisions so it fitted – then Hergé would read it and maybe make one or two minor suggestions. I can’t recollect a disagreement with him, ever. He trusted, to a remarkable degree, that we understood his style and what he did and didn’t like. He used to say, ‘I want you to convey the spirit, and you can depart from the text. If you get the spirit right, I shall be happy.’ That was marvellous, because it gave us almost total freedom.

“The one disagreement between Leslie and myself was over Milou’s name, but we accepted that we couldn’t agree, and said, ‘Let’s just find one that’s harmless.’ We both felt – wrongly, I think – that the dog should not have a French name in the English edition, and Hergé himself encouraged us to use an English name – as he also did for Tintin, although we kept that. But he had to be a white dog, and children’s publishers used to instruct writers to use simple words. So ‘Snowy’ was faute de mieux. In fact, Hergé never condescends to children. I remember him saying, ‘There are dictionaries – even in France.’”
Elinor Goldschmied was a specialist in child development and early childhood play. At the end of the Second World War, Elinor moved to her husband’s home town of Trieste, developing her understanding and techniques about children’s thought processes and development, particularly in nursery care. After her husband’s death, she moved back to England where she continued to work into her late eighties. Here she describes her innovative and influential concept of the Treasure Basket.

“A Treasure Basket is based on the understanding that, as soon as a child can sit up, he/she is awake for a great deal more time. And we observed that when children are awake, at that age, they have very good eye-hand-mouth co-ordination, and everything they can lay their hands on they put into their mouth. ‘Don’t suck it! Don’t touch it!’ – all the tradition was that you carried the child around all the time, you never put them down: they were in your arms, they were in the cot. They never got a direct contact with anything... Well, understanding enters the brain through the senses. Therefore, sensory experience was the vital factor which would be stimulating the brain development and the connections, and making the connections. The actual physical connections, which the cells of the brain make with each other... [T]he whole basis of the network of memory, knowledge, reasoning, the works, is going on there.

“The criteria for choosing, say, a large pebble [for the Treasure Basket] is that the sensory experience of a large pebble is weight, cold, smooth, or possibly rough, some colour, and shape. A piece of loofah – because it’s just a piece, you cut it off – is entirely different: rough, light, holes you can put your finger in, something you can wave and handle. A garlic squeezer, cold, metal, peculiar, moves up and down, you don’t know what you’re going to do, wave it about and it may tap you on the head. A lemon: colour, smell. [These objects stimulate] the basic senses of touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing. And the kinaesthetic sense, which is a very important one, of actually what it’s like to be able to put your hand out and pick something up, is a very important piece of our total experience. And you jolly well know it when people get brain problems, and they can’t put something down, because they can’t locate themselves in space because that part of their brain has been damaged. So this was the basis of [the Treasure Basket], and above all, the quality of attention, that children will concentrate for an hour – and I filmed children later on, for an hour and ten minutes, sitting, handling, looking, waving, banging, exploring, finding out about...

“What became so evident was the significance of children’s gestures, facial expression, and their handling of objects. And that when children had objects, such as the ones in the Treasure Basket, when they were either in good relation to a close adult, or they were seated next to other children, the object became the means of communication; as they don’t have words, they have pre-verbal language, of a great variety of squeaks and noises and bubbles and blows and so on. And that was all very effectively used in communicating...

“The discovery part of what I would call the scientific method, used by children in the second year of life, follows on very directly from the work of the Treasure Basket. It demonstrates where children have got mobility, and therefore they’ve got a far greater opportunity of taking initiative in the environment; they can go after something, they can choose, they can get about to different parts of the room. And their manipulative skill is increasing. They, to me, proceed through a perfect scientific method, they notice something which happens by accident very often... I have in mind a thing which I videoed from a town in Tuscany. [A child] had three tins which he put one on top of the other, turning them upside down so they made a tower, and on the top he put a yellow hair curler. By accident he tipped it very gently and the hair curler fell off, and one of the tins fell off. He put the tins back, three tins, and put the hair curler on the top again. And then, with great concentration, held his hand, his outstretched palm, and very gently gave little taps to the top tin, until the hair curler fell. He then put it back and did it again. The first stage was observing that something happened, then he reconstructed twice, and I think he would have done it a third time, except that we were interrupted. But this is continually happening in this age, given opportunities to experiment quite freely, with a large amount of material.”

