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Oral History in Scotland

This article examines the development of oral history in Scotland, locating it within the broader context of the oral history movement, and highlighting some of the ways that we believe oral history has contributed to our understanding of Scottish society. As well as reflecting back on the evolution of oral history, we also consider oral history in the present day, and offer our views on what the future holds for oral history in Scotland. We cannot hope in this article to cover all that has or is taking place in the field of oral history in Scotland, and we know that we will have missed what others might have included had they written a similar article. Just as human memory is subjective, so too is our take on oral history in Scotland; just as oral historians like Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli turned the perceived weakness of oral history (the subjectivity of memory) into a strength during the 1970s, we hope that our review of oral history in Scotland contains its own strengths.¹ In particular, we aim to convey the vibrancy and diversity of oral history in Scotland, and persuade you of the important contribution it has made – and is continuing to make – to understanding Scotland’s past. What is particularly significant about oral history is the way in which it powerfully mediates past and present. Interviewing individuals about their past from the perspective of the present raises methodological and theoretical questions, which we will return to later, but also gives the past a real sense of immediacy and relevance in our present lives. This means that oral history is a powerful form of public history. As Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone noted: ‘Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward’.² We will illustrate this in relation to three key areas: the workplace and health; immigration and national identity; and gender and the family. Finally, we seek to raise some questions and issues for the future direction of oral history in Scotland, including in the area of new digital and media technologies

¹ See for e.g. L. Passerini, ‘Work, Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism’, *History Workshop Journal* 8 (1979) 82–108 and A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, New York, 1991).

² K. Hodgkin and S. Radstone, *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (London, 2005), 1.

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and online resources. In doing so, we hope to make the first steps towards proposing a meaningful agenda for the future.

Before we go any further, we need to define what we mean by 'oral history'. This is no easy task. As Corinna Peniston-Bird recently noted:

The complexities of oral history begin with its definition. It is a multi-faceted term: in the singular with the indefinite article, an oral history refers to a spoken memoir, while 'oral history' describes a historical process and methodology; or, as Alessandro Portelli puts it, the term thus refers to both what oral historians hear and what they subsequently write.³

Oral history is therefore the product of the interview situation—the memoir that is created when interviewer(s) meet(s) interviewee(s). It can also mean the process of undertaking interviews; a quick way of referring to the many stages that make up oral history methodology: shaping the project, identifying interviewees, drafting questions, organising schedules, conducting and recording the interviews, transcribing or summarising, and so on. Anna Green and Kathleen Troup observe that this is how most historians still see oral history: 'as primarily a methodology'.⁴ But oral history also refers to the theory of oral history, the engagement with interpretive theories relating to areas like memory, narrative and subjectivity.⁵

In the late 1970s oral history began to shift from what Michael Roper termed the 'reconstructive mode' (trying to reconstruct the events of the past through direct eye witness testimony) to the 'interpretive mode' (that is, turning the perceived weakness of oral history, the subjectivity of memory, into its strength). A crucial influence was the Italian oral historian, Luisa Passerini, and particularly her work on silences, first published in *History Workshop Journal* in 1979. In her interviews, entire life histories had been recounted without any mention of the years between 1925 and the outbreak of the Second World War i.e. the years of Italian Fascism under Mussolini. Passerini saw such silences as evidence of 'a scar, a violent annihilation of many years in human lives, a profound wound in daily experience'.⁶ As Lynn Abrams recently observed:

Memory is not just the recall of past events and experiences in an unproblematic and untainted way. It is rather a process of remembering: the calling up of image, stories, experiences and emotions from our past life, ordering them, placing them within a narrative or story and then

³ Corinna M. Peniston-Bird, 'Oral History: the sound of memory' in Sarah Barber & Corinna M. Peniston-Bird, *History Beyond the Text: a student's guide to approaching alternative sources* (Abingdon, 2008).

⁴ A. Green and K. Troup (eds), *The Houses of History* (Manchester, 1999), 230.

⁵ An accessible, engaging and comprehensive introduction to these, and other theories of oral history, can be found in Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London, 2010).

⁶ L. Passerini, 'Work, Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism', 92.

telling them in a way that is shaped at least in part by our social and cultural context.⁷

Oral historians have increasingly sought to understand the way in which our memories are constructed and narrated, and to use these understandings to explore not just past experiences, but the ways in which the past resonates with and influences our present.

So, when we refer to oral history, we can actually be referring to practices, sources and/or theories. What makes oral history even more difficult to define is that by its very nature, it is multi- and interdisciplinary, and has meant – and continues to mean – many things to many people. But regardless of approach or focus, what we all tend to have in common is a belief that memory is a vital aspect of Scotland's heritage and that memories should be recorded, preserved, engaged with and used in public history, the media and academic research. More of this should be done, and urgently. As an old African proverb says, 'When a knowledgeable old person dies, a whole library disappears'.

The Development of Oral History

Oral history in Scotland, as elsewhere, has its roots in folklore and oral tradition – the process of passing history down through the generations by word of mouth. In opening the first oral history conference in Scotland in Edinburgh in May 1973, T. C. Smout commented that the 'oldest and strongest root' of oral history in Scotland was the folklore work of the School of Scottish Studies founded in 1951 at the University of Edinburgh. Smout reflected, nonetheless, that 'folklorists and oral history objectives only partly overlap':

The former have a penchant towards the traditional tale, the song, the remote area, the vanishing language, the rural scene: the oral historian has a bent towards uncovering the memorable immediate life experience, the study of work and class relationships, the typical rather than the extraordinary, certainly the city as well as the countryside.⁸

But the lines between 'folklore' and 'oral history' were often more blurred than this would suggest. As Margaret Bennett has noted in her article exploring the life and legacy of Eric Creegan, his interest in the cultural traditions of communities in the Highlands and Islands both encompassed and contributed to the fields of oral history, folklore, education, language and anthropology. It is worth commenting further on Eric Creegan here since, as Bennett has persuasively shown, he was an influential and inspiring figure in the development of oral history in Scotland, the UK, and also further afield.⁹

⁷ L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 79.

⁸ T. C. Smout, 'Scotland: the State of Oral History', *Oral History*, 2 (1974), 11.

⁹ Indeed, Margaret Bennett first found out about Creegan while a postgraduate student in the Folklore Department of Memorial University, Newfoundland.

Born in Yorkshire, and with roots on the Isle of Man, Eric Creegan came to Scotland in 1954 to join the newly formed University of Glasgow Extra-Mural Department. Starting out as a tutor in Argyll, Creegan began tape recording and taking field notes on the traditional culture of the areas he visited. Referring to his research on the fishing communities in Scotland, Creegan commented that the recordings he collected made it 'possible to let the story of the industry be built up by the men engaged in it, creating a more complete and human picture than one can possibly get in any other way.'¹⁰ Appointed a lecturer in the School of Scottish Studies in 1966, Creegan continued recording oral testimonies and traditions, exploring the history and traditions of the west Highlands through tape recording, and in so doing made a valuable contribution to the School of Scottish Studies Archive, the largest sound archive in Scotland by far (with over 9,000 recordings).¹¹ Therefore by 1973, when the UK Oral History Society was founded, Creegan 'was already a seasoned oral historian', and became 'one of the key players in the Society'.¹² Bennett cited a powerful example of Creegan's work in the forty-minute recording of Duguld MacDougall, an Argyllshire drover born in 1866 and interviewed by Creegan in 1956 at the age of ninety-one years old: 'his personal memories spanned not only his own lifetime, but also that of his parents and grandparents. Most remarkable of all he could report details they had told to him, thus taking us back several generations to the early 1700s.' By integrating his interviewee's words with other supporting material, using the 'fresh approach of combining historical records of books and manuscripts with transcriptions of tape-recorded folk memories', Creegan demonstrated the relevance of oral tradition to social historians.¹³

Alexander Fenton was another early pioneer, interviewing on aspects of rural life and work in the 1960s for the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. Undoubtedly the growing sense of national cultural identity in Scotland (as in other Celtic nations) helped to fuel this early work. As we have already argued, the inter-disciplinary synergies were also clear and evident in these early days, with a sociologist from Aberdeen University, Ian Carter, and a scientist from the University of Edinburgh, David Edge, amongst those active in the field, as well as the aforementioned connections with folklorists, ethnographers and anthropologists. Scottish historian T. C. Smout was an early advocate and may well have supervised the first oral

¹⁰ E. Creegan (1960), cited in M. Bennett, 'The Growth of the Oral History Movement in Scotland: the Life and Legacy of Eric Creegan', *Oral History*, 37 (2009), 46.

