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NATIONAL

Life stories

Review and Accounts

2023/2024



National Life Stories

When many people think about history, they think about books and documents, castles or stately homes. In fact history is all around us, in our own families and communities, in the living memories and experiences of older people. Everyone has a story to tell about their life which is unique to them. Whilst some people have been involved in momentous historical events, regardless of age or importance we all have interesting life stories to share. Unfortunately, because memories die when people do, if we don't record what people tell us, that history can be lost forever.

National Life Stories (NLS) was established in 1987 and its mission is: 'To record and preserve a wide range of voices through in-depth biographical accounts, to make them available and inspire their use.' NLS is committed to recording testimonies that reflect the diverse nature of our society. We strive to make sure that our own structures encompass this diversity.

As an independent charitable trust within the Oral History Section of the British Library, NLS's key focus and expertise is oral history fieldwork. For over thirty-five years it has initiated a series of innovative interviewing programmes funded almost entirely from sponsorship, charitable and individual donations and voluntary effort. NLS receives no funding from government.

Each collection comprises recorded in-depth interviews of a high standard, plus content summaries to assist users and transcripts in some cases.

Alongside the British Library's other oral history holdings, which stretch back to the beginning of the 20th century, NLS's recordings form a unique and invaluable record of people's lives in Britain today.

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Chair's foreword



Photo © Bill Knight.

As you will see from this Review, 2023 was a stellar year for NLS, with an array of new interviews, innovative collaborations and wonderful scholarship, exemplified by the International Symposium on the Life Story in Oral History Practice that NLS hosted at the British Library last summer. It was a privilege to spend two days hearing reflections from international scholars, skilled members of the NLS team and – perhaps my highlight – the candid thoughts of interviewee Hew Locke. All of the papers and discussions from the Symposium are now available in our special free online edition of the journal Oral History. We thank the authors and the editors of the issue and the Oral History journal for making the publication possible.

The mood of the NLS team and Trustees changed markedly in the autumn as the British Library suffered

a major cyber-attack. I want to commend the NLS Team for their resilience and express my gratitude for the support of British Library colleagues which has enabled most ongoing project work to continue pretty seamlessly.

We pay tribute to Jennifer Wingate, one of NLS's founding Trustees and tireless supporters, as she has retired as a Trustee to become an NLS Advisor. Another long-serving NLS friend and former Trustee, Dorothy Sheridan, has decided to step back from her role as an Advisor. We send our hearty thanks to Jennifer and Dorothy, alongside my continued appreciation for the NLS team, partners, funders, Patrons, Trustees and Advisors.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Abramsky". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

Dame Jenny Abramsky
Chair of Trustees

Director's welcome



Photo © Bill Knight.

I'm proud that NLS has once again punched above its weight as a small charity to make an impact in 2023. The International Symposium was an intellectually stimulating event imbued with a wonderful collegiate atmosphere. I thank all of the speakers, fellow organisers and attendees for contributing to the event's success. The freely accessible online Oral History journal stemming from the Symposium is a must-read for scholars and practitioners today. Our interview programme continues to collect life stories from across the UK; we thank our team of interviewers, curators, archivists, project partners, Trustees, Advisors and donors, and of course the generosity of our interviewees who share their time with us to record their life stories.

With the autumn's cyber-attack on the British Library NLS has risen to meet a major challenge through exemplary teamwork, which enabled calm and practical decision making. We pay particular thanks to our colleagues within the wider Sound and Vision

department for their ongoing support, which has been emblematic of the strong decades-long partnership with the British Library. The work to rebuild the Library's IT infrastructure is well underway, but it will be a long road to restore all of the services and systems affected. We appreciate the patience and goodwill of our partners, interviewees and the research community as we navigate the road to recovery.

We hope that you enjoy the Review, which gives just a taste of the variety and depth of work which NLS conducts. You can keep up to date with the latest news on the Sound and Vision blog, and please do not hesitate to contact me and the team if you have any queries.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Stewart". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

Mary Stewart
Director

National Life Stories project highlights from 2023

Artists' Lives

Hester Westley, Project Director

Once small and localised, the British art world is now global and multi-centred. Despite this expanse of aesthetic tendencies and attitudes, the goals of **Artists' Lives** remain consistent with its founding mission: to capture an array of first-hand perspectives, from self-perceived 'outsiders' to those part of 'the establishment'. **Artists' Lives** is indebted to the interviewers who made recordings for us in 2023: Cathy Courtney, Kirstie Gregory, Rosa Kurowska Kyffin, Rachel Rose Smith and Hester Westley.

The voices of artists themselves are at the heart of this collection, but in our attempt to understand more fully the infrastructure of both the public and private spheres we also collect interviews with those who educate, support, champion, display, sell and care for the art of our time.

For the past two decades, the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) has offered annual funding to **Artists' Lives** to continue capturing the widest possible breadth of voices.

Our most recent YCBA-funded recording is with Tam Joseph. Joseph is being interviewed in his East London studio, a space described by Joseph as his 'springboard to the universe'. His life story takes us on a compelling journey with its origins in the river-crossed island of Dominica. Recounting with humour, pathos, and a profound engagement with history, Joseph moves from the personal to the political as he considers the intergenerational ramifications of displacement for migrant families and explores the wide-ranging sources of inspiration for his own art.

The Jerwood Foundation continues to be stalwart in its support of **Artists' Lives**. In the latest Jerwood-funded recording, Bhajan Hunjan reveals some of the challenges faced by diasporic artists practicing in the UK. Born in Kenya to Sikh parents, Hunjan came to the UK to study Fine Art before establishing her studio practice here. Recounting a life shaped by a quiet and resolute commitment to making art, Hunjan documents her own activism throughout the 1980s, as well as her role within historically important artist collectives.

Our other longstanding supporter and sponsor, The Henry Moore Foundation, has most recently funded the life story of Denise de Cordova. De Cordova's



Bhajan Hunjan. Photo © Bill Knight.

life story is rich in its discussion of metaphor and materiality, characteristics that define her sculptural practice. Working with different media including heavily embroidered drawings and printmaking, de Cordova exhibits her ceramic work under her *nom de plume* Amy Bird.

Artists' Lives owes this ongoing industry not only to the constant generosity of particular art organisations, but also to the belief of certain individuals. Chair of the **Artists' Lives** Advisory Committee Lubaina Himid has most recently facilitated the life story recording of Marlene Smith. Smith gives a lively account of her emerging consciousness of the politics of race as a Birmingham schoolgirl before her immersion in the activity of the Black Art Group in the 1980s, which unfolds against the current backdrop of Smith's renewed visibility in the contemporary art world.

Other **Artists' Lives** recordings completed this year include art critic and curator Sacha Craddock; art historian and curator Penelope Curtis; artists Hamish Fulton, Jann Haworth, Hew Locke and David Remfry; sculpture conservator Richard Rogers; and art critic Marina Vaizey.

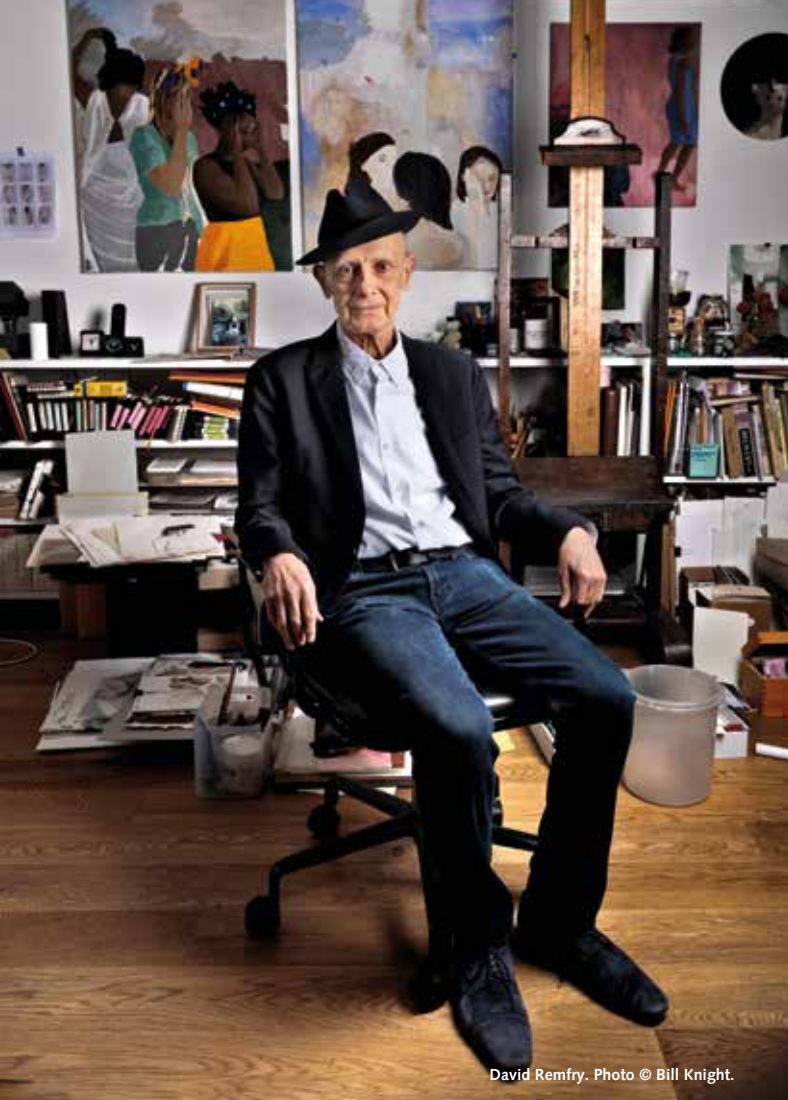
Ongoing recordings continue with artists Terry Atkinson, Sonia Boyce, Catherine Goodman, Celia Paul, Rose Wylie, Fabian Peake, and sculpture conservator Jackie Heuman.

NLS thanks the other valued valued **Artists' Lives** sponsors in 2024, including Victoria Miro, Gry Iverslien and the Gabo Trust.



Tam Joseph in his 'Barbican Arts Trust' studio, Walthamstow, East London. Photo: Hester Westley.





David Remfry. Photo © Bill Knight.



Marlene Smith. Photo © Bill Knight.



Denise de Cordova. Photo © Bill Knight.



Jann Haworth. Photo © Bill Knight.

Architects' Lives

Niamh Dillon, Project Director

Whilst each recording reflects the unique life course of the speaker, there are certain constants that feature within **Architects' Lives**. One of these is the formative experience of architectural education. In Niall McLaughlin's recent recording, he remembers his first weeks at University College Dublin [UCD] in the late 1970s:

It was like a dream of an architect's studio [...] white painted walls and white muslin at the windows. Shane [de Blacam] had come back from working in Louis Kahn's office in Philadelphia and had an idea of what a studio should be like; there was only one kind of pencil you could have, one kind of scale rule, one kind of pencil sharpener and we sat at ash trestle tables with Alvar Aalto stools, in a row, very ordered. We were all from the farms and the suburbs, we hadn't a clue about architecture [...] and we came into this very refined world.

– Niall McLaughlin (C467/163)

Within a short time, students began to understand architecture as a vocation. McLaughlin's memories are an interesting addition to those of tutors such as Ivor Smith, Jeremy Dixon and Ed Jones whose reflections document the atmosphere at UCD in the 1970s; a period which would produce architects who would go on to win prizes and shape cities. Education was to prove important to McLaughlin as he combined teaching at The Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL with the establishment of his own practice in the 1990s.

Architects' Lives documents those who have made a contribution across the nations and regions of the UK, but current recordings speak to key developments in London. Peter Rogers' interview brings a fresh perspective to our appreciation of Broadgate in the City of London. This was one of the most significant office developments of the 1980s in that it both reflected and responded to the financial deregulation occurring during that decade. Rogers recounts how he and his partner Stuart Lipton were influenced by American construction techniques in creating office space with large enough floorplans to accommodate the international banks, who were moving to London as a consequence of the 'Big Bang'. Rogers' recording also complements NLS's **City Lives** project.

