



**MANCHESTER**  
**HISTORIES**

**Toolkit 2**  
**Doing your oral history project**

HIDDEN  
HISTORIES

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HISTORIANS

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# Welcome!

This toolkit is number 2 in a series produced by Manchester Histories as part of our Heritage Lottery funded Hidden Histories Hidden Historians project. The other toolkits are:

1. **Doing your historical research project**
3. **Evaluating your project**
4. **Creating your own archive**

You can download all the toolkits at [www.manchesterhistories.co.uk](http://www.manchesterhistories.co.uk).

These toolkits have been written by history and heritage professionals as beginners' guides, to give you the skills and confidence to carry out your historical projects from start to finish. You do not need any special knowledge or experience – just a general interest in history and the desire to research an area of history and heritage that is of interest to you.

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## What is this toolkit about?

This toolkit is a step-by-step guide to doing a successful oral history project. It covers all the key steps in the process of putting together your project, from planning and design, to interview skills, and organising your material and transcription. At the end of the toolkit, you should feel confident to get started with your oral history project.

The toolkit describes the practical actions you should take, provides checklists, top tips from the professionals, includes case studies as well as links to other resources should you need any further information.

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## Who is the author of this toolkit?

Dr Fiona Cosson is a Lecturer in Modern History at Bournemouth University. She has a special interest in oral history and community history. She is a Trustee and Committee Member for the Oral History Society, and Public History Editor for the Oral History Journal. Fiona has professional background in community history and heritage projects, having directed and delivered several heritage projects for a range of organisations, including archives, charities and museums.





## Introduction: What is oral history?

In many senses, oral history is the oldest kind of recorded history. Before the age of the printed word, stories were passed on by word of mouth through oral traditions or in folklore – in songs, ballads, poems, myths, and legends.

There are several ways in which oral history can be defined. We can regard oral history as:

- the recording of an individual's unique memories and life stories.
- the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information based on the personal experience and opinions of the speaker.
- an important source of information about the past.

Oral history is both a process (the act of interviewing and recording) and a product that is created (the audio file and/or the transcript). Oral history is a widely-used and accessible research practice, used by academic researchers, family historians, schools and community groups, and more. Unlike other types of interviewing, like journalism, oral history is about a distinctive engagement with the past. As an oral historian, you are creating a source about the past that will be used in the future, a first-hand record of an individual's memories, life stories and experiences. Find out more about sources in Toolkit 1: Doing Your Historical Research Project.

## Why do an oral history project?

There are a great many reasons to do oral history, from the friends you'll make, to the number of biscuits you'll eat, and the wonderful stories you'll hear. But here are a few more reasons why oral history is an important activity:

- Oral history fills in gaps in the historical record and provides a unique and personal insight into the past that written documents often cannot.
- Oral history creates a record for now and for the future. By recording stories now, we can learn about the past from people's first-hand experiences, capturing a unique resource for use in the future.
- Oral history testimonies are often rich in meaning and allow us to explore how we understand our lives and experiences on an individual level but also on broader social and cultural levels.



- Oral history can change what we think about the past because it can be used to document the lives of people excluded from the ‘authorised version’ of the past, challenging elite and official definitions of what counts as ‘proper history’.
- Oral history can also contribute to wider social purposes, as it is a collaborative effort, bringing together interviewers and interviewees, communities and the wider world.

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## CASE STUDY: PAUL GRANNEY

Manchester had its own oral history pioneer in the form of Paul Graney. Between the 1950s and the 1980s, Paul Graney captured on his reel-to-reel recorder the sounds and stories of the people of the North West of England and beyond. He travelled across the region, recording and researching the stories and songs, memories, music and myths of ordinary people. From his bedsit in Whalley Range, he stored in his private archive and shared his recordings with anyone who was interested.

All of Paul’s reels, tapes, photos and papers are now held in Manchester Archives+ and are accessible to the public. The entire sound collection was digitised by the Paul Graney Memorial Folk Music Trust thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund. You can listen to it all at Manchester Central Library.

For more information, see [www.gmlives.org.uk](http://www.gmlives.org.uk) (search **gb124.graney**)

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# CASE STUDY: MANCHESTER STUDIES UNIT

Between 1974 and the early 1980s, more than 1000 oral history interviews with people all over the North West were recorded by the Manchester Studies Unit, at what was then Manchester Polytechnic (now Manchester Metropolitan University).

The interviews covered subjects such as childhood, marriage, school, work, leisure, politics, trade union activity, the cotton industry, poverty, housing, Italian immigrants, domestic service, the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, along with tapes concentrating on areas such as Wythenshawe and Miles Platting. There are summaries for all the tapes and transcripts for about half the interviews, which can be accessed at Tameside Local Studies & Archives Unit.