Elinor Goldschmied (1910–2009)

Photo: courtesy of Matthew Goldschmied
# Statement of Financial Activities

**Year Ended 31 December 2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCOMING RESOURCES</th>
<th>Restricted £</th>
<th>Unrestricted £</th>
<th>Total £</th>
<th>2008 £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>148,495</td>
<td>8,947</td>
<td>157,442</td>
<td>132,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank interest receivable</td>
<td>1,970</td>
<td>2,966</td>
<td>4,936</td>
<td>31,183</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment income</td>
<td>3,371</td>
<td>12,733</td>
<td>16,104</td>
<td>22,898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous income</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES</strong></td>
<td>153,836</td>
<td>24,646</td>
<td>178,482</td>
<td>188,738</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESOURCES EXPENDED</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charitable Activities</td>
<td>102,672</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>102,672</td>
<td>110,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and administration</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>35,013</td>
<td>35,013</td>
<td>35,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</strong></td>
<td>102,672</td>
<td>35,013</td>
<td>137,685</td>
<td>146,076</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NET INCOME (EXPENDITURE) FOR THE YEAR**

|                  | 51,164       | (10,367)      | 40,797   | 42,662  |

## Statement of Financial Activities

**Year Ended 31 December 2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENT OF OTHER RECOGNISED GAINS AND LOSSES</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net income (expenditure) for the year</td>
<td>51,164</td>
<td>(10,367)</td>
<td>40,797</td>
<td>42,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrealised investment gains</td>
<td>11,406</td>
<td>15,698</td>
<td>27,104</td>
<td>(124,819)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfers</td>
<td>(14,410)</td>
<td>14,410</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net movement in funds for the year</td>
<td>48,160</td>
<td>19,741</td>
<td>67,901</td>
<td>(82,157)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total funds:**

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brought forward</td>
<td>603,658</td>
<td>365,838</td>
<td>969,496</td>
<td>1,051,653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carried forward</td>
<td>651,818</td>
<td>385,579</td>
<td>1,037,397</td>
<td>969,496</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Balance Sheet at 31 December 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIXED ASSETS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible assets</td>
<td>8,290</td>
<td>9,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td>358,693</td>
<td>281,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>366,983</td>
<td>290,978</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **CURRENT ASSETS**   |       |       |
| Debtor               | 4,631 | 8,264 |
| Cash at bank and in hand | 694,627 | 671,754 |
| **Total**            | 699,258 | 680,018 |

| **CREDITORS (Amounts falling due within one year)** |       |       |
|                                                      | (28,844) | (1,500) |

| **NET CURRENT ASSETS** |       |       |
|                        | 670,414 | 678,518 |

| **TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES** |       |       |
|                                           | 1,037,397 | 969,496 |

| **CAPITAL**                     |       |       |
| Founder’s donation              | 200,000 | 200,000 |
| Unrestricted fund               | 185,579 | 165,838 |
| Restricted fund                 | 651,818 | 603,658 |
| **Total**                       | 1,037,397 | 969,496 |

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

The financial statements are prepared under the historical cost convention, with the exception of investments which are included at market value. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice, Financial Reporting Standard for Smaller Entities (effective April 2008), The Companies Act 2006, and 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 of the state of the charitable company’s affairs as at 31 December 2009 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure for the year then ended;
- the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice applicable to Smaller Entities;
- the financial statements have been properly prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2006; and
- the information given in the Report of the Trustees is consistent with the financial statements.

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

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

Sir Nicholas Goodison
Chairman of Trustees
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 between 1988 and 1997 with representatives from the Stock Exchange, the merchant and clearing banks, the commodities and futures markets, law and accounting firms, financial regulators, insurance companies and Lloyd’s of London. The project is a unique record of the complex interrelationships and dramatic changes which defined the Square Mile in the twentieth century. City Lives: The Changing Voices of British Finance by Cathy Courtney and Paul Thompson (Methuen, 1996) was edited from the interviews.

Living Memory of the Jewish Community
(C410) [187 interviews]

Holocaust Survivors’ Centre Interviews
(C830) [153 interviews]

These major collections were developed with the specialist advice of leading Jewish historians and complement a number of audio collections held by the British Library on Jewish life. The primary focus has been on pre-Second World War Jewish refugees to Britain, those fleeing from Nazi persecution during the Second World War, Holocaust survivors and their children. An online educational resource based on the collection is accessible at www.bl.uk/services/learning/histcitizen/voices/holocaust.html and over sixty full interviews are available on the web at www.bl.uk/sounds.