Whilst Broadgate was one of the most significant developments of the 1980s – and in many ways embodied that period – the London Eye, designed by Julia Barfield and David Marks, was emblematic of London on the cusp of the new millennium. The pair met as students while campaigning for urban regeneration in south London in the 1970s, before working for Norman Foster and Richard Rogers. Barfield and Marks conceived and designed the Eye but also made it a reality and in the process returned some of the profit to the local community. Initially intended to mark the millennium, it has now become a much-loved part of the London skyline. Barfield's recording also highlights another strand within **Architects' Lives**: that of awareness and action in response to climate change. The practice was an early supporter and signatory of Architects' Declare, a network of architectural practices committed to addressing the climate and biodiversity emergency. In Keith Bradley and Peter Clegg's recently completed recordings, they document how responding to the climate was a constant thread through the practice from its earliest days, to the practice's involvement in Architects' Declare.

It is always rewarding to see the interviews that **Architects' Lives** creates in use in exhibitions and research. M J Long's interview was used extensively in *Portraits of a Practice: the Life and Work of M J Long* at the Architectural Association. *Max Fordham: Engineering Ideas, Engineering Change* at the Building Centre featured extracts from Fordham's interview on his childhood, early career and the foundations and ethos of his eponymous firm. Jeremy Dixon's lengthy recording was used in *Architectural Design of the Henry Moore Institute* and Michael Wilford was celebrated in *Building in Colour* at the German organisation STO. **Architects' Lives** Advisory Committee member Peter Murray used the life story recording of Peter Smithson in an article for the French magazine *As Found* – you can read more about Murray's experience of using the collection for research later in this Review.



Left: New Library, Magdalene College, by Niall McLaughlin Architects. Photo by Nick Kane; Right above: Julia Barfield and David Marks on the London Eye. Photo courtesy of Marks Barfield Architects; Right below: Broadgate Circle. Architects: Arup Associates (Peter Foggo). Photo taken in 2007, built 1985–89, City of London.



Environmental Collaboration in Practice: Oral History Interviews

Paul Merchant, Oral Historian and Researcher

National Life Stories has partnered with researchers at the University of Exeter who are studying forms of collaboration in past and present environmental work, as part of the RENEW programme, concerned with the UK's declining biodiversity, funded by NERC (Natural Environment Research Council). I am recording a mixture of life story and shorter topical interviews (covering particular periods of life and work) with scientists, naturalists, project managers and others whose work in nature conservation since the 1960s has involved collaboration between different fields of expertise, and between professionals and 'amateurs'.



Wildlife Watch 'Ozone Project' launch, Spring 1990. Mary Hollingsworth (back left), Sue Askew (back right), Bill Oddie (front with school children). Courtesy of Mary Hollingsworth.

Interviews with managers of biological records centres (Paul Harding, Martin Sanford), ecologists and naturalists (Pat Morris, Royal Holloway University; Alistair Burn, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology; Dawn Balmer, British Trust for Ornithology and Jim Asher, Butterfly Conservation) and managers of 'citizen science' projects (Janice Ansine, Open University; Mary Hollingsworth, the Wildlife Trusts) capture the huge and diverse networks of people engaged in monitoring the UK's wildlife.

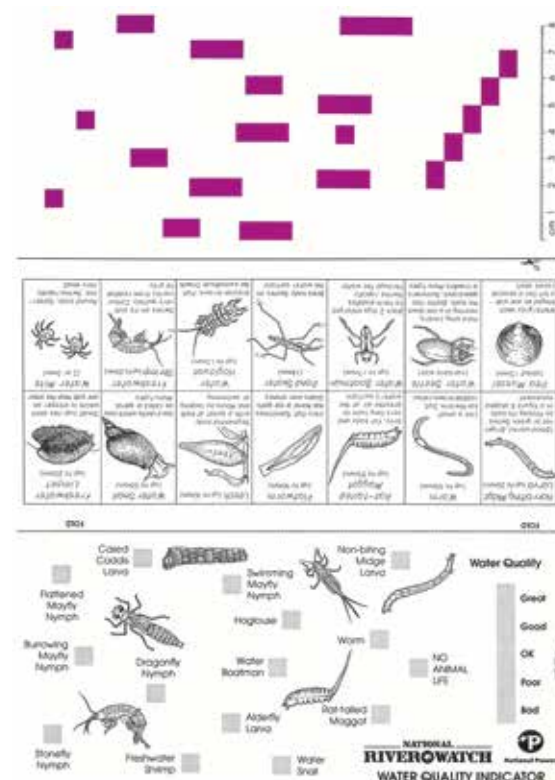
Other interviews explore the challenges and benefits of working across the boundaries between natural and social sciences (Claire Waterton, Steven Yearley, David Macdonald), between science and the arts (Sue Clifford, Common Ground) and between particular scientific fields such as biology and statistics (Stephen Baillie, William Sutherland) or invertebrate taxonomy and marine biology (Miranda Lowe, Natural History Museum). The experience of working on some of the earliest interdisciplinary research programmes funded by multiple research councils, such as 'Valuing Nature' and 'Rural Economy and Land Use', is described from the point of view of the research councils (Sir Ian Diamond), programme officers (Sunita Sarkar, Anne Liddon), academics (Jeremy Phillipson, Claire Waterton) and a

member of a local community involved in a particular project (Mike Potter, Rydale Flood Research Group).

As well as revealing ways in which collaboration has worked, or not worked, in the past – important for current efforts to tackle biodiversity loss and climate change – this collection of interviews documents important changes in approaches to 'nature conservation' in living memory. Former Senior Ecologist in the Greater London Council David Goode and Wildlife Trust officer Peter Shirley trace the development of interest in the wildlife of towns and cities from the 1970s, prefiguring what is now called a 'people in nature' approach. Judy Ling Wong (former director of the Black Environment Network) and Maxwell Ayamba (Sheffield Environment Network) give accounts of their work in highlighting forms of interest in nature beyond the world of mainstream environmental organisations, notably in minority ethnic communities.

I gave a paper at the Oral History Society Annual Conference in June and a pre-dinner talk at a 'Biodiversity Parliament' held at the National Trust's Head Office in November, both drawing on recordings for *Environmental Collaboration in Practice: Oral History Interviews*. We are delighted that a successful application for follow-on funding will allow the project to continue in partnership with RENEW for a further year.

More information about the RENEW programme ('Renewing biodiversity through a people-in-nature approach') is available on their website (renewbiodiversity.org.uk).



Cardboard water quality indicator tool used by participants in Wildlife Watch project 'National Riverwatch', 1990s. Courtesy of Mary Hollingsworth.

An Oral History of the Royal Academy of Music

Jessica Duchen and Joanna Pieters, Project Interviewers

An Oral History of the Royal Academy of Music continues to gather stories that illustrate the Academy's position at the heart of British musical life. Our interviewees have held multiple roles both within and outside the Academy, on public stages, in teaching rooms, recording studios and institutional offices, bringing to life the many facets of musical life in the past seven decades.

Harpist Skaila Kanga, who studied in the Junior and Senior Academy, later became Head of Harp at the Academy and is still performing today. Over the course of her career she has worked with musicians from Frank Sinatra to the London Symphony Orchestra and has played on over 1200 film and TV scores. Here she recalls recording a duet with acclaimed Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti and what it felt like to hear him sing up close:

[The porters] carry the harp all the way up the spiral staircase to the balcony. I sit there waiting, he [Pavarotti] comes. So he comes with his conductor, there's only two of us, but he has to be guided by his conductor. We don't speak, he doesn't look at me [...] The conductor is [...] waving his arms right in my face, and there's Luciano Pavarotti singing full voice, two feet away from me [...] It was so deafening I thought I was going to burst my eardrum [...] I listened to it [the recording] for the first time in about 45 years and it's good, it's fine, but at the time it was traumatic beyond words.

– Skaila Kanga (C1967/06)

Other stories vividly combine the legacy of the Academy with the concerns of the 21st century. Lutenist Elizabeth Kenny recalls the culture shock of arriving at the Academy at the age of 13 to a central staircase full of historic busts, and reflects on the impact of that experience on her current role as Dean of Students:

I didn't like these angry guys with beards glaring at me, that I knew were famous but I didn't have a clue who they were [...] I think a lot about that, how we use our institutional history, who's included in that, who's excluded [...] But I also didn't want them to change it for me [...] Nobody wants to be included if they feel the environment is being watered down.

– Elizabeth Kenny (C1967/07)

The project will continue interviewing into 2025 and we will be supplementing the audio recordings with a small number of video recollections. NLS thanks all the interviewees, the supportive staff at the Academy and the project funders John and Helen Burgess.



Elizabeth Kenny. Photo courtesy elizabethkenny.co.uk/gallery.

Historic Houses: An Oral History

Niamh Dillon, Project Director

In November 2023, Historic Houses celebrated its 50th anniversary. During the Annual General Meeting there were talks on the Past, Present and Future, and awards for restoration, gardens, sustainability, education and collections. The atmosphere was positive and forward looking. It was a far cry from the exhibition *The Destruction of the Country House* held at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1974. The exhibition featured a Hall of Destruction, highlighting the hundreds of houses lost since the Second World War, accompanied by the sound of collapsing timbers and a wrecking ball. It was a call to action for which the Historic Houses Association was set up to respond, by providing advice, support and representation to ensure the survival of these houses.

This capsule project of six recordings explores the experiences of those involved in Historic Houses over the last fifty years. One year after the V&A exhibition, Robert Parker, then a 20-year-old student at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester, discovered he had unexpectedly inherited Browsholme Hall, a large house and estate in Lancashire.

To say that it was in a deteriorated state would be an understatement. My father's diary records, it was unfit to live in [...] there was no heating, the water supply was full of E.coli, there was no kitchen. It needed a complete overhaul.

– Robert Parker (C2016/03)

Yet, undaunted, the Parker family camped out in a couple of rooms and proceeded slowly to make the house habitable. Fifty years on and Browsholme Hall is restored and happily occupied by the Parker family. Fortunately the collection of artefacts – from clothing worn in the Civil War to paintings by JWM Turner – remains. The Parker family's story illustrates much of the experience of owners of historic houses, from often dire circumstances in the middle years of the 20th century to greater optimism now. As Robert Parker points out, there is a need to be adaptable and resourceful; Browsholme Hall now hosts weddings and corporate entertaining as well as welcoming visitors.

Whilst the houses themselves are of undoubted historical and architectural interest, it is the stories of the families who inhabit them which are really compelling. This project allows us to see behind the listed exteriors to have greater understanding of those who occupied these properties. These historic houses visibly demonstrate the change in fortunes: the political ebb and flow which allowed them to expand and then contract in the 20th century. Dorothy Abel Smith, who grew up on the Woodhall Estate in Hertfordshire, recalls

being taken to a house sale as a child at the nearby Panshanger, where

they were selling everything, from the coal scuttles to the cushions, it was very poignant

– Dorothy Abel Smith (C2016/01)

The Abel Smiths' main house had been leased to Heath Mount school in the 1930s, while the family remained on the estate. Informed by this background, Abel Smith was keen to introduce interested groups to historic houses and initiated a programme of tours first in the UK and then overseas.

This project prompts us to consider how we think about home, the intersection between private worlds and public spaces, and how families navigate the two. It also offers an insight into the collections held within the houses, from small family heirlooms to items of great historical significance. Historic houses were often originally designed to sit within expansive landscapes; many of these landscapes either no longer support the house, or have been sold. Therefore this project brings a new perspective on how land was managed and viewed as viable in Britain over the last century and how this is approached in the 21st century.



Dorothy Abel Smith. Photo © Bill Knight.