For more information, see [www.tameside.gov.uk/archives/soundrecordings](http://www.tameside.gov.uk/archives/soundrecordings).

## Getting started: Designing your oral history project

Doing oral history well requires planning. The following steps give an overview of the process you might take at each stage of your project. They are then covered in more detail.

### Step one: Planning your project

This is where you come up with the aims and ideas that your project will focus on. You should consider at this stage any issues of consent and ethics that might come up. You should pick the equipment you will use, decide where you will carry out the interviews, and plan for what will happen to your interviews after the project has finished.

### Step two: Preparing for your interviews

This stage involves deciding what questions you will ask in your interviews, and doing any background research so you are fully prepared.

### Step three: Carrying out your interviews

What makes a good interview? What should you think about to make sure your interviews go successfully? And what is the actual process of oral history interviewing?



## Step four: Processing your interviews

Once you've done your interviews, you need to make sure they are stored safely and securely. You should write summaries and indexes of your interviews, and decide whether you will transcribe them into a written document. You can also edit your audio files, and finalise the material for archiving.

## Step five: Sharing your oral history project

This is the fun part, where you decide how to share the material you have created with other people. You could write a website or booklet, put on an exhibition or event, or even turn them into a film!

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## Step one: Planning your project

Before you start interviewing people, you should make a project plan. The plan does not need to be finalised straight away, and you can change it as the project goes on, but a good plan will help you manage your project effectively. Some good questions to answer at this stage are:

- What is the project about? What do you want to find out, and how will your interviews help with this?
- Who will you interview, and how many interviews will you do?
- Do you need to do any background research, for example about a historical period or event?
- How will you find people to interview?
- What resources do you have? How many people are involved in your project, and how will you fund it?
- Do you have the necessary technical skills to use your audio recording, storage and editing equipment? If not, how can you learn these or do you know somebody that could help you?
- What will you do with the materials once they have been created? Will you create a private archive or will you deposit them into a public archive? You can learn more about Archives in Toolkit 4: Creating your own archive.
- What will your project produce or create (project outcomes)?





## Interviewer's top tip

Keep in mind that a single oral history interview might take around 30 hours to prepare, carry out, and then process. But don't worry, this can be spread out over several weeks, or even months. But leave yourself enough time to complete all of these stages.

## Consent and ethics

It is important that the oral history you undertake is legally and ethically sound. That is, that your interviewees fully understand and agree to how their interviews (their stories) are to be used, shared and stored in the project and afterwards. The Oral History Society (see the Further Resources section) gives the best guidance on oral history legal and ethical guidance, and their online guide is updated regularly. Here is a summary of their advice:

### Recording agreements

The recording agreement makes sure you have the permission of the people you interview to use the interview material you collect to be shared and/or archived afterwards. There are lots of recording agreement templates available online. The Oral History Society website is a good place to start (see the Further Resources section).

### Libel and defamation

If a person you are interviewing says untrue or harmful statements about other people by name, this could be libel or defamation. Be careful! If you think this is an issue during the interview itself, mention it to the person you are interviewing, and look at the guidance from the Oral History Society. It is worth noting that it is not possible to defame a person who has died.

### Data protection

Interviews are sources of personal information, and therefore need to be protected like any other personal data. You must make sure you store private data securely (for example, in password-protected files), and treat information given during interviews as confidential until your recording agreement gives you permission to make the information public.





## Closures and anonymity

The people you interview might share memories and experiences that they will not want to allow the public access to. If so, you should give them the option of closing access to sections of the interview for a period of time (10, 20 or 30 years). Closing access means that the public cannot have access to the interview. Give them this option at the time of the interview, but be aware that they may not decide to close access until they have received a copy of the interview transcript at a later date.

The Oral History Society points out that it is difficult and often impossible to anonymise interviews and transcripts effectively, because details of the person's life are difficult to disguise completely. You should avoid agreeing to anonymise interviews unless the content is of great value or significance, and there is no alternative. It is the convention in oral history work that agreements to hide the identity of interviewees must have a time limit.

## Putting your project online

If you intend to publish, broadcast, or place on the internet any part of your interviews, you need to make the people you interview aware of this. You can ask permission to do this on the recording agreement.

Interviews placed on the internet should always be accompanied by terms and conditions for use. This will make sure that anyone making use of them will be aware of what they are allowed to do with them. Normal copyright conditions and exceptions apply to online deposits.

## Interview dynamics

A crucial part of the interview process is the relationship between you and the people you interview, as this will affect what is revealed in the interview. The relationship is influenced by a variety of social and cultural factors that shape how we communicate with one another, such as age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. This interaction is sometimes referred to as 'interview dynamics'. For example, if you are not from the same community as the people you interview ('an outsider'), this can create suspicion and a lack of trust. If you are 'an insider' this might mean it is difficult to raise critical or controversial subjects.

