NATIONAL
Life stories
Review and Accounts
2012/2013
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 (NLS) was established in 1987 and its mission is: ‘To record the first-hand experiences of as wide a cross section of society as possible, to preserve the recordings, to make them publicly available and encourage their use’. As an independent charitable trust within the Oral History Section of the British Library, NLS’s key focus and expertise has been oral history fieldwork. For twenty-five years it has initiated a series of innovative interviewing programmes funded almost entirely from sponsorship, charitable and individual donations and voluntary effort.

Each collection comprises recorded in-depth interviews of a high standard, plus content summaries and transcripts to assist users. Access is provided via the Sound and Moving Image Catalogue at www.cadenssa.bl.uk and a growing number of interviews are made available 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.

As our users demand greater access to our recordings online rather than through print and CDs or onsite visits to the British Library, we continue to plan to retrospectively digitise our older analogue recordings, and make more of our content available via the web. In this vein we have added two new packages of interviews to the British Library’s Sounds website, including one in collaboration with the University of Sussex about the 1980s. Partnership working is becoming increasingly important to us, as evidenced by collaborations with the London School of Economics for our legal project; with The Baring Archive, which culminated in an excellent booklet and exhibition; and with Tesco, whose recently-published history has been based largely on the interviews we conducted a few years ago.

As I have noted previously, the fundraising environment remains highly competitive and we are currently seeking financial support to allow our crafts and science programmes to continue beyond 2013. We are grateful to those donors and funders who have helped us over the past year and look forward to working with them and others in the future.

I would like to thank all our trustees, advisors, staff and volunteers who have worked so hard to make the past year such a success.

Chairman’s Foreword

Bill Knight
Chairman of Trustees
Review of 2012

Rob Perks
Director of National Life Stories

Collections and projects

Our Oral History of British Science programme, funded largely by the Arcadia Fund, is on target to complete its first phase during 2013. By the end of 2012 ninety in-depth life story interviews and eighteen video interviews had been completed or were underway, amounting to nearly 1000 recorded hours. For the Made in Britain strand, Project Interviewer Tom Lean’s major areas of focus this year have been materials science and civil engineering. In materials science, interviewees have discussed the transformation of the discipline as it became more based on an understanding of the physics of materials, the development of new techniques and new materials, such as semiconductors and composites. Interviewees included Julia King and Colin Humphreys; Cyril Hilsum, whose expertise ranges widely across electronic materials; Tony Kelly, who worked on the theory of composite materials; Peter Hirsch on electron microscopy and materials; and George Hockham on optic fibres. In civil engineering, interviewees have included Michael Parsons, who made key contributions to the design of the Humber, Forth and Severn suspension bridges; bridge design and sustainability innovator Peter Head; motorway engineers Ron Bridle, Harry Yeadon and Howard Stevens. In other disciplines interviews were completed with Ann Dowling on the acoustics of aeronautics and Tony Hoare on theoretical computer science; Richard Brett-Knowles on electronic systems; scientific instrument entrepreneurs Martin and Audrey Wood; Ralph Denning on jet engines; Frank Rayner about his work supporting nuclear research; and Steve Furber about the BBC Microcomputer and the invention of the first ARM computer chips, that power most of the world’s mobile phones. Former rector of Imperial College Eric Ash discussed discipline interviews with geologists and geophysicists whose work contributed to the revelation of plate tectonics: seismologist and editor of Nature in the 1970s, David Davies; the first female geophysicist permitted to work on Royal Research Ship Discovery, Carol Williams; the geologist involved in the first computer-aided fit of the continents around the Atlantic, Alan Smith, and the geologist who first interpreted orogeny (mountain building) in relation to moving plates. An interview with Stephen Sparks extends this collection of interviews to volcanology. Video interviews with Alan Smith (with the original maps used in the first computer fitting of continents around the Atlantic, published in 1965) and scientists and non-scientists involved in cruises of Royal Research Ship Discovery supplement this collection. Paul has examined the history of British climate change science in two ways – firstly, by completing interviews with scientists concerned with geological orogenic plates; and second, by completing a set of interviews with scientists concerned with the reconstruction of past climates through the study of tree rings (Mike Baillie, part of the team who constructed the long oak dendrochronology of Iceland), historical records (Phil Jones of the Climatic Research Unit), tide gauge records of sea level change (Philip Woodworth), and the bubbles of ancient air in ice cores (Eric Wolff). Two video interviews (featuring Mike Hall and Eric Wolff) explain how cores of ocean sediment and cores of Antarctic ice can be used as records of past global temperatures. The second strand of the climate change work has been to interview scientists involved in the development of numerical weather forecasting and computer climate modelling: Andrew Gilchrist, Julia Slingo, John Mitchell, Michael McIntyre, Tim Palmer; and scientists whose work has advanced understanding of the role of the oceans in climate change: James Crease, John Woods and Bob Dickson. For a video interview at the Department of Mathematics and Theoretical Physics, University of Cambridge, Michael McIntyre simulated aspects of atmospheric motion (including those involved in the formation of the stratospheric vortex; import in the ‘ozone hole’ story) using tea leaves in a bowl of water. Ongoing interviews with Nigel Bell and Rick Batterbee explore the use of plants and lakes in studies of atmospheric pollution, including acid rain, ozone and radioactive fallout.

We continue to make excellent progress in providing online access to completed interviews and transcriptions through the British Library’s Sounds website (http://sounds.bl.uk). At the end of 2012 forty-five complete interviews from the project were available online to a worldwide audience as streamed audio files via the ‘Oral History of British Science’ package, alongside an additional six life story interviews with scientists which were carried out for previous National Life Stories projects. The interviews available online can be browsed by both ‘interviewee’ and by ‘subject’ – aiding searchability and increasing the use of the life story recordings from lesser-heard voices within the project whose names are often not well-known.

Complementing our science programme, the Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry in the UK got underway with Tom Lean as Project Interviewer. Interviews range across the full spectrum of activities of the electricity supply industry and its place in the wider context of energy supply, industrial and technology policy and the lives of consumers, and span the period from the 1940s to the present. We will cover careers in the sector started prior to nationalisation, those who served during the period of state ownership and others who experienced the transition to privatisation and its aftermath. These so far include John Duckworth (Chief Research and Development Officer, Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), Chief Engineer at Ferranti Wythenshawe, and the Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell), Glyn England (Former Chairman of the CEGB, Chairman of South Wales Electricity Board, Director General of CEGB South West Region), Roger Farrance (Chief Executive of the Electricity Association, Head of Industrial Relations and Deputy Chairman of the Electricity Council), Frank Ledger (Deputy Chairman Nuclear Electric, CEGB Member for Production, CEGB Director of Operations), Lord Francis Tombs (Chairman of the Electricity Council, Chairman of the South of Scotland Electricity Board, Chairman of Rolls Royce), and Bryan Townsend (Chief Executive of Midlands Electricity plc, Chairman of South Wales Electricity Board). Over the next three years the project will carry out forty-five interviews.

Dennis Crefield, Allen Jones, and William Mitchell (best known for his concrete murals, frequently created in collaboration with architects) were among new interviewees recorded for the Artists’ Lives in 2012. We are grateful to the Yale Center for British Art for its support of our recording with Ralph Irving (in his role as gardener at Little Sparta, a key collaborator with the late Ian Hamilton Finlay), and our knowledge of Finlay has also been enlarged by a short recording with John Stoller who recalled his involvement with the artist in the 1970s. Frances Cornford added interviews with Glensys Barton, Michael Green and Simon...
and with architecture theorist, artist and teacher Keith Critchlow. Niamh will also conduct separate recordings with Rab and Denise Bennetts, a valued opportunity to document the experiences of the husband and wife partnership at Bennetts Associates. We are grateful to Ceraint Franklin for the recordings he has made for Architects’ Lives on a voluntary basis. His generosity has enabled us to include speakers in the project which lack of funding would otherwise have prevented us from approaching, such as Mervyn Seal, Francis Duffy and Adrian Gale.

Recordings for Authors’ Lives resumed after interviewer Sarah O’Reilly’s return from maternity leave in August 2012. New additions to the collection include recordings with critic and biographer Professor John Carey, former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, children’s writer and former Children’s Laureate Michael Rosen, and biographer Fiona MacCarthy.

Long-running interviews with the first female Chair of The Royal Society of Literature Maggie Gee and the Man Booker prize-winning novelist Howard Jacobson were also completed in this period, bringing the total number of recordings in the archive at the end of 2012 to fifty-two. Most heavily represented are novelists (twenty-two interviews), followed by poets (thirteen), biographers (five), children’s writers (four), critics (three) and historians (two). Recordings with a science writer, a translator and a literary executor complete the collection.

The 2011 CD publication The Writing Life: Authors Speak has continued to sell but we have successfully reached agreement with BL Publications to place the audio clips online in order to reach a wider audience of educational users. This is a first step towards a more ambitious web resource which we propose to scope over the next year.