Other project news

Two books featuring chapters discussing life story interviews recorded for **An Oral History of Farming, Land Management and Conservation in Post-War Britain** were published in 2023. Paul Merchant and Sally Horrocks together with John Martin wrote on the sociability of scientific knowledge exchange in British farming for *Planting Seeds of Knowledge: Agriculture and Education in Rural Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Berghahn Books). Paul Merchant contributed a chapter on humans and birds on British farms in the second half of the 20th century to *Winged Worlds: Common Spaces of Avian-Human Lives* (Routledge). The Farming project was generously funded by The Arcadia Fund.

Elizabeth Wright has completed a recording with theatre designer Martin Morley for **An Oral History of Theatre Design**. The concluding session covers the period prior to his retirement in 2010, including designing the Welsh children's classic, *Llyfr Mawr y Plant*, the final production created by Theatre Gwynedd, and television design work including recreating a traditional North Wales pub. Martin reflects on his life since retirement including his interest in painting and drawing, travel and creating a website documenting his career in design.

For *An Oral History of British Photography*, Elizabeth is currently interviewing John Haynes and Clive Barda, both of whom specialise in photographing theatre and performance. Recent recordings with John Haynes cover his experiences of photographing the premiere of Edward Bond's controversial play *Saved* at the Royal Court Theatre, the work of playwright David Hare with Joint Stock theatre company, and productions by Mike Leigh at Hampstead Theatre. John describes the process of creating the book and exhibition of his work, *Changing Stages* (1986), and reflects on developments in photographic technology and processing. In the first sessions of his recording, Clive Barda details his early life in Alexandria and his family's return to England. He recalls his discovery of photography, early documentary work including a trip to Romania to photograph the painted monasteries of Moldavia and the start of his career photographing theatre performances and musicians, beginning with Welsh Harpist Susan Drake.

Also added to *An Oral History of British Photography* are two life stories recorded by Shirley Read. In early 2023 Shirley completed her recording with curator and collector Terence Pepper, who worked at the National Portrait Gallery from 1975 to 2014 where he helped to bring photography to the forefront of the Gallery's exhibition policy. Shirley also interviewed photographer Michael Ann Mullen, who was a member of prominent feminist groups The Hackney Flashers and Format Photo



Curator Terence Pepper on original 1960s studio chair, which was on temporary loan before being accepted by V&A Museum furniture collection. Photo courtesy of Terence Pepper.

Agency, later working with the Greater London Arts Association and the Arts Council before becoming a lecturer at Middlesex University. Michael Ann was also a long-time advisor and interviewer for *An Oral History of British Photography*.

Daphne Jackson Fellow Dr Kimberley Chandler has completed the first year of her two-year Fellowship with London South Bank University. Following a period of close listening to recordings in the **Crafts Lives** collection, Kimberley has selected nine individual accounts of working motherhood to form the basis of a monograph, *Making Mothers*. She has written a proposal for publishers, mapping the scope of the book and describing her approach to transcription which aims to retain the unique character and 'voice' of each interviewee. Kimberley is on maternity leave in 2024 and will return in early 2025.

Graphic Designer Mike Dempsey was recorded by Wendy Rickard for **Design Lives**. Mike's long and industrious career in design saw him made a Royal Designer for Industry in 1994, spending a period as the Master of the Faculty of Royal Designers for Industry from 2005 to 2007. Mike regularly interviews other Royal Designers for Industry in his *RDInsights* podcast series, which is also being archived at the British Library.



Anthony Barnett with interviewer Emmeline Ledgerwood. Photo courtesy of Anthony Barnett.

Emmeline Ledgerwood recorded the life story of Anthony Barnett, founder of openDemocracy and a long-standing campaigner for constitutional reform in the UK, particularly through the Charter 88 campaign that was launched at the end of the 1980s. This interview for the NLS **General Interviews** collection complements the deposit of Anthony Barnett's papers in the British Library's Contemporary Manuscripts collections.

In December 2023 Emmeline was delighted to receive an award from the Royal Society's Lisa Jardine scheme to support her archival research into an aspect of the British Library's institutional history. This scheme encourages early career researchers to exploit history of science collections in pursuing their research. Emmeline is exploring how the National Lending Library for Science and Technology (the original library built at Boston Spa in the early 1960s) supported the circulation of Russian-language scientific literature during the Cold War period. She will be looking at material in the British Library Corporate Archive, the National Archives and papers in the Royal Society collections to explore how relationships between library staff across borders facilitated this circulation of knowledge despite geopolitical tensions.

Members of the NLS team collaborated with project partners at the History of Parliament Trust in hosting an event in the House of Lords in November 2023 to promote the Trust's oral history project, which is archived at the British Library. *The History of Parliament Oral History Project* records interviews with former MPs. At the event, interviewees Baroness Estelle Morris and Lord Robert Hayward spoke about their experiences of recording a life story interview and what they valued about having the opportunity to reflect on their personal and political careers in this way.

PhD candidate Amy Crinnion continues to work on her project entitled *Listening to Listeners: An Oral History of Family Therapy*. This AHRC-funded project in partnership with the University of Essex examines the development of family therapy in the UK between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, tracing how 'working with families' became 'family therapy' across different professions involved in the emotional ecosystems of the family. Following a successful PhD upgrade meeting in summer 2023, Amy has been further familiarising

herself with archival material on family therapy held across a range of institutions such as The Wellcome Collection, The London Archives, The Freud Museum, and The National Archives. Alongside this archival research she has been preparing to start life story interviews for the project. Amy has secured university ethics approval and has been thinking forensically about the information she hopes to draw out in the interviews.

Julia Volkmar – PhD student and MSCA Cofund CITIGENS Early Stage Researcher – submitted her thesis, entitled *Archives and Archivists in Transitional Justice: Perspectives from Eastern Germany and Northern Ireland*. We congratulate Julia for successfully defending her thesis in her viva in April 2024. Her PhD project focused on the impact of archives and archivists on the theory and practice of transitional justice, based on 28 oral history interviews which will shortly be deposited at the British Library. In conducting in-depth interviews with archivists across the archival landscapes of Eastern Germany post-reunification and Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement, Julia examined how far archivists aid the processes of dealing with the past. This includes activist archivists in community archives, as well as national archivists, church archivists, and archivists working in arts, military, and memorialisation archives. The thesis has highlighted the contributions of archival records to achieving judicial accountability and in furthering reconciliation.

Cathy Courtney completed her recording with Ann Jefferson, fellow and tutor in French at New College, Oxford 1987–2015. Professor Jefferson's most recent book is *Nathalie Sarraute: A Life Between* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2020). Jefferson's recording is part of the NLS **General Interviews** collection. Cathy began a recording with The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, for **Leaders of National Life**, which she plans to continue in 2024. For both these interviews recording sessions took place whilst the speakers sat for portraits painted by Eileen Hogan.



Ann Jefferson. Portrait by Eileen Hogan 2023.

People news

We are delighted to announce that Cathy Courtney was awarded an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours 2023 for her work as Project Director for NLS, in particular for **Artists' Lives**. This is a wonderful recognition of Cathy's amazing contribution to the field by pioneering the long life story methodology and recording the life stories of artists and so many others. NLS, our team, our practice and methodology have all benefitted so much from Cathy's extraordinary input.

After two and a half years with the Oral History team, Hannah Tame left the British Library in September 2023 to take up the post of Museum Archivist at the National Army Museum. Hannah spent 18 months as the cataloguer for the *Voices of our National Health Service* collection, followed by a year cataloguing the audio visual component of the Tony Benn Archive. The team thank Hannah for her hard work and wish her the best in her new role.

With thanks to the British Library Hidden Collections fund, Grace Johnston joined the team for 10 months to continue the cataloguing of the audio visual component of the Tony Benn Archive. Grace came to the Oral History team on secondment from the Library's Listening and Viewing Service, where she provided expert assistance to Library visitors wishing to access oral histories and other sound archive content.

At the beginning of 2024 Daphne Jackson Fellow Kimberley Chandler went on maternity leave, and baby Ted safely arrived in February. We wish Kimberley a happy maternity leave and look forward to her return to her Fellowship in 2025.

Charlie Morgan supervised two placements in the Oral History department. Continuing NLS's long association with the MA in Archives and Records Management at University College London, Aiden Chan joined the team in summer 2023 to catalogue the collection *Memories of Ceremonies at Key Transition Points in Life*. Hannah James Louwse completed digitisation, cataloguing and rights status audits for the *National Trust Sound Archive* as part of a Northern Bridge Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership Placement Scheme. Aiden and Hannah were welcome additions to the department and their work will ensure both collections can be made more widely available to researchers.

Dorothy Sheridan, a valued NLS Advisor and former Trustee, announced after the 2024 AGM that she would leave her role as an NLS Advisor. We send heartfelt thanks on behalf of everyone at NLS for her many years of support and wise advice.

Longstanding NLS Trustee Jennifer Wingate has stepped down from her position on the NLS Board. On behalf



NLS Trustee Jennifer Wingate. Photo courtesy of Jennifer Wingate.

of the NLS team and the Board of Trustees past and present, we thank Jennifer for her many years of service to National Life Stories as a founding Trustee. Jennifer has been ever present for NLS, as a skilled interviewer, excellent fundraiser, supportive Patron and champion of our work. We are delighted Jennifer will remain an NLS Advisor, as our debt to her is impossible to quantify.

Former NLS Director and Trustee Rob Perks adds the following:

'From the very beginnings of National Life Stories (or National Life Story Collection as it was known in those days) Jennifer has been a warm and generous enthusiast for the charity and what we do. At times that has been through direct donations and organising fundraising events (such as the special Richard III film charity premiere), but most importantly through her role as a founding Trustee and ambassador over nearly four decades. She was the key instigator of **The Living Memory of the Jewish Community** on the Holocaust, one of our largest and still most-used collections, for which she also demonstrated her marvellous listening skills as an interviewer. We have a great deal to thank her (and her husband Roger) for, not least introducing us to Martyn Goff who, as our Chair for eight years, helped transform the charity's finances, a position cemented by his successor Sir Nicholas Goodison (another associate of Jennifer's). Although she's stepping down as a Trustee I know she will be there when we need her and I, for one, find that enormously reassuring.'

Training news

Camille Johnston, Training Coordinator

In 2023 the National Life Stories and Oral History Society Training Liaison Group delivered almost 100 oral history training courses to more than 800 individuals.

Our in-person training programme expanded as we continue to build back our offer of in-person courses following the Covid-19 pandemic, with courses offered monthly at the British Library in London and one course delivered at Central Library in Manchester. Online training by Zoom video call also continued throughout 2023, with participants joining from around the UK and internationally.

For the first time since the pandemic we have seen a considerable shift in demand for in-person training, with 53% of participants joining an in-person course in London or Manchester. In response, we are pleased to announce that several new in-person UK training locations will be launched in 2024, including Leeds Art Gallery.

What does the training include?

The courses on offer range from introductory programmes to specialist and subject specific training. Our most popular course, *Introduction to Oral History*, provides a practical overview of how to do an oral history interview with sessions on equipment, approaching interviewees, ethics and the UK legal context for collecting testimony. *Archival Management of Oral History Collections* is also pitched at an introductory level, but in this case tailored for archivists. Similarly, the *Introduction to Data Protection Legislation (GDPR) for Oral Historians Workshop* is designed for anybody who plans to provide access to oral history recordings, whether they're working within a museum or archive context, as a researcher, publisher or in a freelance capacity.

Our specialist training courses are designed to build on participants' existing knowledge, whether as oral historians – *Advanced Oral History Workshop* – writers – *Transcript to Script: Turning Oral History into Plays for Stage and Radio* – or project managers – *Designing and Planning your Oral History Project*. Several times a year the *Oral History in Palliative Care* course is delivered for those planning to record oral histories in a palliative care context.

Alongside training for individuals, we also deliver group courses under our 'Tailored Training' programme. Adapted to suit individual projects, these courses are run by the training group online and in-person at any location in the UK.