When you develop your project, think about how these issues might arise and try to come up with some ideas of how you will deal with them. It is important to work together with the people we interview so they feel involved and part of the oral history project, rather than simply interview 'subjects'.



## Equipment and kit

The amount of kit needed for oral history interviewing can seem little daunting at first, but here is a basic overview to get you started. If you don't feel confident with technology and equipment, the Oral History Society has an online guide to recording equipment (see Further Resources section), or consider who you know and could ask for advice.

### Audio recorders

As a general rule, you should not use an audio recorder that records onto a separate item like a cassette. Try to use a 'solid state' recorder that records a digital file onto a memory card. A good recorder:

- can record in WAVE (or .wav) format.
- can be powered both by mains power and by batteries.
- can have an external microphone(s) plugged in.
- has a USB connection to allow you to plug in the recorder to your computer.
- records onto a memory or SD card (this means you can change or increase storage capacity).

For the best quality, you should aim to record .wav files (uncompressed) at a minimum quality of 44.1khz 16 bit (44.1khz or 48khz at 24 bits is better). If that sounds very technical, don't worry - this is often a pre-programmed setting on many recorders! Remember, record in high quality/ large file size and you can always reduce file sizes later; record in low quality/ low file size and you can't improve the quality afterwards.

If you don't have access to a high-spec recorder, it is possible to record oral history interviews on other recorders, such as cheaper Dictaphones or smart phones. However, do be aware of the issues with these. Often, you can't insert an external microphone in a Dictaphone, and they may only record mp3 files (not wav) so the quality of the recording might not be as good. Some smart phones can record in high quality, but the format of the recordings might mean that only special software can play them. There are a number of apps and accessories for smart phones to improve their use as oral history recorders. See the Further Resources section for sources of advice.

### Microphones

You might want to consider using one or two microphones for your interview (one for you and one for the person you interview). External microphones can improve the sound quality, but you need to make sure your different pieces of equipment are compatible with one another.



## Headphones

You can use headphones to check your recorder is working properly for the interview and what the recording sounds like. Over-the-ear ones tend to be best. Many interviewers use the headphones for the sound-test and remove them once they're confident the audio is recording well.

## Using the equipment

Practice recording well before the interview, so you feel confident setting up and using the equipment. Practice recording sound at home with different people in different rooms, what the range of pre-sets do, how to listen back, and how to upload the files from the audio recorder onto your computer.

Always read the instructions for your particular recorder carefully, and look online to check for tutorial videos and quick-start guides.

For the interview, you should plug your recorder into the mains if possible, rather than rely on batteries. Do a sound check before you start the interview to pick up any background noise in the room (such as electrical appliances or pets), and see if you can minimise these noises or interruptions. Of course, always take care to be polite and respectful of people's homes, possessions and pets.

## Data storage

Think about using an external hard-drive and/or cloud (online) storage space to store the interviews you record. Audio files can take up quite a bit of room on your computer drive. It's also important to have your interview files backed up and duplicated in more than one location too.

If you are going to store oral history material online in the 'cloud' (Dropbox, Microsoft OneDrive, Google Drive etc.), you should read the terms and conditions of storage. Some companies providing this type of storage claim some rights over the material they store which could have implications for both copyright and access restrictions.





## Arrangements for archiving

You should think about how and where the oral history interviews will be stored and used, both during the project and afterwards. This means the interviews will be preserved for future use after the project ends. If you wish to deposit your interviews with an archive (such as within a library) you should contact them to check what their archiving policies and procedures are. They may want you to include specific wording in your recording agreement to do with consent and copyright permissions. Also be aware that some archives need to charge fees to cover the costs of archiving oral history interview materials. For more information on archiving, see the Creating your own archive toolkit.

### Step one checklist

Before moving on to Step two, check you have done the following activities:

- Decided what themes and topics your project is about.
- Decided who you will interview and how many interviews to do.
- Put together your project team and gathered your resources.
- Decided what to do with your project when you have completed it.
- Considered any ethical issues, or things you need to be sensitive to.
- Produced a recording agreement form.
- Thought about how to build up trust with the people you interview and make them feel involved in the project.
- Make sure you are comfortable and confident in using your audio recorder to record, play back, and upload the files to your computer.
- Arranged how you will store your files, and made sure you have enough storage space.



## Step two: Preparing for your interviews

The most challenging part of doing oral history is the interview itself. But with the right preparation, you will get the most out of the interviewing experience.

