



British and Irish Sound Archives Annual Conference

11-12 November 2022

College Court, University of Leicester &
University of Leicester Campus

Conference Programme

Friday 11 November – College Court, Leicester

09.30am

Delegates Arrive

10.00am

Welcome and Introduction

Colin Hyde (Project Manager: Sounds for the Future, East Midlands Oral History Archive)

10.10am-11.45am

Session One

10.10am

Disability Voices: Stories of Lived Experience in the British Library

Madeline White (Oral History Curator, The British Library) and Emily Watts (Collection Care North Manager, The British Library)

Between November and December 2021, colleagues from across the British Library collaborated on a project to produce a blog series to celebrate UK Disability History Month (UKDHM). The four blogs – one from the UK Web Archive, one from Contemporary Manuscripts, and two from Oral History – showcased items from the Library's collections that reflect or represent personal experience of disability. Curators selected and wrote blog posts about collection items which spoke to the themes of UKDHM and disability activism; a member of the British Library's staff Disability and Carer Support Network added personal commentary to each of the blogs, reflecting on the contemporary relevance of these archived stories.

This presentation will explore the collaborative process that underpinned the project as a model for showcasing underrepresented stories from the archive. It will look in particular at the process of searching for stories of lived experience in sound archives and the ways in which our systems and processes – including curation and cataloguing – can help or hinder the visibility of these stories in the archive. In doing so, it will discuss the importance of talking about and sharing lived experiences of disability and the role of librarians and archivists in that conversation.

10.30am

Recording D/deaf histories in Essex

Kate O'Neill (Sound Archivist, Essex Record Office)

In November 2021 the Essex Sound and Video Archive began an ongoing collaboration with Damien Robinson, a visual artist based in Southend-on-Sea.

For the past year, Damien has been exploring how the experiences of D/deaf people have been recorded in regional and national archives as part of a commission for Focal Point Gallery. The commission is one of eleven funded by the Arts Council for the 'New Histories' project, which aims to explore new regional histories from diverse communities across the East of England.

Existing material relating to deafness in the Essex Sound and Video Archive - and other collections at the Essex Record Office - is largely from a hearing perspective. As well as reinterpreting this material from a deaf perspective, Damien aimed to readdress the historical exclusion of D/deaf voices by creating new recordings to add to the archive. The result was a series of short films of signs of local place names, recorded at a workshop with the Southend Deaf Pub Group - a snapshot of contemporary BSL used in Essex.

This presentation will reflect on what we've learnt about archiving under-represented voices through our involvement with the project, and highlight the value of building relationships with local artists and arts organisations.

10.45am

The Silent Archive: Creating a Time-Capsule of Taboo Narratives

Dr Helen Foster (Research & Outreach Officer, East Midlands Oral History Archive)

The Silent Archive was a project which aimed to collect spoken testimonies about menopause between 2020 and 2021. Led by the East Midlands Oral History Archive, the project aimed to fill a void in the archive around women's lived experiences of the traditionally taboo topic of menopause.

Originally devised to be delivered face-to-face, the project was adapted for online delivery when the Covid pandemic struck just weeks after launch. This brought fresh challenges, but also offered exciting opportunities to push the boundaries of oral history. New strands were introduced into the project, to collect women's stories virtually through facilitated conversations and audio diaries. The resulting narratives offer an insight into menopause experiences, setting medicalised language alongside euphemism and colloquialism, metaphor and simile. They express confusion, frustration, fear, pain, relief, humour, revelation, resignation and joy.

This presentation will give an overview of the project and reflect on how the pandemic reshaped our plans. It will explore the challenges and rewards of recording narratives around sensitive subjects and our efforts to preserve the resulting recordings and make them accessible as a time-capsule for the future.

11.05am

How the Voices of Our National Health Service Oral History Collection Captures the Lived Experiences of People during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Hannah Tame (Oral History Cataloguer: NHS Voices of COVID- 19, The British Library)

The NHS at 70 oral history project started in 2017 and then continued remotely through the Covid-19 Pandemic as NHS Voices of Covid-19, capturing the experiences of over 1200 interviewees, and forming The Voices of Our National Health Service Collection at the British Library.