More information about training and details of upcoming courses are available on the Oral History Society website (ohs.org.uk/training).

Testimonials

[Our trainer] was so attentive and responsive to our feedback during the sessions whilst remaining disciplined to his time constraints. We felt honoured to have someone with such experience training us for this important role.

– *Tailored Training: Introduction to Oral History course participant*

I was just incredibly impressed with the level of detail, the animated course materials, and the sense that everyone's project or purpose was being addressed throughout.

– *Archival Management of Oral History Collection course participant*

The course provided the practical and creative knowhow to take a project forward, introducing a wide range of texts and techniques as well as giving permission to be imaginative. I now feel confident and inspired...

– *Transcript to Script: Turning Oral History into Plays for Stage and Radio course participant*

With thanks to the team of trainers: Cynthia Brown, Anna Bryson, Alison Chand, Rib Davis, Sarah Gudgin, Camille Johnston, Julia Letts, Ros Livshin, Sarah Lowry, Charlie Morgan, Rob Perks, Rosa Schling, Sam Smith, Mary Stewart, Beth Thomas and Michelle Winslow.



Nourish Scotland oral history training led by Alison Chand, 2024.



Dartmoor Calling oral history training led by Sarah Lowry, 2024.

Access to oral history content

The British Library is rebuilding its IT infrastructure following a major cyber-attack in October 2023. The cyber-attack caused serious disruption to the Library's onsite and online services including the Library's web resources and the Sound and Moving Image catalogue. The British Library website contains more information about the incident and its impact on services (bl.uk/cyber-incident). The Library also publishes periodic updates on the restoration of services on the Living Knowledge blog (blogs.bl.uk/living-knowledge).

The onsite Listening and Viewing Service at the British Library in St Pancras is resuming in stages to provide access to the oral history collections. The work to rebuild the Library's infrastructure work is an evolving process; please visit the Sound and Vision blog for up-to-date information on access to sound collections (blogs.bl.uk/sound-and-vision).

The NLS website lists resources that are currently accessible (bl.uk/nls). This list includes material in the British Library's Research Repository, and audio extracts on SoundCloud and YouTube.

The NLS team and Trustees encourage everyone to access the free, online special edition of the Oral History journal which stems from 'The Life Story in Oral History Practice', the two-day International Symposium hosted by National Life Stories at the British Library in summer 2023. You can read more about the symposium on p16–17 of this Review.



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Life stories of agricultural-environmental change **Paul Merchant**

John Rankin on tractor with sizer on cobble, County Down, c.1945. Courtesy of John Rankin.

I was never anxious to make money because I was faced with the prospect of children to feed and educate. [...] I was an avid member after advice, probably 100 – I don't know – perhaps too much. But I was very keen. I came from Cambridge for my farm and I was a very keen farmer, yes. Keen to, keen to make some money. My father didn't give me any money, what I had was what I earned."

Through the 1950s and 1960s he introduced a system of field-drains, planted high-yielding varieties of cereals and grass, applied artificial fertiliser, sprayed herbicide ('2, 4-D [...] that was revolutionary') so that by the late 1950s his farm, Old Hall Farm, was used by ICI as a demonstration of good practice." That he invested emotionally, not just physically and economically, in farm improvements, especially extensive drainage, is suggested by the way in which he refers to the loss of the farm when Retland Water reservoir was filled in 1971:

Old Hall Farm at the time [was] in a valley and it's now of course underwater. [...] You see after twenty years,

all that work I'd done, it was flooded, taken away from me. [...] And I have a grievance. [...] I did forty [drainage] schemes before I was finally disappointed. And presumably these are fish swimming up the pipes. [...] There was a drainage officer [...] and he would draw up a drainage scheme for me, or with me, and then we would get the work done. Such a waste when the reservoir came."

Other interviewees tell us that farming was tightly associated with feelings of duty to family. Farmer John Rankin understands his own efforts to 'keep up with modernisation' on his farms in County Down, Northern Ireland, originally bought by his grandfather in the late nineteenth century, in these terms: 'I owe so much to my father, to my grandfather for the work that they did.'" Christine Hill recalls her early decision to take on the family farm in Norfolk as an urgent defence against more loss:

I can remember, and I was eleven, so it must have been [after] the time when my father had died that summer, I was actually cutting corn [...]. And I can even picture

John Consent on the sale of his land for the establishment of a reservoir

Christine Hill on her decision to be a farmer

Extract from Paul Merchant's article 'Life stories of agricultural-environmental change' in the NLS special edition of *Oral History*.



ORAL HISTORY JOURNAL

SPECIAL ONLINE-ONLY ISSUE AVAILABLE TO ALL

www.ohs.org.uk/oral-history-online/

This special online issue of *Oral History* is devoted to the life story in oral history practice. Thanks to the generous support of National Life Stories, this extra issue is available to everyone. In full colour with clickable links to audio content.

ORAL HISTORY

THE LIFE STORY IN ORAL HISTORY PRACTICE

The Life Story in Oral History Practice: An International Symposium

30 June and 1 July 2023 at the British Library

Mary Stewart, NLS Director

In summer 2023 we were delighted to host 140 people at the British Library for a thought-provoking two-day Symposium reflecting on the method central to all our projects – the life story interview. With NLS now over 35 years ‘young’ it was an apposite time for the NLS team and Trustees to step back from the relentless work of fundraising, interviewing, cataloguing and dissemination to critically examine what we aim to do and the methods we use. The two days were filled with high quality papers, thoughtful discussions and the hubbub of conversation in the breaks between sessions.

‘A superb symposium – stimulating, informative, provocative and also fun!’

The in-depth biographical interview – the ‘life story’ – has been the core methodology of NLS ever since it was established in 1987 by Paul Thompson and Asa Briggs, supported by founding Trustee Jennifer Wingate. In recent years the use of the long-form life story method in oral history has been challenged, with queries from funders over cost and questions about the efficacy of the approach in contrast to more outcome-driven shorter interviews. The Symposium’s central aim was to engage critically with our own methodology and seek to answer some core questions about the practice: what does it mean when we invite someone to share their ‘whole life’ with us? How do we conduct a life story and how does this contrast with other oral history techniques? What value can a life story collection bring to wider policy debates? What specific challenges do we face in archiving life story interviews?

‘A splendid mixture of the academic and practical.’

Day one commenced with a warm welcome from Dame Carol Black, Chair of the British Library. Canadian scholar Alexander Freund gave a thoughtful – and at times helpfully provocative – talk on the nature of the life story interview, considering who it is for, how it captures a ‘life’, some of the ethical implications particular to the method and the re-use of the material now and in the future.

Alan Dein (oral historian and broadcaster) chaired a lively session in which Elizabeth Wright (NLS Interviewer), Madeline White (NLS Deputy Director) and Wendy Rickard (an oral historian who has frequently collaborated with NLS and the British Library) explored the practice of life story interviewing: how we frame questions, what we can gain from conducting life story interviews with younger people, interviewing over time and how life stories compare with other types of interviews.

NLS has a long track record of conducting projects in corporate and institutional settings, so it was a boon to hear the perspective of Indra Chowdhury – founder of the Oral History Association of India – as she reflected on institutional histories and life stories in the context of post-independence India. NLS Project Director Niamh Dillon chaired the subsequent discussion, contributing her own experience of conducting numerous institutional histories for NLS.

An animated session focusing on the spectre of new technology for the reuse, analysis and ethics of archived life stories brought together experts in the field, exploring the potential implications of new technologies for good, ill and many places in between. NLS Archivist Charlie Morgan set the scene, and then joined a panel discussion with academics Julianne Nyhan (Technical University Darmstadt and University College London) and Doug Boyd (Louie B Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries), chaired by NLS Trustee Andrew Flinn (University College London).

To mark the end of the wonderful project **An Oral History of Farming, Land Management and Conservation in Post-War Britain**, generously funded by Arcadia, we held a celebratory reception that preceded a brilliant discussion about the potential impact of life stories on policy-making about the natural world. Sally Horrocks (NLS Senior Academic Advisor for Science and Technology) introduced some key aspects of NLS work on science and the environment over the last 15 years to give context to this particular project. Paul Merchant (NLS Oral Historian and Researcher) then outlined five observations from the 50 interviews he conducted, illustrated with numerous audio clips from the collection. NLS Trustee Jon Agar (University College London) then chaired a wide-ranging panel discussion on the value of life stories of the environment with Paul, Sally and Fiona Harvey, environment editor at *The Guardian*.



Hester Westley in conversation with Hew Locke at the NLS Symposium. Photo: Camille Johnston.

The second day of the Symposium started with a captivating session in which celebrated artist Hew Locke discussed with NLS Project Director Hester Westley his experience of being an interviewee for **Artists' Lives**. Hew's recording is closed in his lifetime, but he explained to the audience the value of the experience of recording his life story:

What I'm doing in these talks is trying to put out an oral, literally, oral history as I experienced it for future audiences to know well, there's an official history which was written about, but there's an unofficial history which is as important, very, very important, I feel, which is not written about that much. And it needs to be recorded somewhere, you know.

Alistair Thomson (Monash University, Melbourne) picked up the themes that Hew and Hester explored in a presentation reflecting on his career researching using the life story. Weaving in examples of his work in the UK and Australia he articulated the value in the long form interview and gave some practical tips on how we can approach the cataloguing and re-use of material. The final session, chaired by Don Ritchie (Historian Emeritus of the United States Senate), brought together all of the international panellists with Rob Perks (NLS Trustee and former Director) and Mary Stewart (NLS Director). The discussion highlighted themes from the two days and looked to the future of the life story,

informed by reflections on the strengths and challenges of the method contributed by symposium attendees.

'An excellent and thought-provoking symposium. I came away with a lot to think about.'

NLS is delighted that the papers and discussions from the Symposium feature in a special online open-access edition of *Oral History*, the journal of the Oral History Society (ohs.org.uk/oral-history-online). As a publication freely available to all, we hope that the articles and discussions will become essential reading for oral history scholars and practitioners.

The Symposium was also a chance to publicly acknowledge the decades of service of two key members of the NLS team: Cathy Courtney, Project Director from 1990 until 2022 and Rob Perks, the British Library's inaugural Oral History Curator from 1988 and Director of NLS from 1995 until his retirement in 2021. Thank you Cathy and Rob. Thanks too to all of the speakers, the NLS team and Trustees for their practical and moral support in hosting the Symposium, and to all the attendees whose energy and enthusiasm made the event such a success.

Interviewee spotlight: Akyaaba Addai-Sebo

Rosa Kurowska Kyffin, Project Interviewer

In 2022–23 I recorded a life story interview with Akyaaba Addai-Sebo for **Leaders of National Life**. This in-depth interview covers his influential work as a campaigner and activist across three continents. After working as a trade union organiser in newly independent Ghana, Akyaaba lived in the US in the 1970s, where he studied peace-building in Washington and became close with many civil rights activists of the time, including Kwame Ture, Jewell Mazique and C.L.R. James. The interview also covers his later peace-building work in Liberia and Sierra-Leone and environmental campaigning. In the UK Akyaaba has had a fundamental impact on politics and culture as one of the founders in 1986 of the UK's Black History Month; the interview explores the origins of this month, which today is as vital a part of autumn as the cooler days and bright colours of the turning leaves.

As a young child Akyaaba quickly developed a deep understanding of the impact of politics. In 1957 when Akyaaba was just seven years old, Kwame Nkrumah led Ghana to independence from British colonial rule and established one of the first post-colonial governments in Africa. Caught up in the 'dynamism of the times', Akyaaba spent his childhood observing the rallies and activism of his community: a close-knit, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic compound in Asawase, one of many new projects built by the socialist Nkrumah government. His early political memories are of excitement and promise, but these hopes were soon dashed as the backlash of European powers began. One of Akyaaba's early memories was the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961, the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then known as the Republic of the Congo).