It was a challenging year for Crafts Lives as funding almost ran out. We are grateful to the J Paul Getty Junior Charitable Trust, Gerard and Sarah Griffin, and the Stuart Heath Charitable Trust for stepping in at the eleventh hour and enabling the project to continue. Amongst the interviews completed this year, Frances Conrord recorded Paul Spooner and traced his interest in the field of fine art, sculpture and art student through to his intricate and humorous automata. A detailed description of the piece he was currently working on gave an insight into the ideas and references to art and film that go into his work. Anita Besson talked about her experiences of working for over twenty years in fine art galleries Marlborough Fine Art and Fischer Fine Art as a registrar and then director. She described the fine art regime of new shows every month with catalogues that she brought into the craft world when she set up her own Galerie Besson, specialising in ceramics. Calligrapher Joan Plisbury talked about her work on major projects such as the ‘Lifeboat Service Memorial Book’ which was undertaken as part of a team including Wendy Westover, who is also in the collection. She also worked for the Crown Office for over forty years writing the Letters of Patent received by new Lords as well as Royal Declarations. Alexander Beleschenko described in detail some of the large scale installations he has worked on and new techniques he has developed in his career as an architectural glass artist. These included inventing a technique of colour into laminated glass for a corridor installation at Canary Wharf, and curving and stabilising shattered glass into columns for the Met Office. Elizabeth Wright concluded her interviews with silversmiths Michael Lloyd and Rod Kelly. Reflecting on his life-long enthusiasm for the natural world, Michael spoke about how nature has been an important influence on his work, for example the pieces based on months of the year for ‘Twelve Vessels of Life, Love and Death’, as well as describing the process by which he designed and made the ceremonial mace for the Scottish Parliament. Rod Kelly talked about the challenges of creating chased silver bindings for a lectern bible commissioned by the Victoria and Albert Museum and for a copy of the Kelmscott Chaucer, as well as his designs for the Brunel £2 coin. Elizabeth also completed her interview with Pierre Degen, a jeweller making pieces for the body in mixed media, who described creating work that uses shadows and materials under tension, as well as his career as a lecturer in jewellery. Funding to take the project forward remains a priority.

Partnerships

An Oral History of Barings, our collaborative project with The Baring Archive, concluded with the publication of an oral history booklet – in the locker of my memory: extracts from An Oral History of Barings – which was launched at an event at London Wall to mark Barings’ 250th anniversary. A small touring exhibition featuring audio clips was also on display. To conclude the interviews the Baring Archive is funding six short recordings with further individuals to document the events of the weekend of Barings’ collapse in 1995.

For Legal Lives we were successful in a joint funding bid with the London School of Economics Department of Law’s Legal Biography Project to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for a collaborative doctoral studentship. Entitled ‘The changing face of local justice: Examining the shift to a centralised justice system through the life stories of Crown Court clerks’, the research will encompass twenty life story recordings with Crown Court clerks who played a key role within the courts that witnessed significant periods of change and restructuring after the Second World War. A student is expected to start work later in 2013.

Our longstanding partnership with English Heritage (which originated with the Courtualds at Eltham Palace project) came to an end with the departure of Virginia Arrowsmith, whose post was made redundant in English Heritage’s restructure. Virginia sent ‘a big thank you on behalf of English Heritage for all your guidance on oral history over the last few years which has been invaluable to us in establishing the way forward for oral history within the organisation and in setting up our oral history archive’.

Projects in development

We are in the process of developing a new project to explore the development of ‘talking therapies’. An Oral History of Talking Therapists in the UK will interview a wide range of professionals who do not use pharmaceutical or other medical forms of intervention to alleviate mental distress but depend on verbal exchanges between client and therapist.
an excellent scoping study in 2011 and a useful roundtable meeting of interested parties and stakeholders in 2012, we commissioned a pilot series of interviews from Dr Zibiah Hennessy, Baron Hennessy of Nymphsfield, joined National Life Stories as a new Trustee. Originally a journalist, Hennessy co-founded the Institute of Contemporary British History in 1986 and since 1992 has been Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History at Queen Mary, University of London. His analysis of post-war Britain, Never Again: Britain 1945-1951, won the Duft Cooper Prize in 1992 and the NCR Book Award in 1993, and his study of Britain in the 1950s and the rise of Harold Macmillan, Having It So Good: Britain in the 1950s, won the 2007 Orwell Prize for political writing.

We also welcome another new trustee Dr Jo Reilly, Head of Participation and Learning at the Heritage Lottery Fund, where she leads on the ‘Cultures and Memories’ strand of funding, including policy directing LHF’s support for oral history in the UK. She was previously a lecturer in modern history at Southampton University and Education Officer at the Wiener Library, London.

After many years’ service Dame Penelope Lively, Sir John Craven and Caroline Waldegrave have all stepped down as trustees. We are delighted that they will continue as Advisors and Penelope will stay on as chair of the Authors’ Lives Advisory Committee. We thank them all for their enthusiasm and hardwork for the charity.

Clive Philpott joined the Artists’ Lives Advisory Committee as we thanked retiring member Beth Houghton, formerly of Tate archive, for her longstanding support. Sally Horrocks joined the Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry in the UK Advisory Committee as Senior Academic Consultant. Tragically we lost Sue Robinson in December and have had a baby boy, Frederick. We welcome Emily Hewitt and Holly Moisey who will be covering for Ellie’s absence and also for Deputy Director Mary Stewart in January and February.

The Listening Project, a new partnership between BBC Radio 4, BBC local and national radio, and the British Library, launched last March. The Listening Project encourages pairs of people to share an intimate conversation with a close friend or relative ‘to build a unique picture of our lives today’ (www.bbc.co.uk/listeningproject) Each couple spends up to fourty minutes in a BBC studio talking about what matters to them. Elaine asked her mum how she managed to raise ten kids. Oby and Rebekah were brought up as Jehovah’s Witnesses and talked about what this has meant to them. Cardiffs neighbours Bronwen and Iris remembered the Second World War. Martin told his daughter Sandra about being given up at birth by his mother. Husband and wife Willie and Alison discussed the difference that Alzheimers has made to Willie and their life together. Friends Angeline and Tina reflected on their experiences of postnatal depression. These often powerful personal stories are shared with the nation: clips are aired on local radio and on BBC Radio 4 in three five-minute slots introduced by Fi Glover on Fridays. The full uncut recorded conversations, together with a photo of each pair, are archived at the BL, and we expect to place these online over the summer. The project is closely modelled on the US StoryCorps project (http://storycorps.org/), set up by David Isay in 2003 with a recording booth in New York Grand Central Terminal. Since then StoryCorps has collected and archived over 40,000 recordings at the American Folklife Centre at the Library of Congress. Millions tune in to StoryCorps’ weekly broadcasts on NPR’s morning edition.

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

**The Listening Project**

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**People**

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Our archive assistant Elspeth Millar left on maternity leave in December and has since had a baby boy, Frederick. We welcome Emily Hewitt and Holly Moisey who will be covering for Ellie’s absence and also for Deputy Director Mary Stewart who started her maternity leave in March 2013 and delivered Albert in April. Annette Mundy, our longest-standing volunteer who has been unable to travel to the office in recent months, has been interviewed by Cathy Courtney about the early years of NLS.

**Dissemination**

Our major Oral History of British Science web resource – ‘Voices of Science’ – was chosen as one of two pilot projects helping to shape the first phase of the redevelopment of the British Library website. We convened a Project Board to oversee the delivery of ‘Voices of Science’, which includes members of the relevant BL departments and two external advisors, Jon Agar and John Lynch, drawn from the Oral History of the British Library Project Advisory Committee. The British Library funded a part-time post to coordinate the collection of resources for the website and Stephanie Baxter has been working with us since October 2012. The website, expected to launch fully in late summer 2013, will provide immediate access to short ‘curated’ excerpts of the oral histories (audio and video), clustered by key interlinked themes in the history of technological innovation and environmental discovery in the twentieth century. These will lead users to the full interviews on British Library Sounds and links to other related content.

The Oral History of British Science Team have again been busy with public talks and presentations. At the annual meeting of The Association of Business Historians at Peanut Park in November, the team have again been busy with public talks and presentations. At the annual conference of The Association of Business Historians at Peanut Park in November, Rob Perks also presented a paper on interviewees’ work and links to other related content.

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and 2008, as part of his DPhI to investigate the concept of ‘patient zero’ and the early years of the North American HIV/AIDS epidemic (Sound & Moving Image Catalogue reference C1491). We also archived twenty-four interviews conducted by Sarah Franklin and Martin Johnson (University of Cambridge and LSE) with the key scientists who led to the birth of the first ‘test tube’ baby following in-vitro fertilisation (C1342). The collection includes an interview with the late Anne McClaren, who donated her personal papers to the BL in 2004. The Oral History of British Goans from Colonial East Africa (C1557) project deposited thirty-three video oral history recordings from this Heritage Lottery funded oral history project, which will add a new dimension to our collections relating to post-war migration to the UK. Allan Sutherland deposited the audio interviews from the Neglected Voices project (C1485), which were carried out during a year-long residency at the centre for Citizens Participation at Brunel University. Four life story interviews were conducted with disabled persons, and poems were then created by editing the transcripts from the interviews (C1483). Finally, an interview with Mary Branczek, the first woman president of the British Veterinary Association, has been deposited, the first in the Oral History of Veterinary Practice collection (C1519). The project is being run by Sue Bradley at the Centre for Rural Economy, Newcastle University, in collaboration with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Charitable Trust.

Amongst cataloguing projects, a number of collections have been transferred from BL India Office Records to the Oral History collections, including Plain Tales from the Raj (C1510) and Elizabeth Cornwall’s Children’s interviews (C1515). These were catalogued by Laura Wood, an MA intern from the Archives and Records Management course at UCL. A second student, Dean Annison, catalogued the BBC World Service ‘Discovery’ tapes (C5-40) comprising 360 open reel ‘insert’ tapes recorded for the ‘Discovery’ programme between 1971 and 1981 covering subjects within natural science, applied science, physical science and cognitive science.