This collection of interviews recorded during the pandemic, includes many examples of different peoples lived experiences. Some of these experiences are commonly shared and others more unique and untold. There is the common theme for many interviews of staying at home, juxtaposed with NHS staff and other key workers experiences of putting themselves at risk relentlessly. Yet at the same time home working forced a fundamental change in the methodology underpinning the interviews, impacting upon interviewer/ee relationships in oral history during this time.

For this paper Hannah will draw upon her experience as cataloguer for the collection (one of the largest ever to be deposited at the British Library). Audio extracts from the collection will be used and additionally, Hannah will demonstrate the British Library's new web resource Covid Stories.

11.25am

Session One Q&A

11.45am

Break

12.00pm-1.00pm

Session Two

12.00pm

How Can We Remember the 'Right Version' of the Past?: Archivists' Struggle to Obtain Testimonies in Post-Reunification Germany

Julia Volkmar (PhD student and MSCA Cofund CITI-GENS Early Stage Researcher, Queen's University Belfast School of Law)

Over thirty years after German reunification and the historic opening of the 'Stasi' Archives, dealing with the past for many has come to an end. The vast media attention of the 90s and early 2000s has long died down, and judicial mechanisms of reparation and rehabilitation have ceased to exist. A new interest has however sprung up: so-called 'Zeitzeugen' [contemporary witnesses], give testimony of

their lived experiences in the former GDR. There is a societal interest in learning from the past beyond the realms of the dictatorship.

Archivists are now trying to preserve these testimonies. The many GDR-focussed archives in the East of Germany are experiencing an increased interest in oral history and are broadly engaging in trying to find all those stories worth recording. For the archivists, many of them former activists in the GDR, this is an emotional affair. They are trying to balance the uncertainty of future research requests with the demands of victims who they often know personally. Based on substantive oral history interviews Julia has conducted with archivists in Eastern Germany, she will reflect on how they deal with the challenge of creating sound archives of a contested dictatorship past.

12.20pm

[Amplifying Underrepresented Voices in the Archive: A Case for Publishing 'Orphan Works'](#)

[Stephanie Ashcroft \(Lead Intellectual Property Rights Manager, Unlocking Our Sound Heritage, The British Library\)](#)

During Unlocking Our Sound Heritage, project staff have worked to prepare 100,000 previously un-digitised, and so under-used, sound recordings for publication on our forthcoming website. This involved developing practical processes to identify speakers and performers, contact and request permission to make their works available to wider audiences.

Around 40-50% (TBC) of speech-based recordings are 'orphan works,' in-copyright works where the rights holders cannot be identified or located. We have therefore had to assess the risks of publishing these recordings without permission.

Of these orphan works, a large proportion record the lived experiences of people that are underrepresented in our sector's collections, public outputs and/or workforces, e.g. rights holders from working class, ethnic minority and LGBTQ+ backgrounds and communities.

Stephanie will examine why orphan works are prevalent amongst underrepresented rights holders. Using a number of case studies from traditional music, literature and oral history collections she will address the following questions:

- What key factors lead to 'orphan work' status?
- What steps are needed to ensure these marginalised stories are shared?
- Why is publishing these orphan works important?

This talk will explore practical methods to address structural issues, whilst highlighting the stories which would remain hidden if we didn't publish orphan works.

12.40pm

Issues of Ongoing Restricted Access for Politically-Sensitive Recordings

Jim Hickson (Audio Project Cataloguer, Unlocking our Sound Heritage, The British Library)

Through the work of the Unlocking Our Sound Heritage (UOSH) project, many collections in the British Library's sound archive have been examined and considered for the first time in decades – sometimes for the first time since their donation. In his work as a cataloguer for UOSH, I have come across various recordings (and even whole collections) that have restricted public access due to the political sensitivities of their contents. However, the world has changed significantly over the decades, and so have political sensitivities. In this talk, I will draw upon examples from three disparate collections as case studies (including recordings from Romania, Ethiopia and South Africa) to discuss some problems and difficulties with evaluating political sensitivity over time, and how changing sensitivities could – and perhaps should – be reflected in the varying degrees of public access and restriction of sound recordings. These issues serve to highlight the importance of keeping such recordings in active conversation to ensure that valuable history remains accessible where (and when) appropriate.