That incident changed my life and my, raised my political consciousness because I was asking a lot of questions as to why? Why should another prime minister be killed, why would the Belgians do that?

This incident and the betrayals that followed as later coups in Ghana took Nkrumah from power forged a powerful activist in Akyaaba, who has led a life dedicated to confronting injustice. As a child he was also frustrated by his experiences of education in the British colonial system, where he studied European classics, religion, geography and literature rather than his own region's culture and history. Later as a teenager he saw the importance of finding 'cultural synergy' through learning about Ghanaian and African culture and history in Nkrumah's Young Pioneers and the Pan-

African Youth Movement. In the US he also saw the impact of what was then called Negro History Week for African Americans, and the beginnings of the campaign to rename the period as Black History Month which is still celebrated there in February. In the US he became involved in delivering workshops in Washington libraries and museums and spoke at celebrations of African Liberation Day in Malcolm X Park.

His activism eventually took him back to Ghana and then to London, where he found safety having narrowly escaped persecution under the Jerry Rawlings regime in 1984. Through C.L.R. James he became involved with a powerful group of activists based in Railton Road, Brixton, including Leila Hassan Howe, Darcus Howe and the Race Today collective. At the same time Akyaaba had started working at the Greater London Council (GLC) – a place of pioneering social policy under the leadership of Ken Livingstone. It was an exciting time to be working in local government. With his boss and friend Ansel Wong, Akyaaba worked in the Ethnic Minorities Unit and it was there in the office that a chance encounter with a colleague set in motion the inspiration for Black History Month in the UK.

One day I go to work, and then Ansel's secretary, she had come in early, she comes in early, to set up. And I saw her and she was very downcast. And I said 'what is wrong?' And she said, 'Would you believe it, last night, I was in Marcus's room putting, preparing him for bed and then, after prayers, as I left his room and go to the door, he called me, "Mum", then he asked, "Mum, why can't I be white?"'

And she said that troubled her as a mother, she said, 'I had deliberately named my son after Marcus Mosiah Garvey. And here is my son, questioning his identity. I have failed my son.' That's what she said.

And I said 'No, you haven't failed your son, it is rather, the institutions of state that have failed your son.'

[...]

And so, then that triggered something in me. I am someone who also reflects on things, I reflect on things, so it kept ringing in my ears. And her face and all that and the torment that she was going through. So something had to be done.



Akyaaba Addai-Sebo standing in front of the King's Library at the British Library, St Pancras. Photo courtesy of Rosa Kurowska Kyffin.

In both the US and the UK Akyaaba had seen the impact that this lack of 'cultural synergy' was having on Black children and their families. He was shocked that here in the UK – the 'mother of imperialism' – that there was so little understanding of African history and civilisation. To rectify the damage done to children like Marcus and to attempt to eliminate the odious racism that plagued the UK, Akyaaba worked hard to establish Black History Month. Here he recalls some of the conversations that fed into the founding of Black History Month, and why the choice of October is so significant:

Then October also has meaning, October is the harvest period in Africa, particularly in my part of Africa, in the West Africa. The yam period, the period of plenty, there is food, there is celebrations, and a time also when people travel from all over to come to the centre, or to go to their villages to renew themselves and re-examine their lives and relations with one another and assess what had gone on the year before, and how they can reorganise themselves to face the coming year and all that.

There was a school of thought also that said that oh, it should be in February, in tune with what was happening in America. And I argued at that time

also that we are an outdoor people and you have the carnival in August bank holiday which is also outdoor. And, this is directed at the children, and it is not cold in October, and in February the children are absorbed in their learning and studies, so it's the children not us [...] who needed that space and that time. [...] We want to change the dynamics in terms of race relations in the United Kingdom, and who are better situated to work with than the children, so all attentions should be on the children on the future generation. That was my argument and I think that argument won. And it has come to be accepted. And it has grown up beyond imagination, beyond imagination! Incredible!

Akyaaba built support across the political spectrum, applying lessons learned from his time in the US civil rights movement. The UK's first Black History Month events began with a series of historical talks and events in London in 1986 to which people 'came in droves.' Those events have now grown to become an integral part of the year with countless events happening across October and beyond across the whole country. Akyaaba Addai-Sebo's recording is collection reference C408/037. Leila Hassan Howe was also recorded for *Leaders of National Life*, collection reference C408/035.

'Just hearing a voice brings back so much [...] it brings them to life': Peter Murray on *Architects' Lives*

Peter Murray is a long-standing member of the **Architects' Lives** Advisory Committee. He has spent his life engaging with and promoting architecture in the UK and beyond. After training as an architect he joined *Architectural Design* as Technical Editor under its formidable and long-standing editor Monica Pidgeon. He subsequently worked at *Building Design* and the *RIBA Journal* and has curated exhibitions on 'Foster Rogers, Stirling' and 'Living Bridges' at the Royal Academy. He founded *Blueprint* magazine in 1983 and *New London Architecture* in 2004.

Peter Murray recently used Peter Smithson's life story recording, made in the 1990s, as research for an article in the French magazine *As Found*. Smithson and his wife Alison were amongst the pre-eminent architects in post-war Britain. Their built work was limited but significant, including Hunstanton School, the Economist building, and Robin Hood Gardens. Their role as critics, writers and teachers was equally important. The magazine *Architectural Design* regularly published their articles.

Peter Murray knew the Smithsons well, having worked with them during his time at *Architectural Design*. I sat down with Murray to discuss his experience of listening to Peter Smithson's recording and what value he sees in the life story approach to recording architects' stories.

What was the prompt for you to start doing some research about Peter Smithson?

I received a note from this fairly obscure French magazine who were following up on some articles which had been published in Architectural Design [AD] in the early seventies, a series written by both Alison and Peter Smithson. The editor, Marc Antoine-Durand, wanted to know more about the background. I could remember pretty well about working in AD, but I couldn't recall that much about our relationship with Alison and Peter at the time. I needed to refresh my memory.

Magazines at that period were rather different than they are now, it was before the days of public relations teams, marketing and promotion. Magazines tended to publish those architects that they supported; with the Smithsons we were promoters of their work, we published almost everything they wrote. I wasn't quite sure how that came about and

that was one of the key things that I discovered from listening to the audio. I was reminded that the Smithsons and Theo Crosby (former Technical Editor at AD) had worked together on the Whitechapel exhibition of *This is Tomorrow*. They were social friends as well as work friends.

You knew Peter personally, you knew the writings of both Alison and Peter. So when you came to his interview, what do you want to find out from it?

Well, it really was trying to work out how they saw that period. Although I met them quite frequently, clearly there are lots of things that go on in people's lives that you are not aware of. I wanted to know, in that period of the late 1960s-1970s, how he perceived his practice, and how he also perceived their role as critics, because that was a key part of what we dealt with on the magazine. Alison particularly saw that as their role. I learnt a lot about their relationship with Theo Crosby and their relationship with AD magazine.

We carried on publishing the Smithsons even though the editorial approach of AD changed. Our interests in the early seventies after the OPEC-imposed oil embargoes, started to focus on energy. Now we'd call it sustainability, but of course that was before anyone knew about the impact CO2 was having on climate change. So we started to become much more interested in solar energy, insulation and pollution – green issues.

And having a recording in which Peter Smithson discussed his whole life, from his childhood onwards, what difference did that make, when you're thinking about a specific part of his life?

I think putting people in that sort of context is really helpful. And I guess people are perhaps more open now, but in those days people were not, they didn't discuss personal issues much, or, indeed anything outside their work life.

That recording took place at the end of his professional career, so he was able to review his life in teaching, his life in practice. Does that make a difference when you're researching someone, that you are able to look at a life's work rather than focus on a project like Robin Hood Gardens, or even the Economist?

Well, people have a more rounded view of what they've done than when they're still working. When they're working, they are in a competitive world, they're competing with their friends often, so they don't like disclosing too much. The architecture profession is very interesting, because people are generally collaborative, but they obviously realise they are in competition, so they're very friendly, they share lots of information, but there's a whole part of their work which they don't want to talk about. They are protective of their clients and how they get the jobs. Architectural practices are tough businesses to run. So they do tend to be defensive from that point of view. I got to know Freddie Gibberd (Sir Frederick Gibberd, modernist architect and planner of Harlow New Town) pretty well after he retired, and he got on really well with my children, and we would go up to Harlow to his wonderful garden, and had long lunches. And what a charming man he was. I would say to people who had worked with him in the office, 'Gosh, he's such a nice chap,' and they'd say, 'Well, [laughs] when you're working with him, sometimes you had to watch out.' He was a tough cookie, but when he retired he became very generous, very nice, very open; when he was working he was tougher, and very successful too. Once people are retired, they can take a more relaxed view of the world. Protecting their patch isn't so necessary anymore.

And that's of course something that people do raise. They say, well, why interview someone, they may have a whole range of built work, they may have monographs. They may have written a lot of articles. What are you adding to the historical record with a recording? And, I would say that actually you get to understand context, and a range of relationships, and maybe things that aren't so known about.

Yes, but it's the bits in-between which are really important, aren't they? You write an essay, but what leads up to that essay? Or you design a building. What are the things that lead up to it? If you are a young architect reading about the careers of architects who have gone before you, I think there's an awful lot you can just learn from that. There's a lot that doesn't come out in their writings. How did you organise your practice, how did you run your practice, who did the work in the practice, who were the other people? There are all sorts of details which comes out of the recordings which you don't get in any other way. Sometimes they're too cautious. The architectural world is very much a network, so another element which I think is important and you can garner from the interviews is how all these people overlap.

And what was it like hearing Peter Smithson?

Well, one of the great things about recordings of people who you haven't heard for a bit, just hearing a voice brings back so much, doesn't it? That's the case with almost all the recordings of people I've known, hearing them years later gives extra meaning to what they were saying in a way that perhaps writing doesn't. I guess it's something that now we accept even more than we did, with podcasts, vlogs and such things, that the relationship of what people are saying to their voices is so much more telling. So yes, hearing them again brings them back to life.

Peter Murray is recording his life story for **Architects' Lives** in 2024, collection reference C467/167. The full unedited recording of this conversation between Peter Murray and Niamh Dillon is collection reference C467/166. Peter Smithson's recording is reference C467/24. Monica Pidgeon was recorded for **Architects' Lives** in 1995, reference C467/39.

Peter Murray. Photo by Bernd Ott.



Celebrating *Positively Spoken*

Mary Stewart and Madeline White with the *Positively Spoken* team

In December 2023 we celebrated the conclusion of the *Positively Spoken* oral history project run by Chiva, the charity which supports children, young people and young adults who have grown up with HIV. With the support of oral historian Wendy Rickard and with thanks to funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund [NLHF], over the past three years the *Positively Spoken* team has gathered 40 powerful testimonies from young people who acquired HIV around birth or early childhood, many of whom are speaking on record for the first time about their experiences.

The collection – which will be archived at the British Library in 2024 – is a highly original contribution both to the Library's oral history collections and also to the wider documented history of HIV. Though the Library holds extensive oral history collections on the subject of HIV covering a range of experiences including those of the LGBTQ+ community, people with haemophilia affected by the contaminated blood scandal and HIV healthcare workers, the experiences of young people are largely absent from the archive. Indeed, young people aren't often the subject of oral history projects and so are a demographic underrepresented in our collections more widely.

Working with *Positively Spoken* has been a brilliant way to see co-production in action: the recordings include peer-interviews and the project was driven from the start by the wishes and active involvement of young people, developing fantastic new skills for the young people in the project team. We were privileged to join the key project team in leading a conference session at the Oral History Society conference in Nottingham in summer 2023. Together we presented on the ethical framework for the project, the interviewers reflected on their experiences working on *Positively Spoken* and we listened as a group to a range of audio extracts from the interviews. Artist Cai Burton joined the team to live-illustrate his impressions on the presentation and the audio clips – a first for an OHS conference!