To mark the London 2012 Olympics we launched a new online web package of sporting oral history interviews at http://sounds.bl.uk/oral-history/sport, featuring sixty-one full interviews for online access. Famous interviewees include Sebastian Coe, Tanni Grey-Thompson, Roger Black, Mary Peters, Daley Thompson, Geoff Capes and Liz McColgan. However, the package also features interesting stories from lesser-known sportspersons and those working to support sport, such as the late marathon runner Jim Peters who, in 1953, was the first to complete a marathon in under two hours twenty minutes; Don Thompson, who won Olympic gold for the 50k walk in 1964; Bill Roberts, winner of gold in the 4x400m relay at the 1936 Berlin Olympics; Sybil Canadine, the first girl guide in 1909 who refused to swim for Great Britain at the Berlin Olympics in 1936; memories of the first Paralympics/Olympic Games for people with disabilities in 1952 at Stoke Mandeville, from William Bunn; Colin Hancock, dentist to the British Olympic team at the Barcelona Games; and Stuart Devlin, who designed the 2000 Sydney Olympics gold coin series.

The interviews recorded for National Life Stories projects are archived at the British Library and cared for as part of the Library’s Oral History collections.

**Discover National Life Stories recordings**

All interviews recorded for National Life Stories are catalogued on the British Library’s Sound & Moving Image Catalogue (www.bl.uk/sounds) which provides detailed content data about individual recordings.

**Access to National Life Stories recordings**

The Listening and Viewing Service in St Pancras provides free public access to open recordings which have no access restrictions, on an appointment basis. Many digital recordings are also available via SoundServer, a computerised listening facility available at the Library’s sites in both St Pancras and in Boston Spa, Yorkshire. Further information about listening at the Library can be found at www.bl.uk/listening.

A selection of the interviews recorded for National Life Stories can also be accessed via the internet through the British Library’s Sounds website (http://sounds.bl.uk/). The website gives remote access to a selection of interviews from the Library’s sound collections, including oral history recordings.

At present, interviews from Artists’ Lives and Architects’ Lives are only accessible to those in Higher and Further Education in the UK; interviews recorded for The Living Memory of the Jewish Community and An Oral History of British Science and the packages Disability Voices, the George Ewart Evans collection, Sport and Observing the 1980s can be accessed by anyone worldwide.

Louise Brodie has continued her interviews for Pioneers in Charity and Social Welfare including Romana Cassock from Anti-Slavery International who is a passionate campaigner for the abolition of modern slavery, and has witnessed first-hand the problems in West African states such as Mali and Mauritania and among impoverished workers in Pakistan. Another interviewee, Les Burrows, worked for Shelter for thirty-five years in a variety of positions, including parliamentary lobbying, and later became information manager, creating the Shelter Archive. Jean McCrindle was still at St Andrews University when EP Thompson asked her to be Scottish secretary of the New Left Club. She started women’s classes and became involved in the women’s movement in its early days. She was very active on behalf of women during the miners’ strike in 1984 and taught for many years at Northern College, running residential courses for women during the miners’ strike in 1984 and taught for many years at Northern College, running residential courses for women and men in the areas of globalisation, capitalism and post-development.

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New online resources in 2012/2013

**Sisterhood and After**

Sisterhood and After was a three-year collaboration between the British Library, Sussex University and the Women’s Library with funding provided by the Leverhulme Trust. In March 2013 the full oral history archive became accessible via the British Library’s Sound and Moving Image Catalogue. Containing interviews with sixty key feminist activists from the last century, Sisterhood and After documents the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) from the Northern Ireland Women’s Rights Movement, through to Greenham Common. The recordings have been used to create a website that explores the history and characteristics of the WLM. This is available at www.bl.uk/sisterhood.

Observing the 1980s brings together, for the first time, ‘voices’ from both the Mass Observation Archive and the British Library’s Oral History collections. Led by the University of Sussex, the aim of this project is to offer insights into the lives and opinions of British people from all social classes and regions during the 1980s. The interviews from which the clips were selected for the ‘Observing the 1980s’ Open Education Resource include those involved in key events, such as the Falklands War, the miners’ strike and the Brixton riots, as well as those reflecting on industry in the 1980s, unemployment and redundancy, and HIV/AIDS. The interviews in their entirety have been made available via British Library Sounds.

Children’s Oral History of the Falklands, or ‘Children’s View of the Falklands War’, is a unique collection of interviews conducted by and for schoolchildren from Headingley Grammar School in Leeds. The project was run by Kaye Stedman and John Gielgud. Photography by John Swannell.

The Oral History of British Goans from Colonial East Africa (C1557) project deposited thirty-three video oral history recordings from this Heritage Lottery funded oral history project, which will add a new dimension to our collections relating to post-war migration to the UK. Allan Sutherland deposited the audio interviews from the Neglected Voices project (C1485), which were conducted during a year-long residency at the centre for Citizens Participation at Brunel University. Four life story interviews were conducted with disabled persons, and poems were then created by editing the transcripts from the interviews (C1483). Finally, an interview with Mary Branczek, the first woman president of the British Veterinary Association, has been deposited, the first in the Oral History of Veterinary Practice collection (C1519). The project is being run by Sue Bradley at the Centre for Rural Economy, Newcastle University, in collaboration with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Charitable Trust.

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All interviews recorded for National Life Stories are catalogued on the British Library’s Sound & Moving Image Catalogue (www.bl.uk/sounds), which provides detailed content data about individual recordings.

**Access to National Life Stories recordings**

The Listening and Viewing Service in St Pancras provides free public access to open recordings which have no access restrictions, on an appointment basis. Many digital recordings are also available via SoundServer, a computerised listening facility available at the Library’s sites in both St Pancras and in Boston Spa, Yorkshire. Further information about listening at the Library can be found at www.bl.uk/listening.

A selection of the interviews recorded for National Life Stories can also be accessed via the internet through the British Library’s Sounds website (http://sounds.bl.uk/). The website gives remote access to a selection of interviews from the Library’s sound collections, including oral history recordings. At present, interviews from Artists’ Lives and Architects’ Lives are only accessible to those in Higher and Further Education in the UK; interviews recorded for The Living Memory of the Jewish Community and An Oral History of British Science and the packages Disability Voices, the George Ewart Evans collection, Sport and Observing the 1980s can be accessed by anyone worldwide.

Access to National Life Story recordings

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Access to National Life Story recordings
Twenty-five years of National Life Stories 1987–2012

Rob Perks, Paul Thompson, Alan Dein, Harriet McKay and Polly Russell

National Life Stories (NLS) celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2012. Since its establishment as the National Life Story Collection (NLSC) in 1987, NLS has grown significantly in ambition and scope. Working as an integral part of the British Library’s Oral History Department, it has raised more than £4.2m of funding and helped to create one of the largest oral history collections in the world, some 35,000 recordings, of which, at the end of 2012, 2,517 are long in-depth biographical interviews created by NLS. NLS has enriched the huge breadth of subject coverage across the Library’s oral history collections: encompassing the oil and steel industries, the food sector, Royal Mail, the utilities, science and technology, computing, aerospace, the crafts, art and photography, architecture and design, horticulture, charitable activity, banking and finance, Jewish Holocaust experience, publishing and authorship, theatre and fashion design, and the press. All of these are accessioned and catalogued, and when funding has allowed there are full transcripts. All have detailed content summaries and growing numbers of full interviews are available online via the web (over 200 so far).

NLS founder Paul Thompson remembers setting up NLSC in 1986–7: “I just sketched out an idea on a page and I asked Asa Briggs if I could see him about it. He was then Provost of Worcester College Oxford. I went to see him and he seemed really keen on the project, and I said to him, ‘How should we do it? What roles should you and I take?’ And he said, ‘I’ll be Chairman and you should be Director’. So it started like that. We then set about getting a group of trustees, that was the next stage. My idea was that we should get an impressive list of people. At that point I hadn’t thought through how you needed to be strategic and have trustees who were going to be able to help you achieve your end in particular ways. I thought, this is a national project so we want MPs and other distinguished people. So we had distinguished biographers, like Lady Longford, Elizabeth Longford, and politicians like Rhodes James, historian and Conservative MP, and the biographer, Lord Blake. “My idea was to try to have both leaders of national life, elite interviewing, and also a national cross section of some kind. And interestingly, oral historians in England hadn’t been interviewing elites so much and (there) was really great unease in the oral history community about this idea. So that was sort of a legacy that we had to overcome.”

Over the past twenty-five years oral history has entered the popular understanding and imagination; it is used as a research tool in myriad different disciplines and contexts, from planning to health-care, reconciliation to museum interpretation; it has grown exponentially in local and community history; and has earned its place among academic and heritage professionals. As a UK centre of excellence NLS has played an important part in this transformation, and whilst archiving has been central to NLS’s mission, engaging users and new audiences has also been important.

NLS has documented many of the UK’s key industries including food, oil and gas, electricity and water. Alan Dein was the project interviewer for Lives in between 1991 and 1992, gathering 102 interviews with employees from one of Britain’s largest yet least understood industries. Interviewees ranged from top managers and trade unionists to technicians, furnacemen and sheathers. British Steel General Steel Division sponsored both the project and the Lives in Steel CD (BL, 1993). Twenty years on Alan, now well-known as a BBC Radio 4 presenter and programme-maker, reflects on the project: “The timing of this project was crucial. The steel industry was in the throes of a massive rationalisation of both its workforce and its production heartlands, but the living memory of steel people could hark back to an era of huge numbers of steelworkers churning out massive tonnages of rails, rods or billets shipped across the world. Back in 1991 Lives in Steel was also the first of its kind – to preserve a spate of several generations of these steel memories and the workforce and its production heartlands, but the living memory of steel people could hark back to an era of huge numbers of steelworkers churning out massive tonnages of rails, rods or billets shipped across the world. Back in 1991 Lives in Steel was also the first of its kind – to preserve a span of several generations of these steel memories nationwide, and also to capture a snapshot of how steel people viewed what was happening in the present to an industry they loved.