¹¹ School of Scottish Studies Archive Website: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-cultures/celtic-scottish-studies/archives/sound-archives/history>

¹² Bennett, 'The Growth of the Oral History Movement', 47.

¹³ Bennett, 'The Growth of the Oral History Movement', 48–9; Creegan's key work was based in Tiree, funded by a large Social Science Research Council grant, on which the long-serving School of Scottish Studies Archivist, Margaret A. Mackay (recently retired in 2010), cut her teeth as a research assistant (Jane Macgregor also acted as part-time research assistant).

history based PhDs in Scotland.¹⁴ In a manifestation of 1960s anti-establishment radicalism, Smout was involved with Dr James Maclean (who was interviewing Indian Civil Servants at the time) in establishing an Oral History Committee in the History Department of Edinburgh University in May 1968.

Modern oral history originated after the Second World War and a number of factors combined to vastly increase its popularity in the post-war years, but particularly from the 1960s. We have already mentioned the growing international interest in folklore and oral traditions, and Scotland became famous for its work in this area. Renowned folklorists such as Hamish Henderson and the American, Alan Lomax, found Scotland fertile ground for collecting, and the School of Scottish Studies Archive provided a lively hub and safe store for the preservation of these disappearing traditions. However, the technological breakthroughs of mechanical sound recording through reel-to-reel and cassette tape recording in the 1960s, combined with the development of 'social history', meant that the methodology of oral history interviewing began to take off in Britain during the 1960s.¹⁵

From the beginning in Britain, a central aim of oral history was to preserve the past of those least likely to leave behind written traces. The new generation of social historians who came of age in the 1960s found that oral history offered them a powerful methodology and rich source material for understanding the history of 'ordinary people'. As Paul Thompson noted in his influential book, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*:

Until the present [referring to the twentieth] century, the focus of history was essentially political: a documentation of the struggle for power, in which the lives of ordinary people, or the workings of the economy or religion, were given little attention except in times of crisis such as the Reformation, the English Civil War, or the French Revolution.¹⁶

There was a growing interest in 'history from below', and it quickly became clear that oral history offered a unique and valuable source for those historians looking to explore areas of the past that were still within living memory. Oral history has at its core a personal narrative, and through such narratives oral historians frequently (though not exclusively) aim at a refocused history centred on 'everyday life'—an emphasis that oral historians claim provides a more 'democratic' approach and helps us to better interpret and understand the past—especially where areas are poorly documented. As Trevor Lumis

¹⁴ Joan Smith studied Harry McShane and neighbourhood class consciousness, while Sylvia Price explored the labour market in the Clydeside shipyards between 1880 and 1914.

¹⁵ See 'Historians and Oral History' in P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Third Edition, Oxford, 2000) for a detailed account of the history and development of oral history.

¹⁶ P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 3.

noted: 'Given the inadequacy of other sources, oral evidence stands alone as the only major resource for large areas of experience'.¹⁷

Like elsewhere in the UK, oral history in Scotland had a close connection with labour history during its formative years. Until the 1960s, histories of the labour movement and the working classes more broadly were scant, and rarely found in undergraduate teaching.¹⁸ Looking to address this gap, the Society for the Study of Labour History (SSLH) was formed in 1960 and formally launched in Scotland in April 1961 with a focus on the history of working people.¹⁹ From the beginning, one of its main aims was tape-recording the memories of labour movement veterans, although by the early 1970s only a few interviews had been recorded.²⁰ An early member was Ian MacDougall, at the time a trainee teacher and history graduate of the University of Edinburgh, who was quickly elected Secretary of the Scottish Committee of the SSLH. One of his roles was to lead a collective effort to trace and preserve records of the labour movement in Scotland, an urgent task that was also shared by the parent Society. As Robert Duncan noted in his recent retrospect of the Scottish Labour History Society, a number of innovative projects took place in this regard, including some early forays into oral history:

Some members tape-recorded reminiscences of labour movement veterans, although such initiatives were slight and, as yet, somewhat amateurish, when compared to the skilled, and highly productive, efforts of MacDougall and other oral history practitioners from the 1970s.²¹

The Scottish Labour History Society (SLHS) was formed in 1966 and 'diverged amicably' from the SSLH, with MacDougall becoming its first Secretary, spending some years employed full-time on compiling a comprehensive list of labour movement records.²²

From the 1970s, Ian MacDougall began undertaking oral history interviews of working people, and during his career has proven to be an inspirational crusader for oral history. He influenced, and was influenced by, the growing number of labour historians adopting oral history interviewing as a methodology in their research. The interviewing of labour movement veterans was an initial focus, with a series of interviews undertaken with the Fife miners' leader John MacArthur

¹⁷ T. Lummis, *Listening to History* (London, 1987), 21.

¹⁸ In Scotland between 1953 and 1963, William Marwick was the only historian teaching courses on the working class movement in Britain and Scotland in university education; by the late 1960s, courses were available at other Scottish universities.

¹⁹ See R. Duncan, 'The Scottish Labour History Society: A Retrospect', in J. McIlroy, A. Campbell, J. Halstead and D. Martin (eds), *Making History: Organisations of Labour Historians in Britain since 1960, Labour History Review Fiftieth Anniversary Supplement*, 75, (April 2010) 117–127.

²⁰ See 'Current British Work', *Oral History*, 1 (1972), 7.

²¹ Duncan, 'The Scottish Labour History Society', 120.

²² Eventually published as I. MacDougall (ed.), *A Catalogue of Some Labour Records in Scotland and Some Scots Records Outside Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1978).

and Joseph Duncan of the Scottish Farm Servants' Union. By the early 1970s oral interviewing projects linked to the labour movement in Scotland included work on the 1926 General Strike by John Foster and Ian MacDougall, 'urban subcultures' by Charles Woolfson, shipyard labour by Sylvia Price and the 1971 UCS work-in by Roy Hay.²³ One of the earliest University of Edinburgh doctoral students to use oral interviewing methods was Joan Smith in her study of the Glasgow Marxist Harry McShane—a project that produced the most insightful of all the Red Clydesider autobiographies, *No Mean Fighter*, in 1978.

The 1970s were a fertile and significant period for oral history across Britain. Arising out of the growing number of individuals beginning to use interviewing in their academic work alongside increasing interest, the Oral History Society was formed by a group of British scholars led by Paul Thompson in 1973. It had been in existence in a different form since 1969, when a conference was held in December 1969 at the British Institute of Recorded Sound (now the British Library Sound Archive) 'to bring together some of those scholars known to the organisers to be using the interview method in social and political history, and to discover whether any further liaison would be valuable.' A committee, comprised of Theo Barker, George Ewart Evans, Stewart Sanderson, and Paul Thompson, was created, and the founding meeting of the Oral History Society took place at the University of York in September 1973.²⁴ A few months before, in May 1973, the first oral history conference to take place in Scotland had been organised by the departments of Economic History and Educational Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Attended by over fifty people and consisting of four papers—by Paul Thompson, Eric Creegan, Ian Carter, and Roy Hay and John McLaughlan—the conference pointed to the growing interest in and application of oral history in Scotland. 'The day wound up with a discussion', noted T.C. Smout in a report for the journal *Oral History*, 'which gave an indication of the interest the subject is presently arousing within Scotland.'

Despite the hive of activity in oral history that the conference represented, Smout's report on it was rather cautious. For example, in reference to the hopes Carter expressed that oral history interviewing would challenge the 'neo-Whig' tale of agrarian improvement that would arise if only 'conventional sources' were utilised, Smout cautioned that 'the existence of a new source does not necessarily guarantee that we shall use it sensibly.' He also pointed to a number of problems already being faced by the infant oral history community in Scotland, including the inaccessibility of some recordings and a lack of resources available for support services (for example, for coordinating projects and transcribing interviews). 'Unless Scotland is prepared to enter the fray and approach with zestful leadership and well thought-out

²³ See Smout, 'Scotland', 11.

