



Oral History Recording

Why record people's memories?

Recording the spoken word is a great way of preserving social history and memories. Listening to such recordings can give a real sense of what life must have been like in the past. The technique also preserves stories for future generations. Spoken word can often capture details which may not be found in other documentary evidence. It brings to life and humanises many areas of heritage. It is important to remember that some stories may be exaggerated and altered through generations but they still play a big part in recording social history and giving a flavour of times gone by.

Recording memories can be a great intergenerational exercise and a very social experience. These days it is vitally important to record what we can, not only from the more senior members of our society but also from our family, friends and neighbours too. It is important to remember that what seems like everyday life could sound completely different to someone who is listening in 100 years time.

All sorts of different topics can be covered from childhood to coping in times of conflict. Recording memories from residents will begin to create a picture of how an area has changed over the years. By recording a variety of age ranges you will get an interesting comparison and capture memories for future generations to hear.

Equipment needed:

It is now possible to make digital recordings using computers, laptop computers, handheld Dictaphones, telephones, and a wide variety of mp3 recorders which also store music, photographs etc.

While these can create very good recordings it is worth noting that none of them are designed for recording long interviews at high quality. For this it is still best to use a dedicated sound recorder which is designed specifically for this purpose.

The Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service has one recording kit which is available on request. Please call 01522 555780 to ask about borrowing the equipment.

Method:

It is worth deciding on a few questions or anecdotes prior to the recording which may jog the interviewee's memory. It is important to let the interviewee lead with the story telling, with you prompting where necessary.

It can be useful to use photographs to jog a person's memory. Get them to talk about it and they tend to speak more naturally as they look at it. You can use a computer-based photo and the same computer can also be used to record if the quality is suitable.

Choose a place that is quiet with no interruptions. Make your subject feels as comfortable as possible; some may prefer to be recorded in their own home, sitting in their favourite chair.

Place the recording equipment to the side of the interviewee; if it is out of eyeshot they are likely to forget it is there and relax into the conversation.

Start with a test recording to make sure the equipment is working and you can hear the speaker clearly. Always remember to take back up batteries and equipment.

It is useful to record names, location, dates, subject, etc. at the start of the recording as notes can get lost.

Some people can chat for hours, while others can take a while to loosen up. Be aware of the time as this can lead to issues with file storage.





You should also be aware that the first thirty minutes or so may not produce any relevant material, but it will help make your speaker feel at ease. If you are visiting someone in their own home always let someone else know where you are going and how long you intend to be there for.

We really recommend asking your interviewee to complete a consent form. This will ensure that you both understand who owns the recording and where it will be used. This is especially important if you plan to share your recording online or within an exhibition. The best consent/clearance form is the one the British Library/Oral History Society uses -

http://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics/ohs_recording_agreement.pdf

Once you have made your recording you will be ready to edit. Have a listen and pick out the key parts you wish to convey. You can delete pauses and skip irrelevant parts and edit out background noise.

There are plenty of free sound editing websites available. One of which is Audacity, which has been recommended by the East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA).

www.audacity.sourceforge.net

You can make a PowerPoint presentation where you add sound to each photo or page of text. An alternative is to add pictures to sound. This is often a better option as you can edit the sound first for content, quality, duration, etc., then add photos, text, etc. at appropriate points. Free software, such as Microsoft Movie Maker, can be used to do this.

It is always a nice gesture to offer your interviewee the first listen of the finished clip to ensure they are happy with it. Offer them a copy of the recording, if possible.

All recordings should ideally be summarised or transcribed word for word which will allow ease of sharing. At the very minimum a brief overview of the recording will give future listeners the chance to skim through the topics discussed and find the section of information they require.

If you plan to share your material you must ensure that you have a consent form completed and the person you interviewed is aware of where the recording will be stored and shared.

Where to find out more:

The East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA) has all the information you could possibly need to get started with recording spoken history.

www.le.ac.uk/emoha/community/resources/index.html

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/history/outreach/besh/oral/paperwork>

Heritage Lincolnshire has conducted many oral history projects over the years, a good example of which involved young people from Grimsby interviewing older members of their community about their experiences during WWII. These were paired with contemporary video footage and now form a useful resource for local schools.

<https://www.heritagelincolnshire.org/learn/lincolnshire-in-world-war-two>