### The rules of interviewing

Roger Kitchen is an oral historian who's been recording oral histories for more than forty years. Roger suggests there are Four Golden Rules of Interviewing:

#### Rule 1. You only get what you ask for

Always prepare for an interview. Do some research before by looking at historical sources and other oral histories (see our toolkit on Doing Your Historical Research Project for ideas). Think about the questions you want to ask and the topics you want to explore, but be open to what new angles or experiences may come up during the interview.

#### Rule 2. Be interested

The people who you will usually be interviewing are not famous media personalities who are used to being questioned about their lives. They may lack confidence or think their lives are unimportant and 'ordinary'. You will discover they are not, but to convince them you must demonstrate that you are really interested. Eye contact and other positive body language will show this.

#### Rule 3. Listen

Listen and don't interrupt. Let people tell their story. This is probably the most difficult thing to do. There might be lots of interesting points that you want to follow up, but hold your curiosity until they have finished answering your question. Don't forget again that this is an interview, not a conversation. You're there to gather their story, not for them to hear yours. The time to start the conversation is at the end of the interview, when the tape recorder is turned off.

#### Rule 4. Be respectful

No matter how much research you've done, you don't know it all. Bill or Marion, Edna or Jim's experience is just that, their own experience and perspective. Of course, some people's memories are more vivid than others, and the passage of time does sometimes mean that people will make mistakes. However, you should always show the person you are interviewing that you have respect for them and their memories.





## Interview questions

Once you have planned your project, you should have a clear idea of what topics you want to ask about. By doing some background research, you will have an understanding of the historical context and will be able to ask more informed questions. As well as deciding what questions to ask, you will need to know how you will ask them. You should prepare an outline of topics in order to give structure and focus to the interview.

You should prepare an outline of topics you want to discuss, instead of a list of questions. This is because if you read out your questions, you may risk turning the interview into a questionnaire, or stilted Q&A session and you want it to feel more natural.

Start with basic information about the interview. Think of this as labelling the interview recording. I suggest you start your interview by saying the following:

**Today is [today's date].**

**My name is ... and I am interviewing ... for my project about ....**

**To begin, please can you tell me your full name?**

You could then structure your interview questions:

**Chronologically:** starting with the person's childhood and working through their life experiences as they get older.

**By theme/topic:** focusing on one particular event or theme (for example, their experiences at work or memories of being in the army).

Based on the responses you receive, you can then continue the interview in a variety of ways. Try to use 'open-ended' questions (no one-word answers!) and encourage the person to explore, evaluate, or to reflect on how they felt at the time and after. However, don't be afraid to ask for clarification and confirmation of specific details, such as dates and names

### Examples of open-ended questions:

Explore: Can you tell me more about that?  
Why was that?

Evaluate: Was that typical?  
What did you think about that at the time?

Emotion: How did that make you feel?  
How do you feel about that now?





In general, questions should be neutral in tone, rather than loaded with value-laden terms, but you should not be frightened of raising difficult topics so long as they are dealt with carefully and sensitively. If you know in advance that there may be issues that risk trauma or distress, check in advance of interviewing if they are prepared to talk about their experiences of that specific topic.

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## **CASE STUDY**

Mel is going to interview Eva about her life as a journalist, and prepares the following list of interview prompts:

### **Basics**

- Today's date is...
- What is your name? When were you born? Where are we now? Where do you live?

### **Childhood and youth**

- Childhood and growing up: school, friends, and hobbies.
- Home life: parents, siblings, family.

### **Work**

- Getting into journalism: jobs and tasks, wages and working conditions.
- Producing the paper. Changes in newspaper production and journalism.
- Memorable stories and events.

### **Family**

- Meeting your partner, children, impact of work on home life.
- 



## **Interviewer's top tip**

Help! The interview has begun to wander away from the topic! Don't panic - sometimes this can lead to surprising or unexpected insights into the past, so don't interrupt them mid-flow. However, if you find that the interview has reached a dead end, then wait for a natural pause to bring the person back to the main theme by returning to something they said earlier or by introducing a new question.



Be careful to manage your time properly, and be aware of how much time you need to dedicate to each topic or area of interest. Life story interviews can take between 1 to 4 hours and, if they take place over several meetings, can last even longer. Be aware that the longer the interview is, the more time you will need for processing it afterwards.

A useful way of preparing for your interviews, particularly if you have never done one before, is to practice your interview approach with a friend, family member, or another member of the project team. First, decide on the topic(s) to interview them about. You might include one of the following:

- First job
- Street where you lived as a child
- A memorable holiday
- First day(s) at school
- Leaving home

Then take five minutes to draw up some basic questions to ask (don't tell your partner), before finding a quiet space to interview them. If you have recording equipment, use this as an opportunity to practice using it. If you are doing this together with another member of your project, you can swap over so that you both have an opportunity to try out your technique.