“It was a great bonus that my very first interviewee was Dai Davies, then a long-retired General Secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. He’d started as a steel labourer in Ebbw Vale during the late 1920s, and he passionately reminisced with ease with his distinctive Welsh valleys accent bringing a combination of vivid descriptive detail and sheer performance. It conjured up another world for me – heat, sweat and danger – one that was far removed from my own background and experiences. Davies brilliantly prepared me for what would eventually become hundreds of hours of wonderful recordings with all sorts of people from towns whose entire history would be changed forever by the arrival of steel. Over a period of about a year I’d visited Scunthorpe, Corby, Redcar, Workington, Sheffield, Motherwell and Port Talbot. It was enthralling, and a privilege, to meet such a wide range of people, from blast furnacemen, fighters and rollers to strip mill and industrial relations managers, who were all just excited to talk about steel – though I could never be sure what they made of their wide-eyed questioner from ‘the Smoke’!

“Personally, working on Lives in Steel was undoubtedly the best education I could ever have had to acquire the skills of oral history interviewing. It was occasionally difficult for me to hear stories of terrible industrial injuries, thwarted ambition or redundancy, but I would not have missed for the world the opportunity to visit the pounding rolling mills of Scunthorpe or share a pint in a traditional old steelworkers’ boozers in Redcar. Many things have changed since. For even British Steel, which had generously supported the oral history project, would not enter the 21st century following a merger with a Dutch steel group to form Corus, itself later taken over by Tata of India. The industry was compressed to a fraction of its former size, and some of the places I visited back in 1991 have since completely disappeared.

“But in 2012 I returned to Redcar for the first time in twenty years to make a BBC Radio 4 documentary about an unexpected miracle. Europe’s second largest blast furnace had just been re-it, having been mothballed for the previous two years. The North East had its ‘Steel Spring’ and a 150 year old steelmaking tradition returned to the area. As I entered the resurrected blast furnace I took a moment to remember those steel people I’d interviewed who have since passed on. I’m so glad that their voices live on within the Lives in Steel recordings held at British Library.”

Frank Homer was born in 1932 and worked as a softening and descaling inspector and as a trade union official at Shapcote Lane in Sheffield (C592/B3): “I always got the impression that my father was always at work, you know, because they worked long hours, they
worked twelve-hour days and twelve-hour nights so on the
night shift they'd be in bed during the day and we had to be
quiet as children if we were off school for holidays and what
not, you know? So, yeah that's one of the things that, you
know, looking back now you think, well, you never got the
chance to chat too much and at fourteen years old you're
looking to start your own working life."
Malcolm Bournon was born in 1936 and worked as a tractor
driver at Ebbw Vale (C532/76):
“... My first experience of going onto the blast furnace itself
was a most frightening experience. But I think the most
frightening experience of it all was actually going across the
furnace yards if they were pulling the slag out, not so much
the iron - the iron would spill occasionally - but the slag
and I suppose they could very often go across there with a
train coming up the line with a couple of ladles on and the
slag would be spilling over the sides and how someone
wouldn’t kill with it all was amazing, that it didn’t happen.”

NLS’s Architects’ Lives project had been running for
sometime when we were approached by Harriet MacKay, then
the custodian of architect Ernö Goldfinger’s family home at 2
Willow Road, Hampstead. Goldfinger was born in Hungary
in 1902 and became a leading member of the Modern
Movement. He moved to London in 1934 and is perhaps
best-known for designing residential tower blocks such as
Trellick Tower. Willow Road was the first Modern Movement
property that the National Trust had acquired and it was
opened in 1996 as it appeared in 1987 when Goldfinger
died. The house offers a unique insight into how an architect
opened in 1996 as it appeared in 1987 when Goldfinger
built by Goldfinger, had been open for seven years when we
produced the CD, the publication of which offered the
opportunity, through its varied but authentic accounts,
to sketch some rumours (confirm others!) and added
imme...
document the transformation of Britain from a place where garlic was regarded with deep suspicion to a nation where curry and kebab are regarded as everyday foods.

“My own involvement with Food: From Source to Salepoint came about when I started collecting food producer life stories for my PhD. This work continued when Professor Peter Jackson, my PhD supervisor, secured funding for a new research project using life stories to analyze food commodity chains. Funding for this project covered the costs of adding an additional thirty oral history recordings to the library’s food archive as well as creating an educational website based on the library’s food oral histories. Having no previous experience of creating a website, we were reliant on the British Library’s Learning Team – their expertise lies in creating workshops and website resources for school and university audiences. Concerned that an oral history website might lack visual appeal the Learning Team commissioned award-winning animators to design a website which was colourful, playful and engaging.

“While the animators worked on the website design, we focused on the site’s content. We decided to structure the website into seven thematic sections – food, nation and cultural identity; ritual and tradition; retail experience; consumer knowledge and power; changes in eating habits; food & regulation; and technology and change. Each of these topics was brought alive by relevant oral history extracts. For instance, in the section on ‘retail experience’, we included food writer Jenny Linford explaining her commitment to small, independent shops and were able to contrast this with food technologist David Gregory remembering the feeling of exhilaration he felt when first visiting a supermarket as a young boy. Accompanying each extract in the various sections was a biography of the person speaking, the extract transcript, further information about the topic and then a series of exploratory questions.

“Aside from the usual challenges of tight budgets and short timescales, the main difficulty of creating the ‘Food Stories’ website was selecting just sixty short extracts from the wealth of wonderful material held in the Food: from Source to Salepoint archive. Since it was launched ‘Food Stories’ has attracted thousands of visitors. For the academics involved, ‘Food Stories’ has proven that oral history is not only a valuable research tool but is also a powerful means for engaging broad audiences who would usually remain outside the reach of more traditional academic outputs. For NLS, ‘Food Stories’ offers a tantalising taste of the archive’s impressive body of food recordings and demonstrates how life stories can be utilised for a focused educational purpose and can bring to life an academic subject.”

Rosamund Grant was born in 1946 and is a cookery writer, restaurateur and family therapist:

“I think Europeans tend to see Caribbean food in a particular way, and they would say it’s silly and salt fish, rice and peas or curried goat and mutton and… they’ve got particular things. Or people say to me ‘Oh, I know, I like spicy food’ and by that they mean pepper really, or they don’t like spicy food, and I say ‘but you can have the spice without the pepper and separate…’ […] I hate stereotyping, I hate being put in a box, I hate being limited, and I hate being seen through the eyes of Europeans. I don’t like defining myself through the eyes of somebody who’s white or is European. I have my own definition of myself and I think that is really important for me, you know, as a black woman to make an impression in that field ‘cause this is my field, you know. And because I suppose there’s a lot of passionate feeling left over from slavery and the impact of slavery and migration and displacement and all that kind of stuff, and I just think, you know. OK it’s time to speak for ourselves. And so I will define who I am and I will define therefore what I’m cooking, and it’s not that I’m closed about that but I feel we have been put into a box and we have been closed in, and hello folks you know we’re here and this is really what this is about. And so it does irritate me when people talk about ‘exotic food’, you know, exotic through whose perspective, is it mine or somebody else’s?”

“This short extract from Barry Martin’s recording (Artists’ Lives C466/337) is packed with resonance. The listener experiences something of the shock of the peeping boy, along with a painful acknowledgment of the grandfather’s physical discomfort and an awareness of his deference – after years in the First World War trenches – to the doctor who misdiagnosed him, as well as a sense of the engagement between grandfather and grandson, the intimacies and physical discomfort and an awareness of his deference – after years in the First World War trenches – to the doctor who misdiagnosed him, as well as a sense of the engagement between grandfather and grandson, the intimacies and distances of family life, the spoken and the unsaid, the exchanged and the withheld.

Encountering others and ourselves

Cathy Courtney, Project Director, National Life Stories

“One day in their house, I saw this thing on the back of their bedroom door. It was daytime and I’d ventured in there to look. On the back of the door was this bloody great brown… looked like a horse harness, great leather thing with blobs on. As a youngster I couldn’t believe what on earth this thing was. Anyway what it turned out to be was what had been designated to hold the hernia in. It was a great harness you wore round your waist and there were two great leathery pads that were pulled back into the groin so it held a hernia back in place. He’d been wearing it from the end of the First World War to the early 1950s… Anyway he collapsed at London Bridge in about 1956 or ’57, coming home… They took him to hospital and examined him and the doctor there said to him, ‘What are you wearing this truss for?’ And my grandfather said, ‘Well, because of the hernia.’ And the doctor said, ‘How long have you been wearing it for?’ The doctor was amazed. He said, ‘Well, you haven’t got a hernia, there’s no hernia. You don’t have to wear this thing.’ So he never wore it again. It was hung on the back of the bedroom door as a reminder of perhaps you should ask questions at certain times.”

In Crefield’s drawn and painted portraits of his mother, made in her lifetime, after her death when he sat beside her body in the mortuary, and later still working from memory, we see his imagination. Beyond the central figures Dennis Crefield (Artists’ Lives C466/327) evokes, describing his grandmother and mother putting on make-up at their respective dressing tables, is a third person, the small child absorbed in intense observation:

“It was done in a stately fashion with puffs, big powder puffs, lovely. They were big and flouncy… and also small, those lovely… small pink ones like a biscuit which they put the under stuff on with. No eye line, nothing like that. I remember their make-up was entirely concerned with some rouge, and some lipstick and some powder. And then the hair, done up. And then always, I don’t think I ever saw my mother or my grandmother without a hat. The hats tended to blow away so they always did this astounding thing of sticking pins through their hats… I always thought it was magic, that they were putting them through their head… I loved watching the whole process of the face being made up.”