12.50pm

Q&A Session Two

1.00pm

Lunch

2.00pm–2.55pm

Session Three

2.00pm

In Our Own Words – A Perth and Kinross Archive Project

Hannah Mackay (Project Archivist – In Our Own Words, Culture Perth and Kinross)

A significant part of our sound collections contains rural working-class Scottish voices telling their stories of life in early 20th Century Perth and Kinross. The hard graft of bothy life, farming and domestic service and how it intertwined with social life, religion and important events. Stories that are largely missing from the written records.

My role is to catalogue and create access points to the records. I hope to bring these voices to the general public via a portal or other digital space, but I also think it important to ensure that the communities represented in these collections can easily listen to these sounds as well, especially in areas of rural isolation and digital exclusion. This presentation will explore possible solutions, for example, using the Perth and Kinross Mobile Library. The routes pass through and connect with the

community, making the vans and their senior library assistants a great starting point to share the records and perhaps collect more of (hi)stories.

Archives are increasingly acknowledging the value in underrepresented voices, as shown by this conference, and we need to demonstrate through our actions that we value their input and that is it their archive too. If they can't come to the archive, how do we bring it to them?

2.10pm

Conversation with the Blues: Lived experience in 1960s America

Annabel Valentine (Archivist, Oxford Brookes University)

The Paul Oliver Archive of African American Music contains a set of 67 interviews which were conducted by British blues researcher Paul Oliver on a trip to the USA in 1960. He interviewed blues musicians about their music and lives - from the relatively well known, such as Lightnin' Hopkins, to artists virtually unknown outside of their locality. Oliver's research trip was supported by the BBC and resulted in his seminal work 'Conversation with the Blues' - a book, LP and radio show. Clips and quotes from the interviews were used in the resulting publications but the full interviews were never made available. Now, thanks to the European Blues Association and Archives Revealed funding from The UK National Archives, the audio reels containing these interviews have been digitised and catalogued, along with hundreds more which form part of the wider collection.

This talk will explore the collection and its potential for research, both on the history of blues music but also on the surrounding social and cultural history including racial discrimination and the civil rights movement. It will also consider the challenges encountered in rights clearance to make the recordings available online, in order to better foster international connections.

2.30pm

Voices - Our Stories Matter: Bridging the Gap between Archives and Community Heritage

Audrey Wilson (Partnerships and Engagement Manager, Scottish Council on Archives)

To celebrate Scotland's Year of Stories 2022, Scottish Council on Archives are delivering a national project, Voices: The Community Story where we collect stories from all over Scotland and bring together qualified archivists, heritage professionals and community groups, often volunteers. The project theme is Migration, and we welcome the stories of New Scots, second or third generation or people already living in the UK who have decided to relocate to Scotland. It is important to reach out and attract all people to be part of Scotland's Community Archive and hear the voices of people from a variety of backgrounds and from harder to reach communities. We are providing practical training, guidance on best archival practice including digital preservation as well as providing the opportunity to network and form new partnerships.

The project will provide an introduction to archives for many people who have not engaged or been aware of this part of the heritage sector. We set ourselves the challenging goals set out in The National Archives' Archives for Everyone strategy: to build trust, tear down barriers and be bold.

The project will end in 2022, and an evaluation report will be provided to all stakeholders which will include a guide to Next Steps as individuals and groups will have the knowledge and skills to continue recording their community stories. We want to empower people to take ownership of their own stories and be part of a sustainable archive of the future.

[Voices: The Community Story Project - Scottish Council on Archives \(scottisharchives.org.uk\)](https://scottisharchives.org.uk)

2.40pm

Q&A Session Three

2.55pm

Break

3.10pm–4.30pm

Session Four

3.10pm

‘My Soul is a Witness’: the British Library’s Cullen Maiden Collection

Frankie Perry (Audio Project Cataloguer, Unlocking our Sound Heritage, The British Library)
and Gail Tasker (Audio Project Cataloguer, Unlocking our Sound Heritage, The British Library)

Cullen Maiden was a singer, composer, poet, and activist born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1932. Like many Black American classical musicians facing prohibitive racism in the States, Maiden forged his career in Europe, including at the Komische Oper in East Berlin; he eventually settled in London. Maiden’s large collection of tapes was donated to the British Library’s Sound Archive in 2015, and has recently been digitised and catalogued by the UOSH project.