## Interview timing and safety

Where should you carry out your interviews? A good place is the home of the person you are to interview (if both of you are comfortable with this). Homes are likely to be quieter and the person more relaxed in their own surroundings. They may also have photos and other objects at home to share with you too.

Other good interview venues are quiet rooms in libraries, colleges, or community centres (make sure to book in advance). Whilst pubs and coffee shops can seem sociable places, they do not make good interview locations on account of noisy coffee machines and conversations, which will be picked up on your recording.

Make sure you leave plenty of time for an interview, even if you think the interview itself may be only an hour. You need time to travel to the interview location, get set up and have a chat before you record anything. You might need to take tea or loo breaks during the interview, and you should always leave a bit of time at the end of the interview to speak about the interview, sign copyright forms, and express your gratitude to the interviewee for their time and their stories.







## Interviewers top tip

Try not to do more than one interview in a day. Interviewing is wonderful but it can also be tiring. You want to give each person you interview your full attention and energy.

### Step two checklist

Before moving on to Step three check you have done the following activities:

- Have you decided on the topic or theme you want to focus the interview on?
- Have you done some background research on the historical context? (See the Doing Your Historical Research Project toolkit for help).
- Have you come up with a list of interview prompts to keep the conversation going?
- Have you practiced interviewing a friend or family member?
- Have you organised a place to do the interviews?
- Do you know roughly how long you expect the interviews to take?





## Step three: Carrying out your interviews

Developing a strong rapport and a comfortable atmosphere with the person you will be interviewing is key to making the interview a success. These steps will help you to feel organised, confident and ready to interview.

### Getting ready

Contact the person you will be interviewing 24 hours before the interview, to check the arrangements with them. Make sure you are happy with your travel arrangements to and from the interview location. Tell someone where you are going, and let them know what time you are expecting to return.

Before you leave home, check you have the following items:

- Audio recorder and its power pack and spare batteries.
- List of questions/interview prompts.
- Recording agreement.
- Information sheet to explain your project.
- Full address and contact number of person you will be interviewing.
- Pen and paper.
- Mobile phone (this should be off or in flight mode during the interview).



### Interviewers top tip

Wearing a wristwatch is recommended, so you can keep an eye on the time, but avoid wearing jewellery or clothing that will make a noise when you move and will be picked up on the recording.



## Getting settled

If you are at the home of the person you are interviewing, ask them where they would be most comfortable being interviewed (living rooms are usually best for comfort and sound), and where they would prefer to sit (e.g. favourite or usual chair). If they offer you a drink, do accept it – this can help build the relationship between you.

Do a short sound test before you start the interview to check your recorder is working. Record a short bit of dialogue, stop and then play back. This can also help you to check if there is any background noise.

Give the person you are interviewing some information about your project and how the interview will go ahead. Things you might want to tell them are:

- You will ask them to sign a recording agreement at the end of the interview.
- Not to panic if their phone rings or you are interrupted – you'll just pause the recorder.
- You might glance down at your notes occasionally in the interview ready for next question.
- That they can stop at any time, and if the interview goes on for a while, you will both take a 'comfort break' halfway through.
- That the recorder will be on unless they request to stop the interview, and you are happy for them to tell you something in confidence "off-the-record".

Finally, ask if they have any questions before you begin recording. Once you are both ready, happy and comfortable, off you go...







## Interviewer's top tips

Once you have pressed 'record':

- Listen, smile, nod, and make eye-contact. Try not to make encouraging noises like 'uh-huh' or 'yes' as these will be heard on the recording.
- Only ask one question at a time, and wait for the person to finish speaking completely before asking any more questions. Don't be afraid of pauses.
- Look at the recorder occasionally to check it's still recording.
- Keep track of time – wear a watch. But also, turn your watch inwards on your wrist, so that it's less obvious if you do need to check the time.
- At the end of the interview, ask the interviewee if you think you've covered everything or if there's anything they'd like to add.
- And remember, it's not a conversation - you are there to listen to their story.

## After the interview

Say thank you to the person you have interviewed and give them positive feedback. Ask them to sign your recording agreement, and answer any questions they might have about consent, anonymity, and how their recording will be used.

Let them know when you'll be in touch to give them a copy of the interview recording and follow up with them.

## Step three checklist

Before moving on to Step four, check you have done the following activities:

- Confirmed the interview arrangements 24 hours in advance.
- Packed a bag with all your essential equipment.
- Made sure you are comfortable with the travel arrangements to and from the interview location.
- You thank the people you interview and arrange to follow up with them at a later date.