The apparently incidental is often as effective an evocation of a period as the major events in a life story. Beryl Hinde’s recall (Tesco: An Oral History, C1087/01, interviewer Deborah Agulnik) of strategies she found to overcome lack of money

“…when Tesco was in existence for a very short time it was a real revolution…to get any money to buy anything for the store… to get around that they started to get people to put in money… the way they got the money was that they would get people to put a certain amount of money in a box to get money for Tesco… to get around that problem they started to get people to put in money… the way they got the money was that they would get people to put a certain amount of money in a box to get money for Tesco… to get around that problem they started to get people to put in money… the way they got the money was that they would get people to put a certain amount of money in a box to get money for Tesco… to get around that problem they started to get people to put in money… the way they got the money was that they would get people to put a certain amount of money in a box to get money for Tesco… to get around that problem they started to get people to put in money… the way they got the money was that they would get people to put a certain amount of money in a box to get money for Tesco… to get around that problem they started to get people to put in money… the way they got the money was that they would get people to put in money… the way they got the money was that they would get people to put in money… the way they got the money was that they would get people to put in money…”
to spend on make-up – even utilising the tea-time shellfish – embody the spirit of a section of 1950s youth:

“We used to curl our hair up in iron curlers which used to leave your hair rusty. Everybody had curl in them days. We had sugar water in our hair to make it like a lacquer so it stuck because these curls always fell out...Because of the American influence with the pictures so you wore these sweaters and skirts probably with lots of layers of lace because they bounched about when you was dancing. Girls put glitter in their hair...I always went out with the wrinkle on my face. You used to take the blackings out of the wrinkles on a Sunday and stick it on your face like one of the film stars, it was Barbara Stanwyck I think - a beauty spot...We used to put a stick in the chimney to blacken your eyebrows...We used to mix cocoa with flour to powder on your face...although it used to go all on the boys' shirts when you danced with them...we were very glamourised when we went out. They were good days really. It was a lovely time."

In another part of London, Anya Linden (Anya Sainsbury, General, C464/64) was tackling similar problems with different means:

“Right at the beginning when I was just a student member at Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet, very few people had false eyelashes. You had something called hot black. And you had to have a candle. You had to have...a metal teaspoon. And you took out a bit of black guinge with a hair pin, usually, smeared it into your teaspoon, held the teaspoon over the candle till it melted and then with your hairpin, dipped it in and you coated each lash with hot black and then you could go on and on making them thicker and thicker, longer and longer as you wanted...And then somebody's mother...I think it was her milkman's home. She asked him to give her some hairs from the horse's tail, black ones. And then she...you knotted it and knotted the next one onto a bit of thread or several bits of thread. And then you had to curl them, special curlers to curl them. They were a bit gross in a way. They became much more sophisticated when you could buy them, but these were the first I remember. Somebody's mother made false eyelashes with a horse's tail."

Often, people describe what they are wearing at the time of their NLS recording session. A sculptor might, without looking down, articulate the probable construction of his footwear in impressive detail, an indication of his internalised and almost automatic analysis of the physical world around him; someone with a close interest in fashion will conjure the atmosphere and etiquette of a fitting by a leading couturier; the furniture maker, Rod Wales (Crafts Lives, C960/47), was the first person in my recordings to have bought his shoes via the internet.

Speakers define the, mostly unspoken, dress codes of their professions, the pressure to conform to twin sets and pearls in the publishing world of the 1950s (Elizabeth Burchfield, An Oral History of the Book Trade, CB72/49, interviewer Sue Bradley); a scientist's shock at being mistaken for a 'workman' (Elizabeth Burchfield, An Oral History of the Book Trade, C872/45, interviewer Thomas Lean); Barbara Bowen makes vivid the problems of hygiene endured by Antarctic scientists in freezing conditions (C1379/18, interviewer Paul Merchant), whilst John Glen (C1379/26 also with Paul Merchant) remembers a trip to see glaciers during which a telegram arrived from the molecular biologist Max Perutz:

“'Left shirt and ants in Chamonix, please collect': I devised that the fourth word should have been pants rather than ants, so I went to the bureau of the hotel we'd all been staying in and said this to the rather prim looking lady behind the desk and she said (adopts accent) 'Would these be them?' and pulled out some long johns from behind the counter."

Unsurprisingly, this anecdote doesn’t appear in Perutz’s own NLS recording (General, C464/22, interviewer Katherine Thompson) but it does open a chink into a very human side of the Nobel Prize winner. This is one instance of many cross-references between recordings. Another occurs where Leslie Russell of Smiley hairdressing salon was interviewed by Linda Sandino for an Oral History of British Fashion (C1046/05) and in the artist and ceramist Jacqueline Poncelet’s Crafts Lives conversation with Frances Conrord (C960/116). Poncelet had her hair cut at Smiley in the 1970s and whilst there are parallels with Beryl Hinde’s memories of 1960s self-expression through hairstyle, Poncelet's decisions about the image she wanted to project were more complex:

“I can remember when punks first arrived...Carole had introduced us to this hairdresser called Smiley that was up at Knightsbridge and they did punk hair-dos so I’d had this wonderful multi-coloured hair-do but the trouble was with them that the colour washed out and you finished up looking like a moth-eaten teddy bear in no time at all...What was fascinating about that was going on the tube afterwards and realising that people’s relationship to you had completely changed. They saw you as threatening and they treated you as somebody threatening...So you began to learn the language not just of clothing but of hair-dos and that a particular hair-do was telling people something about you...I can remember when we were living in Seattle, one of the potters that we met saying to my friend Meg, 'Oh, she's quite a nice person really. I'd have never guessed it from her hair-do'..."

“Definitely as time went on I wanted people to know...that I was a complicated person and that my life was complicated...When I had my asymmetric hair-dos they were the exception and not the rule and people found them uncomfortable. In fact I remember the first one I had, my son saying to me, ‘When you come and collect me from school tomorrow, can you walk sideways?’ It was because one side was a short long haircut and the other side was a shaved haircut. So I was literally saying to people ‘that’s who I am. It’s not straightforward. It’s complicated.’...so the way that I appeared, the work that I made, was all of a piece. It was complicated. It was fragmented. It wasn’t open and it wasn’t friendly.”
Ever wondered what happens to keep electricity flowing into your home to keep the lights burning and the night at bay? Behind the switch on the wall lies a vast system that spans every corner of the land. Linked to your light switch is every main electric socket, local substation, transmission line, and power station in the country. A huge system, coordinated and operated in concert to a constant 50 Hertz beat. It is a system that has been running day in, day out, since the late 1930s, when the embryonic ‘National Gridiron’ of high voltage transmission cables first linked Britain’s patchwork of disconnected local electricity networks into something approaching a national network. Yet for all its size and importance, the electricity supply industry is a remarkably silent service. It has become part of the fabric of daily life. Barely considered, except when threatened with some crisis that might cause the lights to go out.

**An Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry in the UK**

is intended to record the development and operation of the industry in Britain, through the life stories of around forty-five key individuals who served in varied posts at different levels over long careers, or who influenced it from the sidelines. The culmination of this effort will be a mosaic history of the industry, told from dozens of viewpoints. Generously funded by a donation from Hodgson and Ludmila Thornber, the project will create a unique national collection of interviews from the electricity sector, invaluable to historians and future policy makers, telling the story of the industry through the personal stories and efforts that went into keeping the lights on.

After nationalisation in 1947/8 the industry grew rapidly, finding new ways of generating electricity and spreading its benefits to more of the population, for whom it was still a relatively new technology. Interviews will explore from a personal perspective the story of electricity production in the postwar period, including the increasing scale of conventional power stations, the construction of the ‘Supergrid’ that meant stations could be located away from city centres, the introduction of nuclear power and the subsequent long-running debates over its merits. Today we see power stations as completed entities, castles of generation dominating the landscape, but their planning and construction required a huge amount of work. As interviewee Glyn England, later Chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), recalled of his time in the organisation’s planning department: ‘The great joy was the variety... at that stage when I was looking for sites it meant travelling... talking to the local planning people, because it was important to get them on side... But there were so many of these interactive things, like getting measurements of rivers, getting this done, that done, getting the research people on specific problems. Talking to the highways authority, the railways, the Coal Board, and that’s the sort of way one spent one’s time.’ (C1495/03)

Further interviewees will explore the demand end of the system, where the country was divided between regional Area Electricity Boards. These supplied electricity to the consumer, ran shops selling electric appliances, maintained the local grid and expanded the system to new consumers, notably villages and farmers in rural areas where access to electricity had previously been very limited.