General Interviews
(C464) [73 interviews]

This collection comprises diverse interviews additional to the main NLS projects. Interviewees are drawn from, amongst others, 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) [299 interviews]

Artists’ Lives was initiated in 1990 and is run in association with Tate. 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, Penelope Curtis, Caroline Cuthbert, Mel Gooding (chair), Beth Houghton, Richard Morris, Chris Stephens and Margaret B Thornton.

Architects’ Lives
(C467) [93 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, Catherine Croft, 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 in 1991–2 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) [19 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 collection documents changes in the legal profession in Britain, including interviews with both solicitors and barristers. In 2008 three further interviews were added, including Lady Justice Hale and Sir Sydney Kentridge QC. We plan 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) [212 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 readymeal, poultry, sugar, meat and fish sectors; a series with employees of Northern Foods, Nestlé, Sainsbury’s and Safeway; and a series with key cookery writers and restaurateurs. Within Food: From Source to Salespoint a set of interviews with Chefs [8 interviews] is now underway, exploring the working lives of chefs over a period when their role has changed from being anonymously in charge of the kitchen, to being higher profile. The food programme also 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 cover 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) [94 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) [178 interviews]  

A joint National Life Stories/Aberdeen University project, which, between 2000 and 2005, recorded the major changes that occurred in the UK oil and gas industry in the twentieth century, focussing particularly on North Sea exploration and the impact of the industry on this country. The project received support from within the industry.

An Oral History of the Post Office  
(C1007) [117 interviews]  

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) [16 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) charted developments in post-war British theatre design.

Authors’ Lives  
(C1276) [34 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, John S Cohen Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Friends of the British Library and private individuals. Support from The Booker Prize Foundation is enabling shortlisted 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) [11 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 from the perspective of the director. This complements other theatre collections.

An Oral History of the Water Industry  
(C1364) [10 interviews]

This project records life story interviews with staff at all levels within the water industry. Funded by six water companies, these recordings will provide valuable information about one of Britain’s most important and least documented utilities.

An Oral History of Barings  
(C1367) [12 interviews]

In partnership with The Baring Archive, this project focusses on the history of Barings throughout the twentieth century, providing important insights into life and work within the bank – including stories from the Baring 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.

An Oral History of British Science  
(C1379) [2 interviews]

Initiated in November 2009 in collaboration with the British Library’s history of science specialists, this project is run in association with the Science Museum and generously funded by the Arcadia Fund. It will create a major archive for the study and public understanding of contemporary science in Britain through 200 in-depth interviews with British scientists. As well as filling obvious gaps in our knowledge of major developments and innovations by interviewing the key players in British science, this project aims to account for the character of scientific research since the Second World War. To complement the life story interviews, averaging 10 – 15 hours in length, the project will also undertake some shorter video recordings reflecting key events or locations, plus at least one group ‘witness seminar’ for each of the project’s four themed strands: Made in Britain, A Changing Planet, The Factory of Life (currently unfunded) and Cosmologies (currently unfunded).

An Oral History of British Science Advisory Committee
Dr Jon Agar, Dr Fay Bound Alberti, Georgina Ferry, Professor Sir Harry Kroto, John Lynch, Professor Chris Rapley CBE, Dr Simone Turchetti.

Project in Development

We are currently scoping a new project provisionally entitled An Oral History of Talking Therapies in the UK which will explore the development of ‘talking therapies’ in post-war Britain, covering subjects such as training institutions, rival schools and theories, and the changing status of talking therapies within the National Health Service. A scoping study will be prepared in 2010 with a possible 2011 start.

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. Online interviews with visual artists and architects are 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.

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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 £2.80 from the Inland Revenue if a signed Gift Aid form is received. A Gift Aid form can be obtained from the NLS Office. It needs to be completed and returned to NLS together with your cheque.

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Bequests

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

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Back cover image:
‘Mr Lowry’s Hat and Coat’, 1976. Photographer Denis Thorpe, interviewed by Shirley Read for An Oral History of British Photography (C459/203), photographed artist L S Lowry several times and the day after his death drove past his house to discover that it was being dismantled. The police allowed him to photograph the whole house before it was taken into secure storage. Sometime later Thorpe discovered that Lowry had made an almost identical drawing. Both the photograph and the drawing are on display at the Lowry Museum.
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