## Step four: Processing your interviews

You've completed your interview, and you're ready to move to the next stage - processing your oral history material you've created.

### Organising your material

A successful project keeps a record of all the documents, files, recordings, and information you build up at each stage of the process.

Your signed recording agreements, and any other paperwork, must be kept safe otherwise you will not be able to use the interview recordings in any public presentations, or deposit them in an archive. Scan the paper copy and keep the digital file with your audio recordings.

It is also vital that your interview audio files are securely stored and easily accessible. You do not want to risk losing, deleting or damaging unprotected files! You can take the following simple but important steps to prevent this:

#### 1. Transfer:

Transfer your interview recording from your recorder onto your computer as soon as possible after the interview. The longer you leave it on the recorder, the more likely it will be lost or deleted.

#### 2. Create master copies:

On your computer, create one 'master folder'. Make a copy of every interview audio file and store it in this folder. Files in this folder will be your 'master copies'. Do not use edited or amended files as your master copies. You should back up your master folder on both an external hard drive and cloud storage.

#### 3. Label:

Label all your audio files clearly and consistently. For a small project, a simple name and date format will do e.g. 'Jane Smith 1 June 2016 [part 1]'

#### 4. Editing and transcribing:

Don't use your master copies to edit or transcribe your files. Make copies from the master copy that you can edit instead.

Remember, the safest way to protect your oral history interviews is multiple copies, in multiple formats in multiple locations.



## Summaries and indexes

It is a good idea to write a summary straight after completing an interview, perhaps on the train home or pulled into lay-by on the drive home. The sooner you do it, the more of the interview you'll remember for the summary.

The summary should include basic facts about the interview, such as where and when it happened, and how long it took. You should include any notes you made during the interview, such as topics, keywords, dates, events, and biographical details. You can also add your own thoughts on how the interview went, how useful it was, or whether anything surprising or novel emerged. The summary allows you to think about how well you did as an interviewer, and come up with ways you can improve your skills in future interviews or projects

The purpose of the summary is to help with analysing and archiving the interview. It is especially important if you are not able to transcribe the interview. If you cannot write a transcription, you might also want to consider indexing your interview. An index is a list of the major topics discussed in the interview, a bit like a contents page in a book. To index your interview, listen to the interview carefully to make a note of the major themes and points of interest, and the minute and/or second these were discussed. The more detailed and descriptive the indexing is, the easier it will be for the project, or future researchers, to use your oral history interview recording.





# CASE STUDY: THE BRADFORD PIT PROJECT

The Bradford Pit Project commemorates the Bradford Colliery that used to stand on the site now occupied by SportCity and the Etihad Stadium, Manchester. It was set up to ensure that the people and places that contributed to the development of Manchester will be marked and celebrated. The project was co-ordinated by Lauren Murphy.

The project researchers made sure each interview they carried out was carefully and accurately documented, and interview indexes were created. This meant that the interviews could be easily deposited at the Greater Manchester Sound Archives at Archives+.

Find out more about the project at [www.bradfordpit.com](http://www.bradfordpit.com), listen to full-length interviews online at [www.gmlives.org.uk](http://www.gmlives.org.uk) (search gb124.bradford pit) and listen to excerpts at [www.soundcloud.com/archivesplus/sets/bradford-pit](http://www.soundcloud.com/archivesplus/sets/bradford-pit).

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## Transcription

A transcript of the interview turns the words spoken on the audio file into a written document. The process of transcribing oral history interviews is a time-consuming and laborious task, but it remains a widely-used feature of recording and archiving oral history. Benefits to transcription are:

- It can help to clear up any confusions, mispronunciations, or misunderstandings on the tape.
- Reading through the transcript is a quicker way to find information than listening to the whole recording.
- It can be used to find texts and quotes for your project presentation or exhibition.
- Paper is still a very effective archiving format.



How close should you get to accurately transcribing as much of the person's speech as you can? Should you try to transcribe body language, or facial expressions? Should you include all the 'errs' and 'umms'? There is no one right answer to these questions! You need to think about how 'readable' you want the document to be, or whether there are any other factors (such as time and money) that might mean you can only produce a partial transcription.

Unfortunately, there is no magic machine into which you can feed an oral history recording and receive back a perfect transcript, but there are a number of tools that can assist with transcribing audio:

- Dragon Dictation ([www.nuance.co.uk/dragon](http://www.nuance.co.uk/dragon)) is speech recognition software. You listen to the interview, speak it back to the software, and it will type up what you have said.
- Express Scribe ([www.nch.com.au/scribe/](http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/)) is professional audio player software. You use it to control playback of your recording audio using keyboard 'hot' keys (F keys). This transcribing software also offers valuable features including variable speed playback, multi-channel control, playing video, saving the file in a different format, and more.