As well as exploring the development of technology and the organisation of the industry, the project will consider the day-to-day activities that kept the system running. What was a day’s work like for a CEGB power station manager, or for the Electricity Council labour relations representatives negotiating with union leaders? How did it feel driving around the network fixing faults in area electricity board supply systems in terrible weather conditions, or carefully balancing supply and demand across the whole system at the CEGB National Grid control centre? Technology required huge human efforts to keep it running. As Frank Ledger, who as Systems Operation Engineer was responsible for the national control centre recalled, during the difficult days of the 1970s miners’ strikes, human judgement was all important in deciding if power cuts and voltage reductions were to be avoided:

‘In my office I had a total generated output meter and a frequency meter... The system control engineer at this time was Dennis Tompkinson... And we’d both be on the telephone to each other and we’d say ‘no we won’t have a voltage reduction yet’, ‘look, the demand is levelling out’, ‘we won’t do it yet, hang on a minute see how we get on.’ And this sort of thing happened very frequently, because we were very close to the point where we’d have to apply a voltage reduction... so we were very tight, and this sort of thing could be quite stressful’. (C1495/01)

Attention to the everyday lives of people working in the electricity industry will paint an impression of its ethos and values, as it was seen by those who made it work. This perspective will cast new light on the role of an industry that often found itself the victim of political disagreements that were not of its own making. In the miners’ strikes of the early 1970s the inability to keep the lights on contributed to the downfall of the Heath government. A decade later ‘Thatcher’s victory over the miners’ probably owed less to political courage than it did to the initiative, advance planning, and hard work of the electricity supply industry. However, as Frank Ledger recalled, for the industry itself such challenges were not about politics:

‘A satisfactory outcome isn’t that you’ve defeated the miners, it’s that you’ve kept the lights on. There’s no way that you feel you’re on one side or the other, but whatever the foolish people are doing who have got this disagreement, you’ve got to do the best you can to keep the lights on... there’s a strong feeling of public service.’

The privatisation of electricity supply from the 1980s heralded dramatic changes, altering its relationship with customers, government, and those working in it. Our interviews will explore this change from the perspective of those with long careers in the industry, and from the experts and policymakers drawn in from outside it to help its reorganisation. In doing this it will bring the story of the industry almost up to the present day. At a time when Britain’s future energy policy is debated in the media on a weekly basis it serves as a timely reminder of how the electricity supply industry we have today came to be, and how it dealt with the challenges of the past.
And why did you say ‘yes’?

Sarah O'Reilly, Project Interviewer, National Life Stories

“I much prefer to write … I’m a written word, rather than a spoken word, person, very much so. When I speak like this it’s hit and miss. To really express what I feel needs time and thought in order to get it exact in all its contradictions and layers, light and shade.” (C1276/04, track 17: 1:14:20 – 1:14:43)

These comments were made by the biographer Michael Holroyd in his 2007 recording for Authors’ Lives. They beg the question: why would someone who has chosen to communicate with the wider world through the written word agree to make a recording of many hours duration which relies expressly on speech? Why, when the letter of invitation landed on your mat, would you agree to be interviewed for Authors’ Lives?

Perhaps the answer has something to do with what a British Library recording is not. Novelist Philip Hensher described the formulaic nature of press interviews, and the act they require from the author, in his 2009 recording:

“Usually it is a performance. There’s the five minute interview in front of Russian television cameras that you know how to give, you know what they’re going to ask, and then there’s the hour and a half interview with someone from The Telegraph in which you run through all your funniest stories, tell them about your novel, and that’s the end of it.” (C1276/20, track 2: 1:16:44 – 1:17:10)

Speaking in a similar vein, novelist Hilary Mantel described a problem specific to the print interview, which was intimately bound up with the form itself:

“One thing that you have to get used to as an author is that it’s going to be printed, it’s going to appear in front of the reader, and then it’s going to be read by somebody who’s going to interpret it, and they’re going to interpret it in their own way. That’s really what you have to get used to. It’s going to be there for ever.” (C1276/16 track 22: 0:45:32 – 0:45:54)

For Maureen Duffy, who has written poetry, biographies and novels, the decline in paper-based records was a factor in her decision to agree to a recording in 2007:

“People don’t write diaries now. This [recording] is, in a way, the equivalent of a diary or a memoir. And I don’t want to write a memoir … This is a way of getting it told without writing it and I think it’s partly because our lives are now so complicated that we can’t, like Virginia Woolf, sit down every evening and write a diary. We don’t write letters, we send emails or ring up … this [recording] is a way of saying what I remember and how I see it, and it’s there for anybody who wants it, as I would have wanted it for Apha Behn or Henry Purcell [Duffy’s two biographical subjects]. I think it would have been wonderful to have heard Aphra Behn’s voice.” (C1276/03, track 21: 2:08:32 – 2:10:22 and 2:08:20 – 2:08:27)

When he came to be recorded in 2009, the children’s writer Michael Morpurgo had already turned down the opportunity to write a memoir:

“I thought that if I wrote a memoir it would be bound to be contrived in some way or another because [when writing] you’re thinking very, very hard about what you’re going to say, and what you’re going to leave out. The interesting thing about having a conversation is that whilst I’m quite sure I’m doing a selection, it isn’t as contrived, it’s not as controlled.” (C1276/23, track 22: 0:20:00 – 0:20:57)

Michael Morpurgo’s interview was conducted at an unusual time: his publishers had commissioned Maggie Ferguson to write his authorised biography (Michael Morpurgo: War Child to War Horse) and that process was happening in tandem with his British Library recording. But he made a distinction between the two activities:

“I like the fact that it’s spontaneous … I suppose I feel I have a different kind of freedom with this [recording] because I am just speaking … Somehow there is a formality about the fact there is going to be a book with Maggie and there isn’t with this.” (C1276/12, track 22: 0:43:38 – 0:44:02 and 0:53:33 – 0:55:44)

The fact that his recording would only be made available to researchers after a certain date also appealed to Morpurgo, as it has to many other interviewees – note the reference to his ‘confidential’ recording made by Andrew Motion above. Of the fifty-two interviews currently in the Authors’ Lives archive, over half are closed in part or in their entirety for the duration of the interviewee’s lifetime, or for a specific time period. As Morpurgo explained: “I know this [recording] is not going to go out there and be in other people’s faces, it’s confidential, but not, and I quite like that.” (C1276/23 track 22: 03:00 – 0:03:09)

For the novelist Penelope Lively, thoughts about the national, rather than personal, archive influenced her decision:

“Oral History is important. It’s a central, valuable part of the national archive. It’s a complement […] and a sort of counterbalance to the written archive and in years to come will be an invaluable resource to social historians.” (C1276/04 track 24: 0:43:26 – 0:43:50)

And finally, to Dr. Victoria Glendinning, the decision to take part in 2008 rested on a mixture of professional and personal interest in life stories:

“Why did I say ‘yes’? Because I’m never going to write an autobiography and because I get very frustrated myself when people leave this world without having told anybody their stories. I often think about my own granny and aunts. I should have asked them what it was like. I should have asked them more. And at least you asked me, and I told you so, now it’s there. It’s really my belief that people should tell their stories because otherwise things will be forgotten. You know, I feel knowledge falling off the edge of the world all the time. And it’s inevitable because new things have to be learnt all the time, you can’t hold onto everything, something has to fall off. But I’d like just to hold on to this bit for just a little longer…” (C1276/16 track 22: 1:53:26 – 1:54:30)

The idea of permanent record also appealed to Philip Hensher:

“I know that if I’m transported a hundred years into the future there will be, somewhere in the BL, a little label saying ‘Philip Hensher, long forgotten early twenty-first century novelist’. Which is something, unless the BL takes to throwing things away…

“There is something called posterity. You can’t affect what posterity thinks of you and probably posterity will think nothing of you, almost certainly, but there’s something there, in the vaults. And you never know, somebody might look it up...” (C1276/20 track 27: 1:21:12 – 1:22:57)
Edward Jones was born in St Albans in 1939 to a mother who was a portrait painter and father who was a sculptor and designer. He studied at the Architectural Association in London, where he met future colleagues and collaborators, including Jeremy Dixon. After combining private practice with teaching in Dublin, London and North America, he won the competition to design the City Hall in Mississauga, Canada in 1983. In 1989 he returned to London and formed Dixon Jones with Jeremy Dixon. Their projects have included the Royal Opera House, the National Portrait Gallery, and most recently the Saïd Business School in Oxford. In 2011 he embarked on a lengthy interview for Architects’ Lives, which has recently been completed and includes memories of his childhood, reflections on civic space in the urban environment and the changing role of the architect in the post-war period.

How did you feel about having your life story recorded?
Well I suppose there’s a degree of self-indulgence about it, which the private side of one rather likes and is mildly flattered. The nature of the conversation with you and the degree to which one’s able to talk, has given enough time to talk about things that impact on my work. I’ve found it very interesting that certain things pop out you don’t necessarily expect to say or record. So I feel that’s been rather good because – well there’s a degree of honesty about which it like. You find yourself saying things that don’t contradict official thought, but are more personal thoughts that you might have had as an architect about things that you do. And I think that’s been wholly welcomed from my point of view.

Therefore how important is it to have a sense of the person behind the building?
Well a lot of people create the building, without being too self-diminishing in that comment, and I think the architect and the client, if that’s a rich and strong relationship, then your building is as good as that relationship. And in our case as a practice, our relationship to Charles Saumarez Smith of the National Portrait Gallery I always single out as somebody who was a champion and supported the work. Wafic Saïd at the Business School was a similarly positive person. Daniel Moylan in Exhibition Road was a great enthusiast and encouraged us to do the project and Jeremy Isaacs at the Opera House, and so on, so these are all people that one would say are very definitely behind the project as well as the architect. And that’s not a goody two-shoes comment, it’s saying that relationship is important and those clients have been a great pleasure to work for and – and other clients have not. And it shows.

Your work is public but the process behind it is private. How do you feel about the interview unearthing the private aspect of the whole process?
Well we are a very public profession, our buildings go up and there’s no avoiding that, and so one of the things that I feel as a sort of architect critic, is that there’s a very large measure of private work being put up in the name of the public role of architecture. And it’s an aspect of contemporary production where the private will to form has extraordinary prominence in our cities compared to previous periods when there was some measure of consensus about what was a good idea. Since the beginning of modern architecture, the idea of the individual being able to make something that is epoch making or is controversial, is somehow in the modern project. So in a way the idea of consensus about what the shape of the city might be has gone, it doesn’t exist anymore, which is a pity.