Archiving sensitive stories

Given the potentially highly sensitive nature of the subject matter, the NLS team at the British Library was heavily involved from the outset. The goal was to ensure that the interviews could be archived and made available in a way that was ethically sound and did not put participants at risk, whilst staying true to the project's mission to empower young people to tell their stories in their own words and to engage with their own heritage. To facilitate this we devised a selection of options for

access which enabled the possibility for interviewees to close some or all of the recording for a period of time to protect the sensitivity of their stories, but also enable sections or quotes to be made available immediately.

This was important to ensure that the voices of the young people weren't doubly silenced – once by their general omission from the historical record, and again by archival closures. Most recordings will be closed for between 10 and 100 years, with each interviewee agreeing to a selection of 10 authorised clips from their interview to be made available now. These quotes could be taken straight from the recording – using the interviewee's own voice – rerecorded using an actor or reproduced in written text only, to protect the identity of the interviewee whilst the full recording is closed. A small number of interviews will be available on open access once the interviews are deposited in the archive.

Marking World AIDS Day

All of this work was celebrated on 1 December 2023 with a wonderful event at the British Library. The brilliant project team at Chiva led the event and were delighted to start the day with a special and long-awaited visit to the sound archive stores in the basements, led by Charlie Morgan. There the team were able to see the original cassette tapes of interviews recorded in the 1990s by the project's oral history lead Wendy Rickard for the collection *HIV/AIDS Testimonies*.

Just before the main event Mary Stewart gave 25 interviewees a guided tour of the British Library, which for many was their first visit to the St Pancras site. The event itself featured a host of audio clips, a detailed explanation of the project and certificates of participation for all the interviewees, handed out to rapturous applause. Artist Cai Burton displayed a series of artworks made in response to extracts the audio interviews; Cai also produced live sketches of the event, mirroring his work at the Oral History Society conference. Rounding out the event was a showcase of music co-produced in response to the oral history recordings by nine interviewees working with Camden-based rapper Awate. Awate was formerly an inspirational creative fellow for the NLHF-funded Unlocking Our Sound Heritage project based at the British Library, so it was a delight to welcome him back to Library once more.

It has been an honour to work with Chiva and the project team on *Positively Spoken*. The particular and unique needs of the project have rightly challenged the British Library's frameworks for archiving and access, arming us

with new approaches to balance our requirements under data protection legislation with our ethical obligations to enable the archival preservation of voices which may otherwise be lost to history. It is our privilege to be the custodians of these stories. We look forward to the deposit of the audio material, which will be catalogued under collection reference C1894.

Positively Spoken interview extracts

These interviews have been a really, really great vice, I would say to be able to kind of speak unfiltered to an audience that isn't there. And I guess it's been really important to be able to be in a position to give my unique perspective and being able to use all of my disabilities, for good. It makes me feel heard. It makes me feel important.

– Anky Damz

I think if anyone listens to this in however many years, I just want them to know that my story isn't an isolated one it's part of a chain of stories.

– Paurosi

It can be really extractive, some spaces, so people can just take take take, and I think I've just become someone who's really clear that if I'm sharing my story, or a story or my expertise, that I expect something back. And that something either needs to [be a] change in response, or something needs to register with the person or institution that I share with. And that it's not just telling another story.

– Mercy

Oh my days, the British Library National Life Stories whatever this is called, oh my word, this has been so therapeutic. So freeing. This experience has just been...I've needed it.

– Bankai

Live sketches of the December 2023 celebration event at the British Library. Artwork by Cai Burton (joyful-design.co.uk).



NLS Project Partners: The Miners' Strike of 1984–85

Compiled by Charlie Morgan, NLS Archivist

National Life Stories works in partnership with an array of projects around the UK, gathering in new testimony to strengthen the British Library's oral history collections. To mark the fortieth anniversary of the Miner's Strike of 1984–85 NLS has partnered with two academic oral history projects looking at the strike and its legacy. Both projects use the life story method to situate the strike in the broader history of post-war Britain. For this year's Annual Review we asked the two project leads, Dr Joanna Gilmore and Professor Robert Gildea, to highlight some of the testimony they recorded.

Legal Solidarity and the Miners' Strike

Dr Joanna Gilmore, York Law School, University of York

The 1984–85 Miners' Strike was one of the most fiercely contested industrial conflicts in British history. With thousands of arrests and an extraordinary amount of civil litigation, the strike transformed the courts into intense legal and political battlegrounds. While the role of law and legal institutions in undermining the strike is well-documented, the contributions of lawyers in furthering the miners' cause are largely unexamined. Supported by the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust, this project aimed to collect and preserve the memories of 25 lawyers who represented striking miners, their supporters, and/or the National Union of Mineworkers during this period. The interviews unveil the remarkable networks of legal solidarity that emerged, and the impact of these explosive experiences on those who took part.

Tony Briscoe, a solicitor at the Newcastle office of the trade union law firm Thompsons, encapsulated the dedication of many lawyers involved:

My mindset was these are not criminals, and therefore I had to pull out every stop I could to tip those scales back the other way in their favour.



Tony Briscoe. Photo courtesy of Joanna Gilmore.

This support extended beyond courtroom representation, with lawyers offering free legal advice in miners' welfare centres and raising funds for miners and their families. Manchester solicitor Robert Lizar reflected on the rationale:

It just felt like it was impossible not to get involved. I suppose it was 'which side are you on?' [...] it really seemed crucial to actually not just be on the sidelines but trying to do something to support these people. I can't begin to imagine what some of the striking miners and their families went through; it must have been desperate for them.

This solidarity fostered a deep camaraderie between lawyers and mining communities. Barrister Michael Mansfield KC spoke to the profound 'closeness' that developed:

We'd visit them in their homes. We'd see them burning their furniture because they had nothing else and living on rations sent up from the south by those who supported the miners, of which there were a large number [...] I think the miners, in a way, and their wives, had a real sense of humour, a sense of history, and they were very bright. All of them were very bright. So you were embraced by their warmth.

The strike also became a catalyst for mutual learning and broader understanding of shared struggles across different communities. Leeds solicitor Ruth Bunday noted a significant shift in political consciousness during this period:

I think what resonated with me over that period was the fact that, all of a sudden, there was a far greater understanding from the white community about what the black community had faced on the streets and in court, and how people could be verbally and misrepresented in court, because the miners found this was happening to them.

Legal Solidarity and the Miners' Strike: An Oral History will be published by Hart / Bloomsbury in 2025. The oral history collection will be deposited at the British Library in 2024.

Miners' Strike of 1984–85: an oral history of mining communities in England, Scotland and Wales

Professor Robert Gildea, University of Oxford

Between 2019 and 2021, and twice interrupted by Covid-19 lockdowns, oral testimony was collected from 150 former miners, their families and supporters, in order to provide a colourful and varied account of the last great battle of the organised industrial working class on British soil. The interviews have provided the raw material for a book, *Backbone of the Nation: Mining Communities and the Great Strike of 1984-85* (Yale University Press, 2023).

Interviews were mostly recorded in the former coalfields of South Wales, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Yorkshire, County Durham and Fife. Activists, including members of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, were interviewed in London and Manchester. Miners in Britain were all men but miners' wives and the support groups they ran enabled the strike to continue for a whole year; these supporters are also among the interviewees, as are two women miners from the USA who came over to support the strikers.

A life story approach means we learn about miners' family backgrounds, the close-knit communities in which they grew up and their schooling, failed as they often were by the eleven-plus exam (which governed admission to academically selective secondary schools). We learn about the stop-start outbreak of the strike and how in Nottinghamshire in particular, most miners did not go on strike and were 'picketed out' by miners from South Yorkshire and South Wales, something they deeply resented. We hear of battles with the police and have several accounts of the Battle of Orgreave in June 1984 and the later occupation of mining villages. We learn about the support groups that provided soup kitchens and food parcels for hungry miners and their families, about the emergence of women as organisers, fundraisers and public speakers and about the development of a working-class feminism.



Interview with former Durham miner Ernie Foster (on left) in Durham Mining Museum, Spennymore, Sept. 2020. Picture by Lynn Gibson.

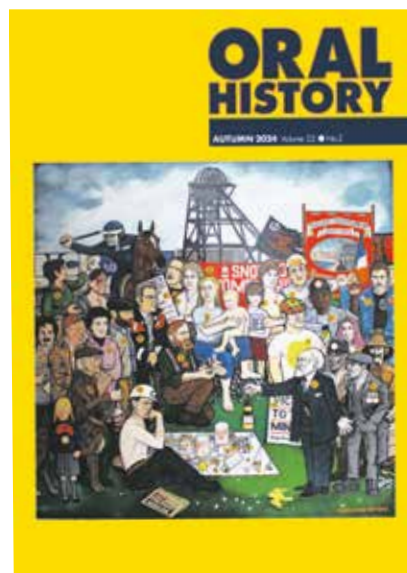
The interviews tell the painful story of the defeat of the strike, the return to work and the closure of the pits. They explore the impact on men who were blacklisted, unemployed or thrown into insecure jobs in the gig economy. Male pride was in tatters and many died early of lung diseases caused by the working environment in the mines. Some families held together, others broke up under the strain. There are also many positive stories however, of former miners and above all their wives going back to college and qualifying for careers in social work and the probation service, or becoming elected as local councillors or MPs, which enabled them to begin to repair their devastated communities. The interviews are often emotional, dealing with tragedy and loss, but also convey immense courage, generosity, solidarity and a powerful sense of social justice. Ultimately, they are the fruit of great trust and collaboration between mining people and the interviewer.

As Siân James, a miner's wife from the Swansea Valley and later MP for Swansea East, wrote: 'We entrusted him [Robert Gildea] with our memories and he has, in return, told our story with dignity and a historian's eye.'

On 5 March 2024 over 150 people attended 'The Miners' Strike: Forty Years On', an event at the British Library to celebrate the publication of Gildea's book, *Backbone of the Nation*. The august panel included Siân James; Robert Gildea; Frances O'Grady, former General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress and the sister of a miner who was on strike; and John Harris, Orwell Prize winning Guardian columnist and writer on British politics and pop music. The evening was chaired by broadcaster and historian David Hendy.

The interviews from this collection are archived at the British Library, collection reference C1989.

Full length articles by both Gildea and Gilmore feature in the Autumn 2024 issue of the Oral History journal, a special issue focusing on the Miners' Strike (ohs.org.uk/journal).



Cover image: 'The Past is Another Country' by David Rumsey. Courtesy of the People's History Museum.

Last Words

Dick Grove (1924–2023)

Interviewed by Paul Merchant, 2010

An Oral History of British Science, C1379/12. Text compiled by Paul Merchant.



Dick Grove in Arolla, Switzerland, 1966. Photo courtesy of Dick Grove.

Geographer AT (Dick) Grove was born in 1924 in Evesham, Worcestershire. After his degree in geography at Cambridge (which was interrupted by service in the Royal Air Force), he worked as an Assistant District Officer in eastern Nigeria from 1945, studying soil erosion. From 1949 to 1982 he was a lecturer in the Department of Geography at Cambridge and from 1963 a Fellow of Downing College, serving for a period as senior tutor.

From the mid 1950s, Dick's research in Africa focused on environmental change over the past 20,000 years. In a series of field expeditions he tracked the expansion of deserts and lakes under dramatically different climates. In Tibesti in 1957, for example, he sought out sediments deposited in wetter conditions of the past:

For me it was really quite a new experience seeing the Pleistocene sediments in the desert. [...] One of the problems was that we collected quite a lot of samples but [...] most of them were lost when the [...] the soldiers decided to tidy up their vehicles.

In 1970 in Ethiopia he investigated the previous extent of lakes there:

It was really a matter of [...] following gullies in the slopes which revealed the sedimentary succession on the slopes which would have been laid down by the lakes when they were much bigger than they are now. [...] We were pretty clear that we would find

shelly material that would be datable. [...] It intrigued the local pastoralists who wondered what the heck we were up to and [...] they joined in with some enthusiasm and helped us to find useful specimens.