Whatever method you use, be consistent in style and layout. Add time-stamps to the document every 5 or 10 mins, and check the transcription for errors by reading it while listening the original audio recording. Finally, always make sure you send a copy of the transcript to the person you interviewed, to check that they are happy with it.

## Archiving

You should have already decided how your interviews will be archived during your planning stage. If you have decided to deposit your project in a professional archive, contact them again now to make sure you have all the documents and information they need.

Remember, archiving is an often-overlooked aspect of oral history. But it is extremely important that you make sure the great material you've helped to create is properly stored and available for future researchers.





## Editing

You might need to edit your interview audio in some way, perhaps to feature it in an exhibition, film or podcast. You might also want to edit the audio to remove the noise of interruptions, and/or to 'splice' (edit together) one or more interview files together.

There is a range of software that can edit audio files, such as Sound Forge (Windows), Peak (Mac), and WaveLab. A popular choice is Audacity because it is free and very straight-forward to use. Audacity lets you edit (trim) sound clips, insert silences, and delete selected audio, and save and export files as WAV or mp3. Advance features include noise removal and fading, and adding metadata to your audio file.

There is a lot of guidance for using Audacity online, including video tutorials and step-by-step instructions. See the Further Resources section for links.

### Step four checklist

Before moving on to Step five, check you have done the following activities:

- Have you created a master folder containing master copies of all your interview files?
- Have you clearly labelled every file?
- Have you scanned and saved electronic copies of all your signed paperwork and documents?
- Do you have a summary and index for each interview?
- Have you decided on the best way to transcribe your interviews?
- Have the people you have interviewed been sent a copy of their interview transcript?
- If you need to edit your files, are you comfortable with the editing software you will use?



## Step five: Sharing your oral history project

There are now many possibilities for sharing oral history, whether it's through traditional booklets, pamphlets, and exhibitions to websites, podcasts, films, cartoons, and audio documentaries. Here are some examples to give you some ideas:

### Online playlists and excerpts

A simple but effective way of sharing your project is by putting short clips of your oral history interviews online. These could be on your group or project's website, or on a sound-hosting service like SoundCloud or AudioBoo. This is a great way to promote your project and get people interested in the longer interviews and transcripts.

#### Be inspired:

This is what Manchester's Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre did with their interviews relating to the 1945 Pan African Congress held in Manchester. Six audio interviews and transcripts were created in 1995 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Pan African Congress. The interviews are with those who were living in Manchester in 1945 and some who attended the Congress, including Sam Nelson and Alfred Gaisie. The interviews were donated by Robin Grinter.

See [www.soundcloud.com/archivesplus/sets/5th-pan-african](http://www.soundcloud.com/archivesplus/sets/5th-pan-african).

### Podcasts and audio documentaries

Take inspiration from your favourite podcasts or radio programmes, and consider creating one yourself, using the oral history interviews you've conducted. You'll need some editing software (to cut and paste your audio clips) and a well-researched script to knit the programme together.

#### Be inspired:

The BBC Radio 4 programme, Voices of the First World War, was a masterclass in blending historical narration with original oral history interviews. ([www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03t7p9l](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03t7p9l))





## Audio trails

If your oral history project focusses on a particular place and space, you could consider creating an audio trail (also known as sound walks or ‘memoryscape’). These are outdoor trails that use recorded sound and spoken memory played on a personal stereo or mobile media to experience places in new ways. Walkers download the audio and a map, and then they walk and listen, marrying sound to place in exciting and creative ways.

### Be inspired:

Toby Butler has created some brilliant memoryscapes in and around London, which might inspire you to create your own. See more at [www.memoryscape.org.uk/index.htm](http://www.memoryscape.org.uk/index.htm).

## Sound events

You could share your oral history interviews with people at a ‘live’ event, where you could play interview clips, with a scripted (or improvised!) narration.

### Be inspired:

This approach was used for an event as part of Manchester Histories Festival in 2016, for an event called ‘A Life in Sound: The Sounds & Stories of Paul Graney’, where a selection of clips from the Paul Graney archive was played, interwoven with the biography of Paul Graney. The sound clips and script was then posted online (SoundCloud and WordPress blog).

See [www.manchesterarchiveplus.wordpress.com/2016/06/09/the-life-and-sounds-of-paul-graney/](http://www.manchesterarchiveplus.wordpress.com/2016/06/09/the-life-and-sounds-of-paul-graney/)

## Printed publications

Even in the age of the internet, there is still a place for printed pamphlets and booklets from oral history projects, items to be read, reread, saved and kept.