²⁴ Editorial, 'Forty Years 1969–2009', *Oral History*, 37 (2009), 2.

projects,' wrote Smout, 'Scottish oral history (apart from the traditional folk life studies) will be left behind. If it is (and this is why the problem matters), the whole study of history in Scotland will suffer again. Historiographically we tend to over-caution in facing new disciplines.'²⁵

But oral history continued to develop in Scotland during the 1970s. Reading through the Current British Work section of the bi-annual *Oral History* journal, we can see oral history gathering pace and spreading (at least, those projects reported in this section). It is striking that from the mid-1970s, the number of doctoral students making use of oral history methodology in Scotland also began to grow, with reference made to a range of theses in different disciplines incorporating oral history interviews. These included projects on childhood and adolescence (Lynn Jamieson, University of Edinburgh), Scottish football (Bob Crampsey, University of Glasgow), Border farm servants (Barbara Robertson, University of Edinburgh), and a study of a Dunbartonshire village (Liz Baird, University of Strathclyde).

It is also telling that an increasing number of students and researchers began to tackle aspects of women's history during the 1970s, when 'second wave' feminism flourished (in 1977, the second issue of *Oral History* was devoted to Women's History). The Current British Work section of *Oral History* made reference to a range of new projects taking place in Scotland from 1976, including oral history projects on the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (Sandra Holton, Stirling University), the women's suffrage movement (Valerie Atkinson, University of Glasgow), the social and economic activities of women graduates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Sheila Cubbage, University of Edinburgh), and the links between suffragettes and political activists (Edith Hamilton, University of Strathclyde). A fledgling women's history movement was in development in seventies Scotland, with the influential Glasgow Women's Studies Group founded in 1978. Its first publication in 1983 noted that despite interest in women's experiences both historically and in late 1970s society, in terms of empirical studies, 'Scottish women's lives seemed as hidden as ever'.²⁶ It is crucial to highlight the 'vitaly important' role that women's history played in women's politics with 'both academic and grassroots women's history-making activity intertwined'.²⁷ This was the case in Scotland, as elsewhere, and the methodology of oral history interviewing proved particularly significant in the development of a social history of women in Scotland. Important works were published during the 1980s by Elspeth King on the suffragette movement in Scotland and Jayne Stephenson on women's lives in Stirling, although it

²⁵ Smout, 'Scotland', 14.

²⁶ Glasgow Women's Studies Group, *UNCHARTED LIVES: Extracts from Scottish Women's Experiences, 1850-1982* (Glasgow, 1983).

²⁷ A. Thomson, 'Oral History and Community History in Britain: Personal and Critical Reflections on Twenty-Five Years of Continuity and Change', *Oral History* 30 (2008) 95-104.

took until the early 1990s for a significant body of work to come through (we will explore aspects of this in the next section).²⁸

Returning briefly to the 1970s, by the end of the decade Scotland had also gained its own formal body for the promotion of oral history. In April 1977, the Oral History Society held its annual conference in Scotland at the University of Strathclyde. On the last day, it was suggested that Scotland should have its own oral history group, and a working party was set up there and then to make the necessary arrangements. Out of this, the Scottish Oral History Group (SOHG) was formally established in 1978 to act as a coordinating body for all those interested in and doing oral history in Britain. Creegan became the first chair, with Smout elected as honorary president.²⁹ In the first newsletter of the SOHG, Creegan commented:

Oral history presents us with a rich and diverse store of source-material, ranging from the ponderous utterances of politicians to the unpremeditated reflections of the elderly and it mirrors the thoughts, attitudes and experiences of people from all walks of life. It is as near as you can get to the history of everyman and to everyman's history [...] It is our aim to make the approach and methods of oral history better known and more widely used in the investigation of Scottish life. The recordings we make now will be a powerful aid to future generations living in a much-changed society.³⁰

Given its emphasis on the experiences of individuals in society, the way in which it conveys the human dimension of our past, its ability to help us understand our present, and its potential for democratising history and empowering those who participate, it is no surprise that oral history has grown more and more popular, within and outside the academy.

In 2007, in his paper to the annual conference of the UK Oral History Society, Alistair Thomson referred to the 'explosion' of community-based oral history projects that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. He identified five 'overlapping and interconnected movements' that each contributed to this growth: the annual radical History Workshop events, which began in 1966 at Ruskin, the trade union college; the community publishing movement; radical adult education, like the Workers' Educational Association and extramural departments

²⁸ See for e.g. E. King, *The Scottish Women's Suffrage Movement* (Glasgow, 1985) and Stirling Women's Oral History Project, *Five Bob a Week, Stirling Women's Work, 1900–1950* (edited by J. Stephenson, Stirling Central Libraries, 1988). In 1992, when Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon published the edited collection *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800–1945*, there was still large gaps in understanding of the experience of women in Scotland's past and 'very wide' scope for further research.

²⁹ The SOHG went on to produce a regular newsletter, *By Word of Mouth*, to organise bi-annual conferences and to host UK oral history conferences. In the 2000s it helped organise two of the UK Oral History Society conferences north of the border: 2003 in Aberdeen and 2009 in Glasgow, the latter co-hosted by the Scottish Oral History Centre at the University of Strathclyde (formed by Callum Brown in 1995).

³⁰ Creegan, cited in Bennett, 'The Growth of the Oral History Movement', 48.

(where Creegan started out in Scotland); the women's movement; and the reminiscence movement. When Paul Thompson wrote *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, first published in 1978 and now on to its third edition, he argued that oral history enabled the uncovering of hidden histories and promoted *democratic* history-making (with oral history, unlike archival research, relatively easy for anyone to learn and do).³¹ It was in public history that Thompson claimed the oral history project 'has its most radical implications':

It can contribute to many different enterprises—an adult literacy programme, an evening class in history, a local history society or a community group project, a Manpower Services Commission scheme for retraining the young unemployed, a reminiscence therapy group for old people in a home or a hospital ward, a museum exhibition, or a radio programme. For each its essential merits will be to encourage co-operation, on an unusually equal footing, in the discovery of a kind of history which means something to ordinary people.³²

Early copies of *Oral History* give a flavour of this kind of work. For example in the 1970s, Partick Housing Association conducted oral histories with tenants and residents of Partick, a working-class area in the west end of Glasgow, then undergoing significant redevelopment. The Manpower Services Commission Community Programme became an important stimulus for oral history in Britain from the late 1970s, when it began to be used by the Conservative Government, under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, to try and alleviate high levels of unemployment by providing opportunities for the development of skills and experience.³³

It is worth taking a moment to explore some of the projects that were carried out under the auspices of this scheme. Projects covered a variety of subjects: the experience of everyday lives, changing work patterns, declining crafts and occupations (such as crofting and fishing), and joblessness. As Thomson observed, 'one of the ironies of Thatcherism was that it destroyed the employment base of working-class communities, and then funded their histories.'³⁴ In Scotland, MSC projects included the Arbroath History Project on

³¹ See Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, and Thomson, 'Oral History and Community History', 96.

³² Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 209.

³³ The MSC was first set up in 1973 by Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath, and from the late 1970s its Community Programme (previously Community Enterprise Scheme) sponsored projects to benefit the community, which included history in its 'social and cultural work' area. It was withdrawn in 1988. See G. R. Smith, 'Manpower History: The Arbroath History Project. An Experience of MSC-funded research', *Oral History*, 12 (1984), 60–3; Thomson, 'Oral History and Community History', 95–104.