Were you ever conscious when you were doing these recordings of someone actually listening to it, were you thinking about the audience?
No, you’ve just raised that now [both laugh]. No, I just assume this is some idle chat that will go in a casket and get buried in the dungeons of the British Library and never surface again, so the idea that somebody might be interested in reading this – or hearing this – is quite alarming really [both laugh].

And do you think by me not being an architect, being outside the profession, made you explain things that you would have thought of as being self evident?
Yes, very much so, I think the idea of spending quite a lot of your time explaining to clients why something’s a good idea is the public side of being an architect. And somehow that process of description and of justification goes all the way back to when we were students at the AA [Architectural Association] many years ago when you had to present your work verbally. There was an aspect of the presentation that was very much like being a barrister: you had to make the case. I think certainly my generation at the AA were schooled to do that. So the process of talking to you and privatizing a little bit of that courtroom rhetoric enters into it a bit because I want to convince you about something too. [Both laugh].

How much opportunity do you think architects have to talk about their work to a wide audience?
Well it occurs in public committees, when you go to a planning committee you have to do that but it doesn’t happen enough. I often think the history of architecture should be a secondary school subject and isn’t. And if it was I think we would have a culture not unlike in Italy where there’s a broad understanding of architectural culture and visual things. I mean maybe that’s just Italy but there are 20,000 students of architecture in Venice, of which only a tiny percentage have an interest in being practitioners. They go to school and they learn about the history of architecture, in the way you learn about the history of politics in eighteenth century England; and if it was taught I think the communication would be much more open and beneficial, we’d maybe know what shape we’d want our cities to be.

I think one of the things that I found when I started these recordings was the number of qualities you need to have in order to be a successful architect: design seemed to be just one element alongside tenacity, diplomacy, managerial skills, and I’m hoping that these recordings will bring all that out. Your motive for the work in most cases is to make something better, to bring improvement, to make people’s lives better. It’s very evangelical, it’s not about making money. So I think this is a good point you’re making of the various qualities you have to have. I think the architect has to be able to draw, has to be able to write, has to be able to talk, has to be able to deal with the difficulties, so it’s quite a lot of talents that are required and some people learn those talents through crisis or through the need to survive. And the need to survive is huge, I mean it’s a massive challenge in these recession driven moments, you know.

How easy is it to articulate the evolution of the design process and should you?
I think it’s very important at certain times to describe the evolution of a design. It’s important to be able to suggest that the design has not come from dreaming it up. Good ideas are fought for, struggled, worked extremely hard for and that doesn’t come easily in my opinion. There is something about the evolution of a design which I think is a fascinating process of struggle and getting it right. And some people say, ‘Oh they win these competitions, they’ve dreamt it up,’ and I say, ‘Don’t be an idiot, it’s hard won and to win the competition is one thing, building it is quite something else’. And the design continues to evolve in that process, so it’s not just doing the drawings and hey presto there it is. In the process of construction and in the process of negotiation, the process of cutting the budget and dealing with representations from the public, it’s part of that long gestation period of, as you described it, the evolution of a design. I think that needs to be recorded, and talked about, because it’s a bumpy road and it’s not a push-over.

Edward Jones.

‘There’s a degree of honesty about it which I like.’
Edward Jones, architect, with Niamh Dillon, Project Interviewer, National Life Stories
**Nina Bawden (1925–2012)**

**Interviewed by Sarah O’Reilly, 2007–2008**

“I was born on 19 January, 1925, at number 10, Kilmartin Road, Goodmayes, Essex. It was a very small semi-detached house with two rooms on the ground floor, three bedrooms upstairs and a long narrow garden at the back. My mother rather despised the neighbourhood. She said it was very lower middle class and boring and the people spoke badly. She was a country girl and had rather high standards of speech and deportment. She said nobody who was anybody would ever live here. I invented stories about people who lived in those lace-curtained houses. I turned them into burglars and serial murderers and things like that. I told some of these stories to my best friend, who told her mother, who told mine, and she was very cross with me and said ‘You shouldn’t put around lies about our neighbours’, and I said ‘They’re not lies, they’re stories’. A story is real. It’s a lie is real in that it has its own reality. A lie is when you say ‘No, that is not a red van going by, it’s a blue one’.”

In adulthood, Bawden’s writing career began with a joint project:

“To start with, with a friend of mine, we decide to write the sort of sentimental novel that was sold on station bookstalls. There was a firm called Piccadilly Publications Ltd that sold these rubbish books. So we decided we could write a rubbish book quite easily. We wrote a novel called Spring Will Not War! which was unbelievably dreadful. We sent it to several publishers, all of whom wrote back rejecting it, but quite kindly. So I set about writing a novel myself, and I decided the best kind of novel that I could write would be a sort of thriller, a detective novel. It was called Who Calls the Tune. I sent it off to a publisher and I had a telegram back at the end of the week asking me to come in. (The publishing house) was William Collins, and I arrived half an hour early, shaking in my shoes. I was shown into a nice room with this tall, elegant, aristocratic gentleman, much older than me – though of course he wasn’t much older, he was slightly further on in his twenties than I was – and his name was George Hardinge. He was my publisher for thirty years. He accepted the book and I couldn’t believe it. It didn’t often happen to people, I understood. It was wonderful. Unexpected.

“While I was in the room Billy Collins, who owned William Collins, came in and said ‘Oh, this is the new find is it? What’s she doing for lunch I wonder?’ Speaking about me in the third person as if I wasn’t in the room. And I was so frightened at the idea of being taken out to lunch by these two grand gentlemen that I said ‘No no I’m terribly, terribly sorry I’ve got to go back to Surrey, I’ve got a dentist appointment’. Which was a lie.”

The Secret Passage, Bawden’s first book for children, was published in 1962:

“When I wrote my first children’s book, my agent said ‘Well, dear, don’t know. It starts off in Africa – who’s interested in Africa?’ – and the mother dies of pneumonia, the father goes off deranged with grief and the children have to go back to England to live with a difficult old woman who runs a boarding house. I’m not sure these are very suitable subjects for children’. And I said, quite crossly, ‘At least it’s not about rabbits wearing funny hats’. I assumed that nobody would publish it, and indeed it was turned down by publisher after publisher until Livia Gallanze, who’d decided to start a children’s list, read it on a plane going to America and not only bought it herself but sold it in America too … I wrote for children by chance actually. I think we were moving house and my husband Austin said ‘Why don’t you write a book for children? It won’t take so long (as an adult novel).’ I thought ‘I couldn’t possibly do that; I thought you had to be a specialist, I mean a teacher or a librarian or something. But anyway, I thought I would have a try. It took me just as long as an adult novel. I didn’t write simple sentences, I wrote as I would write for an adult, only taking the child’s perspective, and as I remembered my own childhood very clearly it was rather nice to do that. Suddenly, writing directly for children, I was using up all of my life, so to speak.”

They were prospects that Dennis made the most of, in spite of the steep learning curve that greeted him at Farnborough:

“I realised it was a tough school. I realised I was miles behind the others. I passed the exam probably because I was struggling so. However, I can’t tell you the resolve that I put upon myself not to cheat, not to slack, to become abnormally diligent because I wouldn’t have another chance. And so much so that I was almost a one track mind. I finished my apprenticeship on my birthday, twenty-first birthday, which was 21st July, 1942. And to my amazement the aeronodynamics department at Farnborough took me on as a junior scientific assistant.”

_Cited by Sarah O'Reilly_
Tim Rix (1934–2012)
Interviewed by Sue Bradley, 2004–2005

What do you think reading meant for you?

It meant living in a different world or, in the case of Arthur Ransome, a world I would have loved to be in. I think it was just voracious curiosity; I wanted to know more and more [of] what life was about.

At Radley I started to read poetry, and I became obsessed – still am – with T S Eliot. There was a man called Charles Wrench who taught me English; he was beginning to inspire the idea in me that poetry might be important, and I happened to come across T S Eliot's Collected Poems in the [school] library when I was fifteen. I just opened it, and The Waste Land was the first thing: 'April is the cruellest month, breeding lilacs ...' I couldn’t believe what I was reading, it was so wonderful.

What time of year was it when you read it?

I suspect it was in the winter; I remember the afternoon light into this really rather lovely library, and you were allowed to sit there and read.

How did you see your future at that age?

When the Warden [headmaster] of Radley asked about this – ‘What do you want to do, Rix?’ – I said, ‘I want to be a publisher.’ I knew that T S Eliot was a publisher as well as a poet – I knew that [he] had worked somewhere called Fabers – and I think this may have worked its way into my mind and the idea of a publisher had somehow stuck there and suddenly popped out when he asked that question.

As somebody who was so enthused by literature, how did you become an educational publisher?

By accident, because I joined Longman. I had written to all these publishers, and I just happened to know Leo Cooper – Jilly’s husband – who was at Longman. He got me an interview, and the man who interviewed me thought I would make a good person [for] the overseas educational publishing. I started as a proof reader, then I went out as an educational rep. It didn’t take literature out of it; I was selling some rather good books about English literature. I would sit in my Morris Minor in the lunch hour between visiting schools, and read the books I was carrying around.