### Be inspired:

The Bethnal Green Memorial Project is dedicated to collecting and preserving records relating to the Bethnal Green underground shelter disaster of 3 March 1943, and its aftermath. The project has recorded more than 30 interviews with survivors, and witnesses and relatives of those who died, and digitised documents and photographs from the families of those who were involved. The project produced a printed and online booklet, teaching pack and audio trail.

See more at [www.bgmemorial.org.uk/](http://www.bgmemorial.org.uk/)





## Film and animation

Just because you've recorded in audio and not video, this doesn't stop you from making films.

### Be inspired:

The Talking New Towns was a Heritage Lottery Funded project to share the stories about planning, building and living in the new towns of Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City, built after the Second World War to absorb the London overspill. The project used oral history interview audio as the sound-track for animation depicting the memories and experiences of people moving to the new towns.

See more at [www.talkingnewtowns.org.uk/](http://www.talkingnewtowns.org.uk/)

### Step five checklist

Get together with your project team to look at some the projects in this section to:

- Discuss which projects you find fun and inspiring.
- Come up with ideas on how to turn your project into something special that you can share with other people.



## Further resources

### General information

Manchester Histories is a charity whose main purpose is to transform people's lives from across Greater Manchester through histories and heritage. We work in partnership with a range of organisations, community and voluntary groups to encourage people to recognise, celebrate and value their own histories.

Our Hidden Histories Hidden Historians project aims to uncover histories of people, families, communities and places that are less well known and well recorded, by encouraging everyone to get involved in exploring their histories and sharing their stories about the past.

Manchester Histories has four free toolkits on other topics you can use to make the most of your project, these are:

- **Doing your historical research project**
- **Doing your oral history project**
- **Evaluating your project**
- **Creating your own archive**

You can find all our toolkits at [www.manchesterhistories.co.uk](http://www.manchesterhistories.co.uk)

Oral History Society (UK)

[www.ohs.org.uk/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/)

Oral History Association (US)

[www.oralhistory.org/](http://www.oralhistory.org/)

International Oral History Association

[www.iohanet.org/](http://www.iohanet.org/)



## Consent and ethics

Oral History Society: Is Your Oral History Legal and Ethical?

[www.ohs.org.uk/advice/ethical-and-legal/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/ethical-and-legal/)

Heritage Lottery Fund Guidelines, 'Using digital technology in heritage projects'

[www.hlf.org.uk/digital-technology-heritage-projects](http://www.hlf.org.uk/digital-technology-heritage-projects)

## Best practice

Oral History Association (USA) Principles and Best Practices

[www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices](http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices)

StoryCorps (USA)

[www.storycorps.org/](http://www.storycorps.org/)

## Equipment and kit

Ask Doug: Choosing a Digital Audio Recorder

[www.ohda.matrix.msu.edu/askdoug/](http://www.ohda.matrix.msu.edu/askdoug/)

Oral History in the Digital Age: Equipment

[www.ohda.matrix.msu.edu/gettingstarted/playlists/equipment/](http://www.ohda.matrix.msu.edu/gettingstarted/playlists/equipment/)

Oral History Society: Recording Equipment

[www.ohs.org.uk/advice/getting-started/3/](http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/getting-started/3/)

Vermont Folklife Center, Digital Audio Recording Equipment Guide

[www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/fieldwork-guides](http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/fieldwork-guides)

Digital Omnium: iOS and iPhone Recording for Oral History

[digitalomnium.com/ios-and-iphone-recording-for-oral-history/](http://digitalomnium.com/ios-and-iphone-recording-for-oral-history/)

Inquit Audio, the UK's first and leading specialist supplier of portable, digital recording equipment

[www.inquitaudio.co.uk/](http://www.inquitaudio.co.uk/)





## Processing interviews

Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center: Indexing and Transcribing Your Interviews

[www.loc.gov/vets/transcribe.html](http://www.loc.gov/vets/transcribe.html)

Audacity

[www.audacityteam.org/](http://www.audacityteam.org/)

Oral History Centre at the University of Winnipeg's tutorial, An Introduction to Audacity

[www.oralhistorycentre.ca/introduction-audacity](http://www.oralhistorycentre.ca/introduction-audacity)

## Other oral history projects

George Ewart Evans Collection at the British Library

[sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/George-Ewart-Evans-collection](http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/George-Ewart-Evans-collection)

Greater Manchester Sound Archive

[www.archivesplus.org/news/greater-manchester-sound-archive/](http://www.archivesplus.org/news/greater-manchester-sound-archive/)

Elizabeth Roberts' Working Class Oral History Archive at Lancaster University

[www.lancaster.ac.uk/users/rhc/resources/archive.htm](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/users/rhc/resources/archive.htm)