³⁴ Thomson, 'Oral History and Community History', 102.

aspects of life in the town and the Dundee Oral History Project, which undertook reminiscence work with elderly residents of the city and created educational packs for schools (both coordinated by Graham Smith); the Scottish Working Peoples' Oral History Project, led by Ian MacDougall and focused on the working lives of people living in the Edinburgh District; the Strathkelvin Local Studies Project on industry and working life in the area; and the pioneering Stirling Women's Oral History Project, set up to create an archive of oral history interviews focusing on the lives of women (coordinated by Jayne Stephenson). These projects—and others like them—were important for a number of reasons, which included: the skills and experience they gave to the unemployed people who worked on them; the opportunity they gave to individuals to tell their stories; the historical sources they created (oral testimonies from many of these early projects continue to be used to this day); the outputs that they generated, which included books, education packs for schools, reminiscence kits for elders; and, moreover, in the way that they contributed to the growing interest in the lives of 'ordinary people' in the wider public. Indeed, Raphael Samuel argued that the MSC training schemes had 'transformed heritage in this country [Britain] from an enthusiasm into an industry'. Reflecting on the growth of community history between 1985 and 2007, Alistair Thomson noted MSC funding stimulated rapid growth in the number of oral history projects taking place, and that during the 1980s, the Oral History Society was 'struggling to keep up with that growth.'³⁵

The interest in the history and experiences of 'ordinary people' that grew in the 1980s was also felt in the media. The voices of working-class people speaking about their past had been broadcast on radio before; for example, in the 1950s some BBC producers had taken the lives of working people 'and made them into history' and in so doing, had given 'a public voice to the internal historical accounts of those outside history.'³⁶ More influential were the Radio Ballads, produced by Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Alun Howkins comments that they created an 'entirely new structure—a mixture of actuality—sounds and voices—with music and song.' As Parker commented in 1961:

It was immediately apparent that here was a form which could achieve something of a breakthrough in popular art; for by speaking in the unquestionable accents of everyday experience, we were able to evoke that thrill of recognition by which the listener was able to identify himself with the action...³⁷

During the early 1980s, Billy Kay created and produced a series called *Odyssey*, first broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland between 1980 and

³⁵ Thomson, 'Oral History and Community History', 102.

³⁶ A. Howkins, 'History and the Radio Ballads', *Oral History*, 28 (2000), 90.

³⁷ Howkins, 'History and the Radio Ballads', 92.

1982 and later broadcast on BBC Radio 4. These took oral histories from working-class Scots and presented them alongside traditional folk music, without a narrator. They were immensely popular and influential and powerfully demonstrated that, as Kay pointed out, 'through the words of the people who experienced it, history is alive.'³⁸

Ian MacDougall also played an important role in popularising oral history in Scotland, and in sparking interest in the voices of ordinary working people—whether in relation to their work, or those who took part in the Hunger Marches of the interwar depression, or the volunteers to the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Rob Duncan noted that by the 1980s, MacDougall 'was well on the way to becoming the Studs Terkel of Scottish labour history'.³⁹ In 1992, Ian MacDougall helped to set up the Scottish Working Peoples' History Trust, a charitable body that sought to 'champion the cause of working people's history', with recording the recollections of working people one of its three main aims.⁴⁰

Community history and oral history came together in the appearance of a range of new types of museums in the 1980s too. Although existing museums were beginning to use oral history in their collections more and more, a number of new museums engaged with (or indeed created by) their local communities sought to make oral history the centrepiece and focus of their collections. One example was Springburn Community Museum, Glasgow's first independent community museum, which opened in 1986 with the aim of telling the story of 'the rise, decline and rebirth' of the industrial community of Springburn in Glasgow through photographs, objects and, above all, the oral testimony of local people. The museum put on a number of successful exhibitions on working and home life in Springburn, as well as contributing to a number of acclaimed (and still very popular) books on the oral testimonies it collected, but sadly fell victim to a lack of funds and closed its doors in 2001.⁴¹ A more ambitious venture was the People's Story Museum in Edinburgh, founded in 1984 and linked to a number of community history and reminiscence groups. Initially established as a museum of labour and trade union history, and taking 'labour' in its widest sense to include 'all aspects of the life and work of ordinary people', it utilised

³⁸ B. Kay (ed.), *Odyssey: Voices from Scotland's Recent Past* (Edinburgh, 1980)

³⁹ Duncan, 'The Scottish Labour History Society', 124.

⁴⁰ See the Scottish Working Peoples History Trust website: <http://www.swpht.org.uk/> The interviews undertaken under the auspices of the SWPHT can be accessed at the SOHC Archive, Glasgow, and at the School of Scottish Studies Archive, Edinburgh.

⁴¹ The Springburn Community Museum still has a virtual presence on the Glasgow Digital Library website (see <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/springburn/index.html>). The books it produced included G. Hutchison and M. O'Neill, *The Springburn Experience: An Oral History of Work in a Railway Community from 1840 to the Present* (Edinburgh, 1989) and J. Faley, *Up Oor Close: Memories of Domestic Life in Glasgow Tenements 1910–1945* (1990).

oral history, autobiography and reminiscence to tell the story in the people's own words.⁴²

Almost all Scottish museums have now incorporated oral history fieldwork into their collections and exhibitions, though it must be said with varying degrees of success. Museums often encounter problems with oral history, whether in relation to storage and cataloguing recorded interviews as 'objects', the often prohibitive costs of including sound in galleries and exhibitions, and wider and more political questions about the testimonies that are used (and excluded). A museum that has really foregrounded oral history sound recordings in its space is Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life, while a recent innovative AHRC-funded Knowledge Transfer Fellowship (*Voice in the Museum*), led by Arthur McIvor and David Walker at the Scottish Oral History Centre (with Martin Bellamy at Glasgow Museums), sought to develop the oral history collection and the use of oral history within Glasgow Museums. This has included digitising and summarising the 300 or so tapes of the 2000 Glasgow Lives project, initiated by Glasgow Museums in 1997 and typifying a wide and growing interest in memory as we reached the end of the millennium.⁴³

It has been observed that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) fuelled a 'renaissance' of community oral history from the late 1990s, which followed a lull in such projects after funding was pulled from the MSC Community Programme in 1988. After the National Heritage Act was passed in 1997, funds became available for a range of heritage-related activities including oral history projects. The Heritage Lottery Fund has supported over 100 Scottish projects with more than £4 million of aid, leading to a diverse range of community-based oral history projects taking place. Even just thinking about those trained at the Scottish Oral History Centre in the University of Strathclyde, founded in 1995 by Callum Brown and active in oral history training and outreach, we can see some really valuable oral history interviews being undertaken. Recently, we trained and worked with the Scottish Council on Deafness who undertook an oral history project conducted entirely in British Sign Language and titled 'My Firsts'. We were also involved in the *Rainbow Lives* group in Fife, which aims to involve communities in recording their own pasts, in order to foster racial understanding and tolerance. This has included the oral history projects *Asian Connections* and *Talk, Tell, Share*, both of which have produced books. As the *Rainbow Lives*

⁴² H. Clark et al, 'Oral History and Reminiscence in Lothian', *Oral History*, 17 (1989) 35–42.

⁴³ It has also involved writing descriptors for the catalogue, working with museums staff to integrate oral history into the galleries and exhibitions, and preparing education materials. See D. Walker, (2011) *Voice in the museum: personal oral narratives and social identities in public history*. In: Glasgow Museums Collections Research Conference, 2011-11-04, Glasgow. (Unpublished)

website states: ‘The use of oral history as a tool in the creation of racial understanding and tolerance should not be underrated.’⁴⁴

The Contribution of Oral History in Scotland

In the early phase of oral history, where the emphasis was largely upon rediscovering ‘lost’ or poorly documented communities, oral history gave voice to the marginalised; to those who had been ‘hidden from history’. Oral history significantly extended the scope and range of social and cultural history into areas of experience that historians had neglected; for example, working class communities, the lives of children and women, and migrant communities (such as the Italians, Jews, Lithuanians, Indians and Pakistanis). Good examples would be the careful reconstructions of childhood experiences in rural and institutionalised contexts respectively in Jamieson and Toynbee’s *Country Bairns*, and Abrams’s, *Orphan Country*. These and other such studies provided insights into the local and the specific, unique, particular cultures of place—and much of Scotland’s oral history has been framed in the local context. Early studies focused on Edwardian life, the interwar depression and the Clydebank Blitz.⁴⁵ Thus oral history helped provide the *substance* of lived experience, adding what it felt like—emotion and vivid subjective experience to the mix. Several oral-history based chapters in Abrams and Brown’s, *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Scotland* (2010) persuasively demonstrate the contribution that oral history is making to our understanding of Scottish society in the twentieth century.

