

The British Library Oral History section

Collection Development Policy

Overall aims

- To create, collect and provide access to the nation's foremost collection of oral personal testimonies.
- To act as a national centre of excellence, best practice, advice and standards for oral history in the UK.
- To promote and support oral history recording in the UK.

Collection Development Policy

The British Library's oral history collections cover a wide range of subject areas relating to British life, work, culture, and experience. The Oral History section collects audio and video interviews, and welcomes offers of suitable original oral history material that provide insights into aspects of UK personal memory, identity and experience.

The curators reserve the right to reject a prospective deposit due to duplication of existing holdings, inadequate documentation, when the rights are unclear, or due to insufficient resources to process, catalogue, store and/or provide access to material. Where the curators are unable to accept an offered collection every effort will be made to help identify an alternative archival repository to which the donor can be referred.

Key collecting objectives:

- Oral history and life story interviewing projects made, commissioned or supported by the British Library Oral History section and National Life Stories, which document aspects of human experience, with a priority accorded to the United Kingdom and subject areas not adequately covered in the collection and/or in danger of being lost.
- Selection, acquisition and custody of oral history recordings made privately by individuals or organisations which enhance the collection (with an emphasis on recordings of national importance) acquired by donation with supporting documentation and metadata.
- Selective audiovisual recordings of UK government fulfilling the British Library's role as a place of deposit for Public Records Bodies.

Collection terms of deposit:

- A condition of deposit is that the depositor is able to provide supporting documentation and metadata (such as content summaries and recording agreements) to the best of their ability.
- The British Library normally seeks the assignment of any intellectual property rights, or a clear statement of what rights exist and a license to provide access to data.

- If the items offered for deposit are appropriate for the Library's collections they will become part of the national collection cared for by the British Library in perpetuity. If the recordings are held on analogue media they will be kept in environmentally-controlled secure storage, and digitised for preservation and access as soon as resources allow. Digital collections (including born-digital recordings and digitised preservation copies) will be archived in the Library's Digital Library System, the British Library's system for securing digital content for the long term. Research access will be provided both onsite and online to generations of students, academics, family historians, journalists, writers and many others for years to come.

Oral History section core responsibilities

- Act as a national lead for oral history: through best practice and standards-setting.
- Provide support and information to research communities, organisations and the public through an enquiry service by phone, letter and email.
- Effectively document and catalogue the collections it holds to provide users with fast and easy access to recordings.
- Promote skills and awareness of oral history at all educational levels.
- Publish recordings and written materials derived from recordings in a variety of print and non-print formats, and promote the published use of oral history.
- Provide training and advice in oral history methods in partnership with the Oral History Society, and propagate agreed standards of oral history recording, interview techniques, and ethical standards.
- Work with individuals and groups to develop oral history project work with a positive outcome of collection acquisition and archiving at the British Library or other suitable repository.
- Encourage the use of oral history recordings by a variety of organisations in the heritage sector, such as museums and heritage centres; and by non-historical organisations.
- Liaise with local and regional oral history projects, collections and archives to exchange information and minimise duplication of holdings.
- Promote oral history techniques and projects within the British Library.
- Fundraise to support fieldwork projects, for both National Life Stories and the British Library.
- Organise seminars, conferences and events to discuss issues around oral history methodology, collecting and archiving.

This policy has been written in consultation with:

- Oral History Section Collection Development Policy (1992) (unpublished)
- The British Library Collection Development Policy
www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/coldevpol/index.html
- The British Library Sound Archive Collection Development Policy
www.bl.uk/reshelp/bldept/soundarch/soundcdp/development.html
- Oral History and National Life Stories Records Management Policy, Retention Schedule and Archival Records Strategy (2014) (unpublished)

August 2014