The tapes demonstrate a lifetime of anti-racist activism through practices of performance and listening. Maiden’s innovative recital programmes, some titled ‘My soul is a witness’, introduced majority-white audiences to music by Black classical composers, alongside spirituals and readings of poetry and prose; his rich and animated introductions told histories of African-American oppression, liberation, and power, and detailed aspects of Maiden’s own experiences. The collection also includes Maiden’s extensive off-air recordings of Black singers and musicians across genres, many of which are now extremely rare.

Focusing on various strands of this dynamic collection, and drawing upon recent scholarship by Kira Thurman and others, our paper highlights the importance of the Cullen Maiden Collection in enriching knowledge of, and access to, aspects of Black music-making in Germany in the later twentieth century.

3.30pm

Unlocking Our Sound Heritage in Prisons, on Islands, in Schools, Parks and Gardens: Creative Engagement in Scottish Communities through Archival Sound

Charlie McCann (Interim Sound Curator, Moving Image and Sound Collections, National Library of Scotland)

Engagement between the National Library of Scotland's sound collections and non-academic and professional communities has been low. This presentation describes how the UOSH project created opportunities to build a comprehensive activity plan that improved digital access and participation in our national sound heritage among new targeted and "non-traditional" audiences.

Through both the UOSH artists in residence programmes and latterly with further funding from the National Librarian's Innovation Fund and Creative Scotland, we focussed specific areas of the collection and invited communities to reflect upon, interact with and use the sounds to create new artistic work and expressions through inspiration and repurpose.

The projects yielded many positive results including establishing lasting relationships between the library and the artists and institutions we worked with, a legacy of resources to which users can return and re-interpret and many films, paintings, prints and mixtapes made by and for the communities involved. The library also experienced an increase in interest and requests relating to our sound collections from those who experienced the projects both online and in person.

This presentation will show how sound collections can be used in innovative and inclusive ways to successfully engage with marginalised groups, creating opportunities for their involvement in our shared cultural heritage.

3.50pm

Uganda to Leicester: From Hostile Reception to Social Cohesion

Dr Liam McCarthy (Honorary Fellow, History, Politics & International Relations, University of Leicester)

2022 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the expulsion of Asians from Uganda, with thousands settling in Britain, and in particular Leicester. This presentation will trace the hostile reception they received here in Leicester, a city described in the national media at the time as the 'most racist city in Britain'. Using the programme archives of BBC Radio Leicester it will show how the 'Ugandan Asians' were reported on as a problem in a city where the anti-immigration National Front received a fifth of the vote in the 1976 city council elections. However, the same archives recordings also reveal a radio station slowly starting to embrace the growing South Asian communities in the city and build social cohesion. A young generation of 'British Asians' torn between two cultures in Leicester went on to create their own sound on BBC Radio Leicester's Asian Network which was launched in 1989.

Showing how archives can be used to bring history to a wider audience some of these recordings were aired for the first time in the city for 50 years this summer on BBC Radio Leicester, Sabras Sound and Uganda 50 (a 28-day restricted licence radio station).

4.10pm

Q&A Session Four

4.30pm

Thanks and Close Day One

Saturday 12 November – University of Leicester Campus

10.00am

Panel Discussion: Realising the Legacy of UOSH and the Role of Networks in Sustaining Work with Sound Archives

Eoin O'Cearnaigh (Network Partnership Manager, Unlocking Our Sound Heritage, The British Library), David Govier (former Project Manager, Unlocking Our Sound Heritage, Archives+ Manchester), Colin Hyde (former Project Manager, Unlocking Our Sound Heritage, University of Leicester), Katie Scaife (former Project Manager, Unlocking our Sound Heritage, Bristol Culture)

A panel of former project managers from three of the ten hubs that collaborated with the British Library to deliver Unlocking our Sound Heritage discuss ongoing work to build upon the legacy of this major project supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It aims to open up a wider conversation about the role of networks in supporting more work of this sort with sound archives.

11.30am

Guided Tour, University of Leicester Campus

Colin Hyde (Project Manager: Sounds for the Future, East Midlands Oral History Archive)

A guided tour of the University of Leicester campus, including the University's digitisation studio.

12.30pm

Close Day Two