Oral historians also sought to question and to challenge the stereotypes and dominant narratives that have pervaded Scottish historiography. One area in which they have been particularly fruitful is in challenging the acceptance of the ‘separate spheres’ ideology (which placed men largely in the public domain and women in the private), which seemed to characterise Scottish historiography up until the early 1990s. This has meant that gender identities have been a key theme in Scottish oral history work; and women’s history was an early focus in Scotland, as elsewhere. As we’ve noted already, pioneering work using oral testimonies was undertaken by the Glasgow Women’s Study Group in the early 1980s. Later, Brown and Stephenson explored religiosity and women and work using the Stirling Women’s Oral History Archive (from the 1980s), critically engaging with the ideas of Elizabeth Roberts regarding the domestic focus of women’s lives at mid-twentieth

⁴⁴ Rainbow Lives website: <http://www.rainbowlives.org.uk/index.html>

⁴⁵ I. Carter, *Farm Life in North-East Scotland, 1840–1914: The Poor Man’s Country* (Edinburgh, 1979); I. Macphail, *The Clydebank Blitz* (Clydebank, 1974); L. Kibblewhite and A. Rigby, *Aberdeen in the General Strike* (Aberdeen, 1977); N. Gray, *The Worst of Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression in Britain* (Leicester, 1985); I. MacDougall, *Voices from the Hunger Marches* (Edinburgh, 1990).

century.⁴⁶ Annmarie Hughes' seminal work explored domestic violence and gender identities between the wars, arguing that deepening levels of abuse in the 1930s were linked to a crisis of masculinity in the economic Depression.⁴⁷ Hilary Young's work has explored the forging of gender identities in Scotland through childhood and youth reading (such as story papers and comic books).⁴⁸ Abrams and Young have also problematised the stereotypical concept of the 'hard man' – Abrams arguing from oral evidence that we need to rethink the notion of discrete 'separate spheres' and the non-participatory, unemotional father and showing how, through oral testimony: 'Working-class families fostered a positive image of domestic life which contrasts with the stereotype of the brutish, selfish father'.⁴⁹

Much oral history based research has focussed on work cultures and workplace politics and in the process made major contributions to our understanding of workplace power, collective struggles, authority, agency and risk-taking in relation to health and safety in Scotland.⁵⁰ A sense of a wide range of distinct work identities and narratives emerge from recent oral history research in this area, showing the potential to use personal testimony both as a barometer of the changing meaning of 'work' and to engage critically with the notion of an

⁴⁶ C. Brown and J. Stephenson, 'Sprouting Wings? Women and Religion in Scotland 1890–1950', in E. Breitenbach and E. Gordon (eds), *Out of Bounds* (Edinburgh, 1992); C. Brown & J. Stephenson, 'The view from the workplace: Stirling women and work 1890–1950', in E. Gordon and E. Breitenbach (eds) *The World is Ill Divided* (Edinburgh, 1990); E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place* (Oxford, 1984).

⁴⁷ A. Hughes, *Gender and Political Identities in Scotland, 1919–1939* (Edinburgh, 2010).

⁴⁸ H. Young, *Representation and reception: an oral history of gender in British children's story papers, comics and magazines in the 1940s and 1950s*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Strathclyde, 2006).

⁴⁹ See L. Abrams, '"There was Nobody like my Daddy": Fathers, the Family and the Marginalisation of Men in Modern Scotland', *SHR* 77 (1999), 242; H. Young, 'Hard Man, New Man: Re/composing Masculinities in Glasgow, c. 1950–2000', *Oral History* 35 (2007); H. Young, 'Being a Man: Everyday Masculinities', in L. Abrams and C. Brown (eds), *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2010).

⁵⁰ A. McKinlay and J. Hampton (eds), 'Making Ships, Making Men: Working for John Brown's Between the Wars', *Oral History*, 19 (1991); A. Gilmour, *An examination of work culture and industrial relations at the Linwood car plant, 1963–1981*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Glasgow, 2010); A. Perchard, 'Sculpting the "Garden of Eden": Patronage, Community & the British Aluminium Company in the Scottish Highlands, 1895–1982', *Scottish Labour History* 42 (2007); A. Perchard, *Aluminiumville: Government, Global Business & the Scottish Highlands* (Lancaster, 2012); A. Perchard and J. Phillips, 'Transgressing the Moral Economy: Wheelerism and Management of the Nationalised Coal Industry in Scotland', *Contemporary British History* 25 (2011); A. Perchard, *The Mine Management Professions in the Twentieth-century Scottish Coal Mining Industry* (Lampeter, 2007); J. Phillips, 'Collieries and Communities: The Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984–1985', *Scottish Labour History* 45 (2010); T. Brotherstone and H. Manson, 'Voices of Piper Alpha: Enduring Injury in Private Memory, Oral Representation and Labour History', *Scottish Labour History* 46 (2011); D. Bradley, 'Oral History, Occupational Health and Scottish Steel, c1930–1988', *Scottish Labour History* 46 (2011); J. de Fresnes, 'After that Strike we was Never Kepted Doon... The Scots Herring Girls Strikes, 1900–1950', *Scottish Labour History* 46 (2011).

erosion of the traditional 'work ethic'.⁵¹ Focusing on male employment in the heavy industries, Ronnie Johnston and Arthur McIvor have marshalled oral evidence to explore the culture and meaning of work, the construction and 'performance' of masculinity and the impact of occupation-related disability (including emasculation)—refining, to some degree, Blaxter's 'social exclusion' thesis.⁵² Research based on oral testimonies is generating a lively debate on the nature of working class masculinities, including the role of the workplace in the forging of manliness and the part male identity played in risk taking and health-eroding behaviours.⁵³ This evidence suggests we need to be careful to contextualise and understand such behaviour and 'agency' within a complex matrix of structural constraints and pressures—including a profit-driven productionist ethos. Such research continues and develops the early oral history focus on workers' lives, culture, narratives and experience in Scotland, pioneered by individuals like Creegan, Kay, and MacDougall.

Health and the body have also come under scrutiny by oral historians and those using oral history. This has been a significant feature of work in the medical history unit at Glasgow University, the Centre for the Social History of Health and Healthcare at Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of Strathclyde, and in the SOHC. Mental health has featured here, in the oral history based work of Mitchell, Turner, Smith and Nicolson, though we still await a comprehensive oral history of mental health in Scotland.⁵⁴ Blending oral evidence with other sources, Angela Turner has challenged the notion of the ameliorative impact of the transition from institutionalisation to community care.⁵⁵ David Smith and Lesley Diack have also explored the powerful influence of the media in creating myths about the 1964 typhoid outbreak in Aberdeen and how these myths influenced oral

⁵¹ A. McIvor, 'The Realities and Narratives of Paid Work: The Scottish Workplace', in L. Abrams and C. Brown (eds), *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2010); and see A. McIvor, *Working Lives: Work in Britain since 1945* (Aldershot, 2013).

⁵² A. McIvor and R. Johnston, *Miners' Lung: A History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining* (Aldershot, 2007); R. Johnston and A. McIvor, *Lethal Work: A History of the Asbestos Tragedy in Scotland* (East Linton, 2000); R. Johnston & A. McIvor, 'Dust To Dust': Oral Testimonies of Asbestos-Related Disease On Clydeside, c 1930 to the present', *Oral History* 29 (2001); R. Johnston and A. McIvor, 'Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries, c1930–1970s', *Labour History Review*, 69 (2004); M. Blaxter, *The Meaning of Disability* (London, 1976).

⁵³ For a survey of this literature and critical engagement with it drawing upon new oral interview material see D. Walker, 'Danger was Something you were Brought up wi': Workers' Narratives on Occupational Health and Safety in the Workplace', *Scottish Labour History* 46 (2011).

⁵⁴ H. Mitchell, 'Sporting Institutions: Football, Masculinity and Community Identity at Lennox Castle Hospital', *Oral History* 25 (1997); A. Turner, 'From Institutions to Community Care? Learning Disability in Glasgow from c1945', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Strathclyde, 2010); G. Smith and P. Nicolson, 'Despair? Older homeless men's accounts of their emotional trajectories', *Oral History* 39 (2011).