Dick's wife Jean Grove (née Clark) was also a Cambridge geographer and an eminent environmental historian. Parts of Dick's interview recall their house on Storey's Way in Cambridge as a confusion of geography students, visitors and children (Dick and Jean had five children):

Some of the students have [...] memories of a two year old sort of in the coal scuttle or essays that disappeared for one reason or another.

The whole family took part in 'family expeditions' in parts of Europe:

Jean was anxious to pursue her studies in glacier history [...] in the field. [...] It was a cross between, I suppose, ordinary tourism and expedition work. It was sort of a picnic fieldwork and much of the time was taken up with inessentials.

He and Jean were able to discuss their mutual interest in climate history, explored in the field at very different latitudes:

We were interested in what each other was doing; what was the relationship between all these changes going on in the high latitudes [...] and in the tropics? So [...] we were able to talk to each other in a way that I suppose [...] is quite unusual. [...] I think we recognised that if we'd been married to other people we would have bored them stiff.

Later in his career and into formal retirement, Dick's interest in climate and environmental history ranged right across southern Europe and Africa and was put into conversation with the evidence – accumulating especially from the 1980s – of rapid anthropogenic climate change in the twentieth century.

Phyllida Barlow (1944–2023)

Interviewed by Kirstie Gregory, 2012–2022

Artists' Lives, C466/335. Text compiled by Kirstie Gregory.



Phyllida Barlow, Hauser & Wirth, Los Angeles CA, 2022. Courtesy the Phyllida Barlow Estate and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Elon Schoenholz. Photo: Emma Louise Swanson.

Dame Phyllida Barlow was an internationally successful sculptor who achieved incredible recognition in the art world as well as being hugely accomplished as a tutor in the field of higher education. She created bold, innovative installations both informed by and challenging their surrounding environments.

Barlow was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1944 where her father Dr Erasmus Darwin Barlow was working as a research doctor in the field of trauma with injured soldiers returning from the Second World War. The family moved back to London shortly after the end of the war. Barlow's childhood was rich with the presence of colourful characters both within her family and outside it; her parents' friendship group was frequently present in the family home and included politicians, authors, scientists and musicians. Barlow recalled numerous examples of making as a child, especially with her mother, although not all were successful:

I remember my uncle giving me some plasticine and it was grey and cold and he was rolling it in his hands into long snake-like strips and then coiling it into these little tiny dishes which I could have used for playing with for the doll's house and thinking it was absolutely fantastic. Then trying to do it myself and the absolute frustration that nothing would work. The plasticine was cold, it wouldn't roll into the nice snaky strips that he had made. Everything when it came to making was absolutely wonderful but the frustration that went with it was just incredible.

At the relatively young age of 16 Barlow was accepted at Chelsea College of Art. It was at Chelsea where she met fellow artist Fabian Peake. They married in 1966 and had five children, Florence, Tabitha, Clover, Eddie and Lewis. Barlow described in detail her practice and approach to making, consistently challenging herself in the process, welcoming contradictions and collaborations:

I think very early on I became fascinated by the feral art object. The art object that stepped outside of either the home or the museum or the gallery. I don't think I had any really coherent thoughts about it but I was interested in how art might be made beyond the things that bound it very rigorously to particular traditions and conventions. But at the same time I was deeply committed to those traditions, to the traditions more than the conventions.

After Chelsea, Barlow continued her education at The Slade School of Fine Art under Reg Butler, Hubert Dalwood and F. E. McWilliam, among others. She subsequently took up teaching positions at West of England College of Art, Chelsea College of Art and the Slade School of Art. Barlow was Professor of Fine Art at the Slade when she retired from teaching in 2009 to concentrate on her art. What followed was an exceptional period of more than a decade of making sculpture and an embrace from the international art world. Her recorded response to this is refreshingly honest:

I spend most of my time with people half my age, apart from Fabian, my husband. We are with my children and maybe with their friends. Then I'm with my assistants and sometimes I'm overwhelmed socially by being with people my own age. I feel the weight of their authority in a very particular kind of way, as though I can't possibly live up to it. I am daunted by the art world, in a way it's not my world. I have no interest in it at all and I think my world has been so much about the studio in all its guises, both as a very private space and maybe also as a social space, like in an art school. And I think maybe I've become conditioned to that.

Murray Melvin (1932–2023)

Interviewed by Elizabeth Wright, 2022–23

General Interviews, C464/104. Text compiled by Elizabeth Wright.



Murray Melvin at the Theatre Royal © The British Library Board.

Murray Melvin was an actor, director and archivist born in London. He began his career as an Assistant Stage Manager [ASM] and then an actor with Joan Littlewood's company, the Theatre Workshop, at the Theatre Royal Stratford East. Later he became the theatre's archivist, assembling a remarkable collection which covers the history of the theatre and plays produced on its stage since 1884. In 2020, the Theatre Royal Stratford East Archive was donated to the British Library.

Melvin originated the character of Geoffrey in the groundbreaking play 'A Taste of Honey' (1958). Surprised by Littlewood's interest in him for this role, he describes almost talking himself out of this life-changing opportunity:

I was just there as the ASM, I wasn't called upon to read, it was all the company. Then at one point [Joan Littlewood] nodded to me and she said, 'tea' so off I went, off make the tea. [...] In this little green room we had, there was a butler's sink and I was washing up the cups, the sixteen cups from everybody, and suddenly she appeared, which was very unusual, and she picked up the tea towel and she started drying up the mugs. So she said, 'What did you think of that boy?' I said, 'Well I don't know what's wrong with him,' I said, 'but he needs a kick up the backside, didn't he drive you mad?' and

I went on [about] how I just didn't like this character. 'Oh that's a shame,' she said 'I was going to ask you to play him'. And she put down the tea towel and walked off.

The success of 'A Taste of Honey' led to a West End transfer and then a feature film version directed by Tony Richardson, for which Melvin won the Cannes Film Festival Award for Best Actor (1963). In addition to theatre and film, Murray began to work in television. He recounts the nerve-wracking experience of filming a live one-hour television play:

What was special about it in those days, I mean people couldn't do it today I don't think, was that it was live. [...] Getting changed from one scene to another on the run and just getting there and putting your coat on as you come into camera and say the [...] I mean it was terrifying and I was terrified. Now why? Because it was a different medium. I mean, one was doing that all the time at Stratford. Somebody was sacked and you just went on that night and made it up, not frightened at all. But of course it was another medium, and in those days you had your cameramen who would come into rehearsals because they would check with their scripts where you were and what you were doing, and if you knocked over something or you knocked into a chair, the camera adapted to wherever you were [...] I remember at the end of the hour cameramen and actors hugged each other because they'd been through this nightmare.

Melvin's numerous acting credits include films directed or written by Ken Russell, Václav Havel and Stanley Kubrick, who made him do one hundred and three takes for a scene in 'Barry Lyndon'. One of Melvin's earliest feature films was 'HMS Defiant' (1962) directed by Lewis Gilbert and starring Dirk Bogart. Murray describes preparing for a day's filming on location in Spain:

I had to have curly hair. I haven't got curly hair, I've got straight, fine hair. So every morning on the quayside in the blazing sunshine, the hairdresser had a little travelling Bunsen burner with tongs. [...] And all the school kids were around because they thought it was the funniest thing they'd ever seen with these tongs being heated over [a Bunsen burner] and sometimes they'd sizzle my hair and the kids used to fall about laughing.

Eldred Evans (1937–2022)

Interviewed by Niamh Dillon, 2015

Architects' Lives, C467/126. Text compiled by Niamh Dillon.



Eldred Evans. Photo: Anouk Ahlborn, AA Archives.

Really great people can't be copied; they are just misunderstood.

Eldred Evans – whose name was an amalgam of that of her two grandmothers, Ethel and Mildred – was born in London in 1937 but grew up in South Africa in a house designed by architect Steffen Ahrends, who had studied at the Bauhaus in Germany. Both her parents were painters and had met at the Royal College of Art. On the advice of a family friend, she joined the Architectural Association:

I experimented with everybody: in the first year, I did Mies van der Rohe, second year, Alvar Aalto, third year, it was more Corb [Le Corbusier], and fourth year, Louis Kahn. In the fifth year, I was myself.

She then applied to Yale with Richard Rogers and met fellow student Norman Foster in the first week. However her time at Yale was cut short as she had just won the competition to design Lincoln Civic Centre – a huge commission for a young architect, and a rare one for a woman. Although Lincoln Civic Centre was not realised, it was her first collaboration with David Shalev, and the two would remain partners in life and work.

Together they won the competition to design a new school in Newport.

We wanted this to be a white building in the landscape [...] we wanted a limited palette because you had nature all around you and that was enough.

Constructed in concrete, it featured paintings by her father Merlyn Evans in the communal spaces. Evans and Shalev envisaged that the school would prioritise children's learning by encouraging teachers to move classes while the children remained in place.

Further projects included Truro Law Courts, a library and a student accommodation block for Jesus College Cambridge, and Bede's World in Northumberland. Eldred Evans describes the design process on Jesus College Library:

We spent three months deciding what this building should be like, and we designed every possible type of library [...] and all the designs with a contemporary feel, felt self-indulgent and not respectful of the place [...], and so we decided it had to be like the existing college, actually have the feel of it, regardless of whether it would be called contemporary or reactionary, and then we could think of the interior [...] which is all white stained ash.

Eldred Evans combined teaching with practice, both at the Architectural Association and Regents Street Polytechnic. She found working with younger architects an inspiring experience. Reflecting on her design philosophy, she said:

Our job is to make interior spaces and exterior spaces in a human scale [...] I reject totemic buildings, icons, we always wanted a building to integrate into its context, whether it's a landscape or urban, so it gets lost, so it never becomes an object.

One of the practice's last commissions was for Tate St. Ives, a place Eldred Evans knew well having spent time with family friend Barbara Hepworth at her studio. Her last projects included a book on her father Merlyn Evans, one on their own practice work *Evans + Shalev*, and another publishing her miniature watercolours for the first time in 2020.

Statement of Financial Activities

Year Ended 31 December 2023

	Restricted	Unrestricted	Total	
			2023	2022
	£	£	£	£
INCOME				
Donations and legacies	193,245	11,049	204,294	200,103
Investment income	3,677	28,844	32,521	25,964
Training income	–	47,441	47,441	45,930
Sundry income	–	4,390	4,390	2,991
TOTAL INCOME	196,922	91,724	288,646	274,988
EXPENDITURE				
Direct training expenses	–	33,856	33,856¹	15,501
Charitable activities	246,248	67,271	313,519	237,813
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	246,248	101,127	347,375	253,314
Total income less total expenditure	(49,326)	(9,403)	(58,729)	21,674
Net (losses)/gains on investments	(3,322)	(17,272)	(20,594)	(48,915)
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) and net movement in funds for the year	(52,648)	(26,675)	(79,323)	(27,241)
Reconciliation of Funds:				
Funds brought forward	348,949	675,822	1,024,771	1,052,012
Total funds carried forward	296,301	649,147	945,448	1,024,771

¹ In 2022 direct training expenses excluded bookkeeping and administration costs. From 2023 direct training expenses include the costs of the administration, but exclude bookkeeping costs and time spent by other NLS staff.

Balance Sheet at 31 December 2023

	2023		2022	
	£	£	£	£
FIXED ASSETS				
Investments		850,841		871,435
Total Fixed assets		850,841		871,435
CURRENT ASSETS				
Debtors	2,377		9,867	
Cash at bank and in hand	129,026		167,200	
Total Current Assets	131,403		177,067	
LIABILITIES				
Creditors falling due within one year	(36,796)		(23,731)	
Net Current Assets		94,607		153,336
NET ASSETS		945,448		1,024,771
THE FUNDS OF THE CHARITY				
Founder's donation		200,000		200,000
Unrestricted fund		449,147		475,822
Restricted fund		296,301		348,949
TOTAL CHARITY FUNDS		945,448		1,024,771

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 have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) – (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and applicable company and charity law in the UK.