Leonard Rosoman (1913–2012)
Interviewed by Cathy Courtney, 1994–2006

“Read up a great deal about it. I found Becket was quite old before he went into the church, he was a great guy for the ladies, a young man about town, and I found that very interesting. The whole painting grew whilst it was being painted. For example, the head of Christ, all these chaps sitting in pews, they weren’t definitely decided when I actually started the thing. I was playing with ideas even when the thing was fairly well advanced... With a thing of this scale – we’re dealing with over a hundred feet long – your mind changes all the time and there are a lot of demands made of you. It’s not just settling the thing and then rigidly carrying something out. For example, once I’d finished two or three sections, when I was up on the scaffolding I couldn’t see it, nor could any of my assistants – the perspective was so acute running along, you couldn’t get away from it. What I had to do was get the gang of chaps working with me to take down a whole section of the planks of the scaffolding and then we would all go and lie on our backs on the floor of the chapel and discuss it. You were painting blind at a bit and it was really very complicated. Even the side panels, which are just panels of colour textured a little bit, I had to look at those very carefully. Some of those side panels are painted over five times, five separate colours underneath.”

“The most frightening part was when I remembered I had a deadline about the scaffolding coming down. The scaffolding completely concealed it, and to see it for the first time [as one piece] after being in there for six months was a major shock. I remember getting up very early one morning and going down there and I knew that once the scaffolding was down, that was it, I couldn’t touch it. And that was really quite frightening. It was a slow business, to take that amount of scaffolding down took nearly all day. I stood up there and peeped out watching it come down with my heart in my mouth, but of course it was very exciting seeing this. I was in a state where I couldn’t like it or dislike it. It was like looking at something absolutely new... as if somebody else had done it almost.”

Leonard Rosoman was an official War Artist in the 1940s. A tutor at the Royal College of Art (1957–78), he numbered David Hockney amongst his pupils, and in 1969 was elected to the Royal Academy. During Robert Runcie’s period as Archbishop of Canterbury, Leonard was commissioned to paint the vaulted ceiling of the private chapel at Lambeth Palace. ‘From Darkness to Light’ moves from a depiction of Pope Gregory commissioning St Augustine to come to England in AD 597 via scenes from the life of Thomas à Becket and Matthew Parker, to a crescendo of colour in the final panel. Here he recalls working on the ceiling.

“It’s a plaster ceiling and first of all it had to be primed with acrylic gesso primer, it’s a lovely surface to paint on... it was of paramount importance that I made this beginning of the whole saga very simple, almost monochromatic in black and white, a lot of linear interpretations of drapery, a lot of form. Obviously, the Pope’s feet are not any attempt to portray them as being realistic and so on. It establishes a launching pad towards the other panels in the whole set. And then in the end – the only venture into what one might call religion – the head of Christ in flames and on each side the lion and the lamb. “
### Statement of Financial Activities

Year Ended 31 December 2012

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<tr>
<td><strong>INCOMING RESOURCES</strong></td>
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<td>Donations</td>
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<td>17,362</td>
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<td>346,340</td>
<td>295,515</td>
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<td>258,940</td>
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<td>Governance and administration</td>
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<td>Realised investment gain/(loss)</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Transfers</td>
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<td>33,153</td>
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<td>93,474</td>
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<td>Brought forward</td>
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<td>473,205</td>
<td>1,102,384</td>
<td>1,116,050</td>
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<td>Carried forward</td>
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<td>539,678</td>
<td>1,195,858</td>
<td>1,102,384</td>
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### Balance Sheet at 31 December 2012

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<td><strong>FIXED ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td>Investments</td>
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<td><strong>CURRENT ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td>Cash at bank and in hand</td>
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<td><strong>CREDITORS: Amounts falling due within one year</strong></td>
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<td><strong>NET CURRENT ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</strong></td>
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<td>1,102,384</td>
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<td>Unrestricted fund</td>
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<td>Restricted fund</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>1,195,858</td>
<td>1,102,384</td>
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</table>

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

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

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

**OPINION**

In our opinion:
- the financial statements give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company’s affairs as at 31 December 2012 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure for the year then ended;
- the financial statements have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice;
- the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

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

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) [150 interviews]

City Lives explores the inner world of Britain's financial capital. Support from the City enabled NLS to make detailed recordings between 1987 and 1997 with representatives from the Stock Exchange, the merchant and clearing banks, the commodities and futures markets, law and accounting firms, and many other generalists and specialists. The collection has also included interviews with 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 http://sounds.bl.uk. NLS has also worked with the Holocaust Survivors’ Centre to archive and provide access to their collection of over 150 recordings (C830).

General Interviews (C464) [188 interviews]

This collection comprises diverse interviews additional to the main NLS projects. Interviewees are drawn from many fields including education, medicine, retail, dance and engineering, and embrace scientists, notably Joseph Rotblat, Max Perutz and Aaron Klug; and leading designers such as Terence Conran and members of Pentagram.

Artists’ Lives (C466) [1383 interviews]

Artists’ Lives was initiated in 1990 and is run in association with Tate Archive. Collectively the interviews form an extraordinary account of the rich context in which the visual arts have developed in Britain during the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries. Artists’ Lives provides visual artists with a forum in which their lives and work can be documented in their own words for posterity. We are grateful to all our sponsors but in particular to the steady support of the Henry Moore Foundation, The Fleming Collection, the Rooftop Hopkins Foundation and The Yale Center for British Art. A double CD, Connecting Lives: Artists Talk about Drawing, was published in 2010 funded by the Rooftop Hopkins Foundation. The audio from the CD is available online at http://www.bl.uk/nls/artists/drawing.

Artists’ Lives Advisory Committee

Sonia Boyce, Sir Alan Bowness, Dr Penelope Curtis, Caroline Cuthbert, Adrian Glew, Professor Mel Gooding (Chair), Lisa Le Feuvre, Richard Morphet CBE, Clive Philpott, Margaret B Thornton and Dr Andrew Wilson.

Architects’ Lives (C467) [106 interviews]

Architects’ Lives began in 1995 and documents architects working in Britain and those in associated professions. In addition to British collection, and in association with the National Trust at Willow Road, NLS made a series of recordings collecting memories of Emo Goldfinger which resulted in a co-published CD Passionate Rationalism (2004). NLS has also partnered English Heritage to document Eitham Palace and the Courtauld family (C1056:13 interviews).

Architects’ Lives Advisory Committee

Colin Amery, Catherine Croft, Ian Gow, Dr Elain Harwood, Dr Alan Powers and Professor Andrew Saint.

Fawcett Collection (C468) [14 interviews]

In connection with the Women’s Library (formerly known as the Fawcett Society) this collection of interviews recorded between 1990 and 1992 charts the lives of pioneering career women, each of whom 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 between 1991 and 1992 with employees from one of Britain’s largest yet least understood industries. Interviewees range from top managers and trade unionists to technicians, machinists, smithers and more. British Steel General Steelkels Division sponsored both the project and the Lives in Steel CD (BL, 1993).

Oral History of the British Press (C538) [19 interviews]

This collection of interviews with key press and newspaper figures was extended with support from the British Library as part of the popular Front Page exhibition in 2006.
A CD, The Writing Life: Authors Speak, featuring extracts from the collection, was published by the British Library (2011).

Authors’ Lives Advisory Committee
Jamie Andrews, Stephen Cleary, Martyn Goff CBE, Mark Le Fanu, Dame Penelope Lively CBE (chair), Deborah Moggach, Martin Pick, Lawrence Sill and Jonathan Taylor CBE.

The Legacy of the English Stage Company
(C1316) [13 interviews]

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

An Oral History of the Water Industry
(C1364) [30 interviews]

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

An Oral History of Barings
(C1367) [27 interviews]

In partnership with The Baring Archive, this project focuses on the history of Barings throughout the twentieth century, providing important insights into life and work within the bank – including stories from the family and those working at all levels within the company. This complements City Lives and documents the bank up to and including its collapse and subsequent acquisition by ING in 1995. The project concluded in 2013 with a booklet and exhibition.

An Oral History of British Science
(C1379) [96 interviews]

This project was initiated in November 2009 in collaboration with the British Library’s History of Science specialists, and is run in association with the Science Museum and generously funded by the Arcadia Fund and the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851. 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 200 life story interviews, averaging 10–15 hours in length, the project also includes 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, Biomedicine (currently unfunded) and Cosmologies (currently unfunded).

Full interviews are available online at http://sounds.bl.uk.

Ferry (chair), Professor Dame Julia Higgins, Dr Maja Kominko, Professor Sir Harry Kroto, John Lynch CBE, Professor Chris Rapley CBE, Dr Simone Turchetti.

An Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry in the UK
(C1495) [7 interviews]

Contributing to NLS’s documentation of the utilities in the UK, this project collects the memories and experiences of those who worked in the industry at various levels, spanning nationalisation in the 1940s, privatisation in 1990-5, and themes such as the changing technologies of generation, the increase in scale of coal-fired power stations, the shift to gas during the 1990s ‘dash for gas’, and the development of renewable energy sources since the 1970s. We are grateful to Hodson and Ludmila Thornber for their generous support.

Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry Advisory Committee
Sir John Baker, Professor Leslie Hannah, Dr Sally Harrocks, David Jefferies, Professor Stephen Littlechild, Hodson Thornber, Ludmila Thornber.

An Oral History of Talking Therapists in the UK
(C1553) [6 interviews]

Six pilot interviews, recorded in 2012-13, explore the development in post-war Britain of therapies that do not use pharmaceutical or other medical forms of intervention to alleviate mental distress, but depend entirely on verbal exchanges between client and therapist. A future project will interview a wide range of professionals in this complex and diverse sector.

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Front cover image: Leonard Rosoman executing his painting From Darkness to Light on the vaulted ceiling of Lambeth Palace Chapel in 1988. (See Last Words, page 27). Photo anon.

Back cover image: Paul Spowers’s ‘Cheap Automata Shop’. Courtesy of Paul Spowers.
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