⁵⁵ Angela Turner, 'From Institutions to community care?'

interview narratives.⁵⁶ Their work draws creatively upon the concept of the ‘cultural circuit’, developed in the work of Dawson, Thomson and Summerfield.⁵⁷ More work is needed here in Scotland, along the lines for example of the seminal work of Beier in using oral narratives to elucidate changing health cultures in England from the late nineteenth century to 1970.⁵⁸

Oral history has also featured heavily in exploration of ethnic and minority identities in Scotland –which includes critical examination of ‘myths’ surrounding the receptivity of host communities (Scotland as a ‘tolerant’ nation) and the enduring nature of discrimination and prejudice.⁵⁹ Oral history interviews have been particularly insightful in terms of understanding national identity. An interesting study carried out by the geographer, Peter Hopkins, explored the impact of ‘9/11’ on how young Muslim men who had grown up in Scotland constructed their sense of national identity:

Mohammed: Well, I’ve got a Scottish accent, so when I’m on the phone, people are surprised when I tell them my name, because people think I’m Scottish... I suppose in that way I’m Scottish... well I don’t wear a kilt, so I’m not Scottish in that way. I don’t go to pubs and things like that which is a part of Scottish culture, so I’m not a part of Scottish culture in that way...⁶⁰

As well as giving insight into how these individuals ‘placed’ themselves in their social world, it also raised interesting questions about the form and meaning of Scottish national identity. Indeed, an interesting theme running throughout the oral history work on ethnic minorities is that of the changing conceptions of Scottish national identity and what Scotland ‘means’. This was one of the motivations for Billy Kay’s *Odyssey*:

⁵⁶ D. F. Smith and L. Diack, with T. H. Pennington and E. Russell, *Food Poisoning, Policy, and Politics: Corned Beef and Typhoid in Britain in the 1960s* (Woodbridge, 2005).

⁵⁷ G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994); A. Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford, 1994); P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, 1998).

⁵⁸ L. McCray Beier, *For Their Own Good: The Transformation of English Working Class Health Culture* (Ohio, 2008).

⁵⁹ M. Kelly and T. Edensor, *Moving Worlds* (Edinburgh, 1989); M. Watson, *Being English in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2003); W. Ugolini, *Experiencing War As The ‘Enemy Other’: Italian Scottish Experience In World War II* (Manchester, 2011); W. Ugolini, ‘Communal myth and silenced memories: the unremembered experience of Italians in Scotland during the Second World War’ in W. Kidd and B. Murdoch (eds), *Memory and Memorials. The Commemorative Century* (Aldershot, 2004); W. Ugolini, ‘The Italian Community in Scotland. Insights from Oral History Research’, in M. Rose and E. Rossini (eds), *Italian Scottish Identities and Connections. Notebooks of the Italian Cultural Institute No. 15* (Edinburgh, 2000); L. Fleming, ‘Jewish women in Glasgow c1880–1950: gender ethnicity and the immigrant experience’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Glasgow, 2005); M. Harper (ed.), *Emigrant Homecomings. The Return Movement of Emigrants 1600–2000* (Manchester, 2005).

⁶⁰ P. Hopkins, ‘Young Muslim Men in Scotland: Inclusions and Exclusions’, *Children’s Geographies* 2 (2004) 265.

There is a national culture, but one divided by region and by class. Scotland is both a collection of provinces and a nation, with provincial cultures which build up into a national culture. The idea behind the *Odyssey* programmes is to highlight local culture and to build up a picture, a tapestry if you like, of a national culture.⁶¹

One group with a particularly poorly documented history were the travelling people—explored through oral interviewing in the classic *The Book of Sandy Stewart*, edited by Roger Leitch in 1988. Another community that has attracted sustained attention from oral historians are Irish Catholics. Boyle's important new monograph on the Glasgow Irish community is an exemplar of a theoretically informed approach incorporating oral history methodology. It directly engages with the debate over the extent and persistence of discrimination against minority Catholics, drawing upon extensive personal evidence.⁶²

What characterises this body of work is the way personal narratives shed insights into layers of experience and diversity of attitudes and emotions—how people *felt* about their life experiences, thus enabling meta-narratives to be challenged and agency and identity restored to the historical narrative. If social history put the 'ordinary' people back in to the picture, oral history refocuses on their identities, attitudes, emotions and feelings, enabling the story to be animated and better imagined. Casting an eye over such work retrospectively, one is struck by the important contributions made by oral historians or historians utilising oral history methods and/or sources in several fields. There is also a considerable body of work on rural and Highland and Islands life, tradition and society.⁶³ Also leisure, sport, religion and popular culture, which has been the focus of a series of stimulating oral history based studies.⁶⁴ Sexuality and personal relationships have also been

⁶¹ G. Smith, 'Voices on the Radio: Billy Kay the Maker of *Odyssey*', *Oral History* 13 (1985), 56.

⁶² M. Boyle, *Metropolitan Anxieties: On the Meaning of the Irish Catholic Adventure in Scotland* (Farnham, 2011).

⁶³ E. Creegan (ed. by M. Bennett), *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover* (Edinburgh, 2004); H. Holmes, *As Good as a Holiday: Potato Harvesting in the Lothians from 1870 to the Present* (Edinburgh, 2000); L. Leneman, 'Fit for Heroines? Women and Scottish Land Settlement after World War One', *Oral History* 19 (1991); I. MacDougall, *Voices from Home and Work* (Edinburgh, 2000); I. MacDougall, *Hard Work Ye Ken* (East Linton, 1994); L. Abrams, *Myth and Materiality in a Woman's World: Shetland, 1800–2000* (Manchester, 2005); T. Neat, *When I was Young: Voices from Lost Communities in Scotland—The Highlands and East Coast* (Edinburgh, 2000); C. Ferguson, *Lewis in the Passing: Twentieth Century Autobiographical Sketches* (Edinburgh, 2007); P. Thompson, with T. Wailey and T. Lummis, *Living the Fishing* (London, 1983); Shetland Archives, *Ahint da Daeks* (Shetland, 1987).

⁶⁴ C. G. Brown, 'Spectacle, Restraint and the Sabbath Wars: The 'Everyday' Scottish Sunday', in L. Abrams and C. Brown (eds), *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2010); C. G. Brown, *Up Helly Aa* (Manchester, 1998); V. Devlin, *Kings, Queens and People's Palaces—An Oral History of the Scottish Variety Theatre 1920–1970* (Edinburgh, 1991); F. Bruce, *Showfolk: An Oral History Of A Fainground Dynasty* (Edinburgh, 2010); A. Bartie, *The Edinburgh Festivals: Culture and Society in Post-war Britain* (Edinburgh, 2013).

explored using oral history methodology, though clearly this is an area that deserves much more attention.⁶⁵

In an important recent book, *Oral History Theory*, Lynn Abrams has commented that three distinct types of oral history were co-existing at the close of the twentieth century: reminiscence, public and community oral history (with little or no use of theory); evidential oral history (where personal testimonies are used as evidence to support /develop argument and prove a hypothesis); and theoretical oral history ('theory baggers') which draws upon concepts in social sciences, linguistics and other fields to explore the nature of memory, the 'meaning of the interview', decoding the narrative and deconstructing the mechanisms of remembering. It is probably fair to say that Scottish oral historians were somewhat slow to embrace the 'cultural turn' in oral history, to engage with theories relating to memory, subjectivity and narrative. The seminal studies were done elsewhere—in Italy, the USA, England and Australia.⁶⁶ This is not to say that oral history was unexciting in Scotland, or that it was not challenging boundaries—Scottish historiography remained fairly conservative throughout the 1980s, and themes like working lives, the experiences of women, and of ethnic minorities arguably took longer to pervade the general literature on Scotland's past. Indeed, it could be argued that the focus on 'reconstructive' oral history was needed for longer, in order build a body of historical materials, and to then incorporate these histories into the dominant narratives about twentieth-century Scotland.