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



R Rubenstein (Senior Statutory Auditor)

For and on behalf of Parker Cavendish, Chartered Accountants & Registered Auditors, 28 Church Road, Middlesex HA7 4XR

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 2023 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its result, for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice; including Financial Reporting Standard 102 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and the Republic of Ireland'; and
- 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.



Dame Jenny Abramsky

Chair of Trustees
2023

National Life Stories Projects and Collections

Leaders of National Life

(C408) [37 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) [152 interviews]

City Lives explores the inner world of Britain's financial capital. Support from the City enabled NLS to make detailed recordings between 1987 and 1997 with representatives from the Stock Exchange, the merchant and clearing banks, the commodities and futures markets, law and accounting firms, financial regulators, insurance companies and Lloyd's of London. The project is a unique record of the complex interrelationships and dramatic changes which defined the Square Mile in the 20th century. *City Lives: The Changing Voices of British Finance* by Cathy Courtney and Paul Thompson (Methuen, 1996) was edited from the interviews. We are currently fundraising for *City Lives Revisited*, picking up the story where we left off.

Living Memory of the Jewish Community

(C410) [189 interviews]

Recorded between 1988 and 2000 this major collection was developed with the specialist advice of leading historians of Jewish experience and complements a number of collections held by the British Library on Jewish life. The primary focus was on pre-Second World War Jewish refugees to Britain, those fleeing from Nazi persecution during the Second World War, Holocaust survivors and their children. NLS also worked with the Holocaust Survivors' Centre to archive and provide access to their collection of over 150 recordings (C830).

General Interviews

(C464) [109 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) [444 interviews]

Artists' Lives was initiated in 1990 and is run in association with Tate Archive and in close collaboration with the Henry Moore Institute. Collectively the interviews form an extraordinary account of the rich context in which the visual arts have developed in Britain during the 20th and now 21st 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 Rootstein Hopkins Foundation and The Yale Center for British Art. A CD, *Connecting Lines: Artists Talk about Drawing*, was published in 2010 funded by the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation.

Artists' Lives Advisory Committee

Professor Lubaina Himid MBE (Chair), Rachel Chatabash, Dr Penelope Curtis, Caroline Cuthbert, Adrian Glew, Cornelia Grassi, Lisa Le Feuvre, Clive Phillipot, Laurence Sillars and Dr Andrew Wilson.

Architects' Lives

(C467) [168 interviews]

Architects' Lives documents architects working in Britain and those in associated professions. In addition to the main collection, and in association with the National Trust at Willow Road, NLS made a series of recordings documenting memories of Ernő Goldfinger which resulted in a co-published CD *Passionate Rationalism* (2004). NLS has also partnered with English Heritage to document Eltham Palace and the Courtauld family (C1056). Included in the architecture collections is **Historic Houses: An Oral History** (C2016), a capsule of recordings with key figures in the organisation's history, and **Argent: An Oral History** (C2054) which will commence in 2024.

Architects' Lives Advisory Committee

Rab Bennetts (chair), Catherine Croft, Peter Murray OBE, Dr Alan Powers, Barbara Weiss and Ellis Woodman.

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, furnacemen, shearers and many more. British Steel General Steels Division sponsored both the project and the *Lives in Steel* CD (British Library, 1993).

Oral History of the British Press

(C638) [22 interviews]

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

National Life Story Awards

(C642) [145 interviews]

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

Legal Lives

(C736) [17 interviews]

This collection documents changes in the legal profession in Britain, including interviews with both solicitors and barristers. Since 2012 we have been developing this area of our work in partnership with the Legal Biography Project in the Law Department at the London School of Economics (LSE), and more recently with the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies at Oxford University. Within Legal Lives, **Crown Court Clerks Life Story Interviews** (C1674) [20 interviews] resulted from a collaborative doctoral award with LSE, providing an insight into the lived world of the law and the pivotal role that Crown Court clerks play in the administration of justice.

Food: From Source to Salespoint

(C821) [218 interviews]

Between 1998 and 2006 Food: From Source to Salespoint charted the revolutionary technical and social changes which occurred within Britain's food industry in the 20th century and beyond. Production, distribution and retailing of food are explored through recordings with those working at every level of the sector, including life stories with those in the ready meal, poultry, sugar, meat and fish sectors; a series with employees of Northern Foods, Nestlé, Sainsbury's and Safeway; and a series with key cookery writers and restaurateurs. Within Food: From Source to Salespoint a set of interviews with Chefs [12 interviews] explores the working lives of chefs over a period when the role has changed from being in charge of the kitchen, to being higher profile. The food programme of interviews also encompasses **Tesco: An Oral History** (C1087) [47 interviews recorded 2003–7] and **An Oral History of the Wine Trade** (C1088) [40 interviews recorded 2003–2004].

Book Trade Lives

(C872) [121 interviews]

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

Crafts Lives

(C960) [162 interviews]

Documenting the lives of Britain's leading craftsmen and craftswomen, Crafts Lives complements Artists' Lives and Architects' Lives. Areas of activity include furniture making, embroidery, ceramics, jewellery, silversmithing, calligraphy, weaving and textiles, metalwork, glasswork and bookbinding.

National Life Stories Projects and Collections

Lives in the Oil Industry

(C963) [178 interviews]

A joint National Life Stories/Aberdeen University project, which, between 2000 and 2005, recorded the major changes that occurred in the UK oil and gas industry in the 20th century, focusing particularly on North Sea exploration and the impact of the industry on this country. The project received support from within the industry.

An Oral History of the Post Office

(C1007) [117 interviews]

From 2001–2003 this project, a partnership with Royal Mail, captured the memories and experiences of individuals from the postal services sector – from postmen and postwomen, to union officials, sorters, engineers and senior management. A CD, *Speeding the mail: an oral history of the post from the 1930s to the 1990s*, was co-published by the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) and the British Library (2005).

An Oral History of Wolff Olins

(C1015) [40 interviews]

This collection documented the development of design and corporate branding through a biographical project based around the growth and development of a single commercial company, Wolff Olins, and was completed 2001–2002.

An Oral History of British Fashion

(C1046) [18 interviews]

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

Pioneers in Charity and Social Welfare

(C1155) [30 interviews]

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

An Oral History of Theatre Design

(C1173) [34 interviews]

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

Authors' Lives

(C1276) [73 interviews]

Authors' Lives was launched in 2007 with the aim of recording approximately one hundred novelists, poets, writers and editors. A CD, *The Writing Life: Authors Speak*, featuring extracts from the collection, was published by the British Library (2011). The authors' programme of interviews also encompasses Women in Publishing (C1657) [29 interviews recorded 2014–2018].

The Legacy of the English Stage Company

(C1316) [15 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) [31 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 insights into one of Britain's most important and least documented utilities.

An Oral History of Barings

(C1367) [34 interviews]

In partnership with The Baring Archive, this project ran between 2009 and 2013 and focused 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. In 2012 Katharine Haydon compiled a booklet entitled *In the Locker of my Memory: Extracts from An Oral History of Barings*.

An Oral History of British Science

(C1379) [135 interviews]

This programme 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. The first phase (2009–2013) was generously funded by

The Arcadia Trust and the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851. It is creating a major archive for the study and public understanding of contemporary science in Britain through in-depth interviews with British scientists. As well as filling obvious gaps in our knowledge of 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 life story interviews, averaging 10–15 hours in length, the project also includes some shorter video recordings reflecting pivotal shifts or locations.

Interviews with ethnic minority British scientists conducted for a collaborative project with the Royal Society, Inspiring Scientists: Diversity in British Science, are available at royalsociety.org/topics-policy/diversity-in-science/inspiring-scientists.

The Privatisation of Government Science (C1802)

An Arts and Humanities Research Council collaborative doctoral project with the British Library and the University of Leicester, looks at how privatisation policies of the 1980s and 1990s affected government research establishments and the scientists who worked in them.

An Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry in the UK

(C1495) [58 interviews]

Contributing to NLS's documentation of the utilities in the UK, this project collected the memories and experiences of those who worked in the industry at various levels, covering the period from nationalisation in the 1940s to privatisation in the 1980s and 1990s. It includes such themes as changing technology, industrial relations, the miners' strikes, changing workplaces, corporate cultures, nuclear power, energy marketing, and public service. We are grateful to Hodson and Luanne Thornber for their generous support.

An Oral History of Talking Therapists in the UK (C1553) [12 interviews]

This collection explores the development in post-war Britain of those therapies that depend primarily on verbal exchanges between client and therapist

to alleviate mental distress. Further interviews will be conducted as part of the AHRC-funded British Library-University of Essex collaborative doctoral programme, which commenced autumn 2021.

Wellcome Trust Life Stories

(C1665) [5 interviews]

A collection of interviews with individuals with a long connection to the Wellcome Trust, funded by the Trust.

Science and Religion: Exploring the Spectrum

(C1672) [33 interviews]

A collaboration between NLS's **An Oral History of British Science**, York University, Toronto and the Centre for Science, Knowledge and Belief in Society, Newman University, Birmingham, this multidisciplinary research project funded by the Templeton Religion Trust investigated the social and cultural contexts of public perceptions of relations between 'science' and 'religion' across all faiths and none.

An Oral History of Farming, Land Management and Conservation in Post-war Britain

(C1828) [39 interviews]

Funded by the Arcadia Trust, this project documents shifts in farming practice, patterns of landownership, and approaches to land management bound up with the development and incorporation of various kinds of scientific knowledge and technology. It records the ways in which environmental knowledge has been developed, promoted, marginalised and revived as part of dramatic changes in British farming and landowning since the Second World War. As many of these changes relate to national and EC/EU policy, the project claims significant timeliness and potential to contribute to debates over the future of British farming.

Design Lives

(C1842) [3 interviews]

This National Life Stories oral history programme will document the history of design in the United Kingdom.

National Life Stories Projects and Collections

Voices of Cartier's English Art Works Workshop (C1879) [8 interviews]

This project has been funded by Cartier UK as part of its celebrations to mark the centenary the English Art Works – Cartier's workshop in London – established in 1921. Through life story interviews the project documents the history of the English Art Works workshop and the lives and careers of the craftspeople who have worked there.

Science in a Time of Crisis: Royal Society Covid Committee Interviews

(C1939) [6 interviews]

Run in partnership with The Royal Society, the project explores the three innovative committees established to support the scientific response in the height of the Covid-19 pandemic: DELVE, RAMP and SET-C.

An Oral History of the Royal Academy of Music (C1967) [10 interviews]

In celebration of its 200th anniversary in 2022, this collection records the institutional memory of the Royal Academy of Music through the life stories of individuals who worked and studied there.

Environmental Collaboration in Practice: Oral History Interviews

(C2053) [32 interviews]

National Life Stories has partnered with researchers at the University of Exeter on a NERC-funded interdisciplinary research programme called RENEW (Renewing biodiversity through a people in-nature approach). This collection explores the process of collaboration concerned with the UK's declining biodiversity through interviews with scientists, naturalists, project managers others whose work in nature conservation has involved collaboration between different fields of expertise, and between professionals and 'amateurs'.

How to support National Life Stories

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

Gift Aid

The Gift Aid scheme allows us to claim back basic rate tax on any donation received from individual taxpayers. This means that for every £100 donated we can claim an additional £25 from the Inland Revenue if a signed Gift Aid form is received. A Gift Aid form can be obtained from the NLS team. It needs to be completed and returned to NLS together with your donation.

Companies

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

Donation of shares

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

Bequests

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

For further information please contact:

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Front cover image: Drawing based on oral history recordings by Chiva for *Positively Spoken*. Artwork by Cai Burton (joyful-design.co.uk).

Back cover image: Martin Morley in the design office at the Liverpool Playhouse, 1972. Photo courtesy of Martin Morley.

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