Nevertheless, a new wave of theory-sensitive oral history articles and monographs emerged in Scotland from the late 1990s which made use of linguistics, of narrative analysis, inter-subjectivity, anthropology, the cultural circuit and other ideas to understand the unique nature of oral testimony, and to read and decode the narratives. It could be argued that an important stimulus here was the growing influence of postmodernism and the cultural turn more generally in history, as the late 1990s were a period in which historians finally had to engage with debates that had occurred earlier in many other disciplines. This can be seen in the growing number of books on history and postmodernism published during this period, as well as in the (often very heated) debates that were played out in the editorials and correspondence of history journals.

⁶⁵ B. Cant (ed.), *Footsteps and Witnesses: Gay and Lesbian Life Stories from Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1993); L. Jamieson, 'Changing Intimacy: Seeking and Forming Couple Relationships', in L. Abrams and C. Brown (eds), *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2010).

⁶⁶ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 15. See Passerini; Portelli; Summerfield; Thomson. The flow of Scottish oral history articles published in *Oral History* slowed in the 1980s through to the mid-1990s. Significantly, there were no Scottish contributions amongst the thirty-nine chapters of the key oral history collection, R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, first published in 1998. Scotland does not appear in the index and there is only one Scottish oral history book that is mentioned in the bibliography (Kay's *Odyssey*).

The 'new' oral history is evident, for example, in the work of historians like Lynn Abrams, Callum G. Brown, Murray Watson, David Smith and H. Lesley Diack and Wendy Ugolini. Whilst much 'recovery' or 'evidential' oral history continues to be written (and to be important), in tandem there is a growing recognition that memories are composed and reconstructed, influenced by a range of factors that include politics, the media, the ageing process, and the inter-subjective dynamics of the interview. Rather than being defensive about their sources, oral historians embrace the clearly subjective nature of oral memory evidence, recognised from the very earliest days of oral history in Britain. Folklorist Tony Green argued in 1971 for oral historians:

... to concentrate much more on history as what people think happened, including the presentation of radically different accounts, in order to demonstrate ... that different individuals and groups experience the same event in totally different ways, and to analyse why this is so.⁶⁷

Attention has been increasingly diverted to theorising memory and unpicking the discourses and narratives present in the testimonies. For example, in *The Death of Christian Britain* Callum Brown used sources like oral testimonies, biographies and autobiographies to explore 'discursive christianity', arguing that secularisation occurred rapidly due to a 'discursive break' between piety and femininity during the 1960s. Lynn Abrams's seminal, *Myth and Materiality in a Woman's World* identified the legends and the realities of the female dominated culture of the Shetlands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this vein, Murray Watson's work, which used a Foucauldian framework for his study of the English in Scotland to challenge the idea of anti-English discrimination is also worth a mention, as is Boyle's thought-provoking *Metropolitan Anxieties*. There has then been a shift to recognition that oral testimonies are unique subjective accounts meriting analysis as narratives and discourses—and this has led oral historians increasingly into using a broad toolkit from a diverse range of other disciplines—such as anthropology, linguistics and psychology—to help understand what is going on in the interview—how and why people say what they do; how they relate to the interviewer; how they structure, frame and 'perform' their stories; why things are left out as well as included.

A Snapshot of the Present Landscape

Searching the internet for oral history in Scotland brings up a range of websites pointing to its current health and vitality. For example, the Glasgow based group *Sikhs in Scotland* oral history project; *Our Story Scotland*, recording the lives of LGBT people; the *Their Past Your Future*

⁶⁷ G. E. Evans et al, 'The Leicester Conference on Oral History: Four Impressions', *Oral History* 1 (1972), 10.

project, held between 2005 and 2009, on the lives of people in Scotland during the Second World War; the oral history project connected to the M74 extension project in Glasgow; the recent Coal Conversations symposium on oral history in the Scottish coal industry, and so on. Oral history has increasingly been embedded into undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in Scotland, whether as stand alone courses or as important elements of classes in other historical topics. This may go towards explaining the burgeoning use of oral history in postgraduate research in recent years, as students cut their teeth on the theory and methodology and, often, experience the resonance of oral history interviews with their research interests. We've certainly found that undergraduates often gravitate towards oral history in class and feel a connection with excerpts from interviews in a way that they do not always get so immediately with other sources.

A brief survey of the kinds of research being carried out in active projects across the Scottish academy just now, including by postgraduate researchers, indicates the breadth and dynamism of oral history in Scotland today. There is a continuing cluster of oral history based research that is being undertaken or has recently been completed on gender and sexual identities. For example, Yvonne McFadden on culture, gender and home in suburban Glasgow between c.1950-c.1970; Andrea Thomson on marriage and marriage breakdown in late twentieth-century Scotland; Eilidh Macrae on women, body culture and physical recreation in Scotland between 1930 and 1970; Jeff Meek on the development of non-heterosexual identities amongst males in Scotland at a time when all homosexual acts were proscribed by law (1940–1980); and Amy Tooth Murphy on lesbian literature and lesbian oral history of 1940s and 1950s Britain.

Work cultures, identities and resistance remain at the forefront of ongoing oral history work in Scotland. Arthur McIvor and David Walker are working together with Glasgow Museums on a project on work narratives in the museum archives (Glasgow Working Lives); Andrew Perchard is exploring deindustrialisation and social identity, in particular the effects on identities of industrial closures in post-war Scotland; Jim Phillips on industrial relations, workplace politics and the 1984–5 miners' strike; Alison Gilmour on work culture and industrial relations at the Linwood car plant; and Catriona Macdonald is working on industrial relations at BMC Bathgate, 1961–1986.

Cultural values and culture in society have also been subjected to intense scrutiny. For example, in Adrienne Scullion and Paul Maloney's work on pantomime in Scotland; Martin Dibb on popular culture, radio broadcasting and mass entertainment in the work of the BBC Variety Department between 1933 and 1967; Susan Galloway and Huw David Jones on the relationship between culture and national identity, explored through the Scottish Arts Council. Changing religious and secular identities also continue to be investigated using oral history methodology as in Callum Brown's ongoing research on the history

of modern humanism in the English-speaking North Atlantic world since the end of the Second World War; Elaine McFarland and Ronnie Johnston's work on the Church of Scotland industrial chaplains scheme (with interviews conducted by Bartie and Susan Morrison); and Fiona Frank's innovative inter-generational investigation of five generations of Scottish Jewish culture and identity in the Hoppenstein family. The Second World War also continues to be an important focus – for example with a major interest in the oral history of the Reserved Occupations in Scotland at the Scottish Oral History Centre at the University of Strathclyde (Chand; Robb; Pattinson; McIvor and Ugolini). This work focuses upon masculine identities amongst those men prevented from enlisting as combatants, engaging critically with the concept of a crisis or challenge to manliness linked to hegemonic 'military masculinity' in wartime.

And current work is also extending the corpus of oral history work on health and the body in Scotland. Ongoing projects include those by Iain Hutchison on the Royal Hospital for Sick Children at Yorkhill, Glasgow; David Bradley on workers' health and safety in the Scottish iron and steel industry between 1930 and 1988; William McDougall on the role of the Society for the Prevention of Asbestosis and Industrial Diseases (SPAID) on Lay Epidemiology and Political Campaigning; and Arthur McIvor and Angela Turner on disability in Scottish coalfield communities. And there are a whole range of other ongoing projects, demonstrating the diversity and the dynamism of oral history across the country. They include Marjory Harper on Scots migration to Canada, Mairi Stewart, Jill de Fresne and Hugo Manson on the social history of forestry in Scotland, Alison Burgess on women in agriculture in Dumfries between 1920 and 1950; and Esther Breitenbach on empire and civil society in twentieth-century Scotland, in terms of the relationship between imperial decline and national identity c.1918 to 1970s.

As we've already alluded to, oral history theory and methodology borrows from a range of different disciplines. This is what makes it so dynamic. As Portelli has pointed out, it is 'a "composite genre" which requires that we think flexibly, across and between disciplinary boundaries, in order to make the most of this rich and complex source.'⁶⁸ But increasingly, researchers from other disciplines have turned to oral history as a methodology to inform their research. These include researchers used to using qualitative methods, but beginning to situate their interviews in a broader oral history framework with more attention paid to the life history, narrative analysis, and to the emphasis on open questioning and space for interviewees to tell their own stories that oral historians tend towards. Another continuing motivation is the idea that oral history is a means of exploring aspects of research that cannot be accessed using other sources or methods. This can

⁶⁸ Portelli, cited by L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 3.

be illustrated by focusing on the recent work of criminologist Fergus McNeill on oral histories of Scottish probation. As McNeill points out on the project webpage:

The reason for our interest in this topic rests in the recognition that our understandings of contemporary practices are undermined by ignorance of their origins and development. There is very little scholarship on penal history in Scotland, and almost none that looks beyond official accounts to explore the interstices between policies and practices.⁶⁹

His key aim is to use oral history methods to produce a rich and multi-layered analysis of the construction and experience of probation in Scotland as an historical penal practice. In doing so, McNeill sought to explore the spaces between policy, rhetoric and reality, the intended and the experienced. Funded by a British Academy Small Grant, McNeill interviewed thirteen probation practitioners and educators and twelve probationers. His study revealed the differences between what was intended by probation officials and what was experienced by those on probation, showing the factors that could have a bearing on its effectiveness as a criminal justice tool, and thus helping to inform current policy and practice.⁷⁰ In the current climate of pressures to produce meaningful impact and knowledge exchange outcomes from our research, we need to think about the potential of our oral history interviews for wider applications such as these. A promising example would be the new pilot-study project currently underway at the SOHC on an oral history of forensic science in Scotland (Nic Daeid, Walker and McIvor).

Like the field of Scottish historical studies more broadly, then, there has been a similar 'flowering' of oral history in Scotland: in terms of research, publication, teaching and also a broader use in the community, the latter aided no doubt by the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund for oral history related projects. This has become apparent through the growing interest in oral history training we have experienced through the Scottish Oral History Centre over the last ten years from staff and students from around Scotland, interested individuals, representatives from a range of bodies (like archives, libraries, museums and local heritage and community groups) and also to provide support and tailored training for HLF groups across Scotland—most recently for Govanhill, Inchinnan, Paisley and the Scottish Council on Deafness Project *My Firsts*. The School of Scottish Studies Archive, in conjunction with BBC Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland, has been undertaking an exciting project on digitization and created an online resource for searching and

⁶⁹ SCCRJ, Probation Histories: <http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/projects/Probation-Histories/14> [Accessed 26 Oct 2010].

⁷⁰ See F. McNeill, 'Helping, Holding, Hurting: Recalling and Reforming Punishment', Apex Scotland Annual Lecture, September 2009.

using an extensive collection of Scots and Gaelic recordings from the 1930s through to the present day. And we have seen the creation (and sometimes, unfortunately, demise) of a range of associations and organisations designed to promote and encourage oral history in various parts of Scotland.

But, despite the ever-increasing flow of stimulating oral history scholarship, there continues to be areas of social and cultural life that have barely been explored, often in Scottish historiography more broadly as well as oral history specifically. The following areas spring to mind, though clearly this is not an exhaustive list: areas that have been either neglected or remain in their infancy include (but are by no means limited to): disability, including learning disability (though note here Howard Mitchell and Angela Turner's work on learning disability in post-war Scotland); sexuality (projects outlined earlier build upon Bob Cant's *Footsteps and Witnesses: Lesbian and Gay Lifestories from Scotland*, but as yet – Jamieson's work notwithstanding – we lack the kind of work Szreter and Fisher have undertaken for England); race and ethnicity (some areas are well covered, but there are gaps in others like that of the experience of Sikhs in Scotland, of asylum seekers, and of the Chinese, despite work by the Scottish Migration Archive Network in trying to fill these gaps); the environment (oral history has the potential to critically explore people's relationships to their environments, like that of Shelley Trower's work in Cornwall).⁷¹ We also have little on the experiences of the Second World War in Scotland, whether in service, on the home front, or of prisoners of war in Scotland; crime and deviancy (although there has been some work in this area, for example Annmarie Hughes on domestic violence in interwar Clydeside); Angela Bartie and Alistair Fraser on Easterhouse youth gangs, and a recently funded project on community policing by Louise A. Jackson – but given increasing concerns about crime in the post-war period, there is a massive gap here; leisure pursuits (with a shift from public to private leisure pursuits in the post-war period, there is scope for much more work on changing patterns of leisure, on youth culture, or on a whole range of leisure pursuits); the meaning of work in the service sector/professions and in the new non-standard, flexible jobs that are growing in importance as well as middle/upper class cultures (e.g. managers by Perchard and Perchard and Phillips; business culture and corporate history); politics and protest (for example, the changing nature of Scottish nationalism during the Thatcher years, or of trade union politics, or indeed protest movements like CND); and globalisation and its impact at a local and Scottish national level.

The Future

As all oral historians know, there is often a real urgency to address gaps in areas of research before those who lived through the periods

⁷¹ S. Trower (ed.), *Place, Writing and Voice in Oral History* (New York, 2010).

we wish to know more about unfortunately pass away. To look to the future—well, all we can do is scrape the surface and give a very selective and brief consideration of this ‘controversial, exciting and endlessly promising’ practice and methodology, as Lynn Abrams recently put it in her book *Oral History Theory*.⁷² The broad field of oral history is endlessly changing and debates arise, re-emerge, and occasionally are resolved. We would recommend subscribing to Oral History H-Net for a sense of the debates going on among practitioners now, for example, in relation to sound versus the written word, the politics of memory, whether oral history has lost its radical edge, and so on.

In a globalised world, the question of what is local, national, international and global is a vexed one, and one that begs attention in oral history. It is an area that many oral historians are trying to get to grips with—when and how does an oral history interview move from being an individual’s life history to a document that can tell us much about broader social, political and economic change, refracted through the perceptions and experiences of one person. What, for example, is the relationship between individual and collective memory? When can this be ‘scaled up’, to allow us to understand more about national experiences or, indeed, shared experiences in a globalised world? Indeed, public history and oral history and the relationship between the two deserves more attention in Scotland. As Jill Liddington and Graham Smith note:

Direct personal experience, along with the older myths we live by and the social narratives we live with, all compete in giving shape to how we perceive, and remember, the past. But we would argue that it is time to consider more deeply the part played by public history in shaping historical consciousness and memory.⁷³

A crucial issue that we must not lose sight of is that oral history in Scotland is very much part of the broader oral history field, and influenced by—and a contributor to—the trends, debates and controversies that occur in relation to oral history in general. Indeed, it feels somewhat unnatural and artificial to us to try and write this essay about *Scottish* oral history without making artificial boundaries and definitions. Many of the oral history projects and scholarship outlined here were or are those taking place in Scottish universities and focused on Scottish interviewees or experiences rooted in a Scottish location, simply because this was the easiest way to capture a snapshot of what is going on in oral history in Scotland. That said, there are important issues that, while they do not apply *only* in relation to oral history in Scotland, should be considered and addressed by those using oral history in a Scottish context.

⁷² Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 1.

⁷³ J. Liddington and G. Smith, ‘Crossing Cultures: Oral History and Public History’, *Oral History* 33 (2005), 30.

In the late twentieth, but particularly in the twenty-first century, new digital technologies and the potential of the internet in relation to oral history has presented both challenges and opportunities to those using oral history methods in their work. In terms of recording and editing oral history interviews, whether recorded in audio or filmed, new digital technologies have surely made things a lot easier for oral historians. Material can easily be backed up onto laptops and secure servers while out in the field, copied and backed up easily and multiple copies made for transcribing, editing, using in presentations, websites and blogs, and a whole range of other uses. This is an area that is slowly beginning to come through in relation to oral history in Scotland, but its potential has not yet been effectively tapped. Some projects are beginning to create access points to digitised transcripts and recordings via online resources like, for example, the School of Scottish Studies collaborative site.

There is also the potential to embed new digital technologies into the teaching of oral history to both undergraduates and postgraduates, imparting vocational and practical technological proficiencies alongside the usual skills in historical understanding, interpretation and analysis. This could take the form of producing edited audio CDs, short films, interactive websites or blogs or, indeed, *Memoryscapes* or *Soundscapes*—this latter a term coined by composer R. Murray Schafer to identify sounds that ‘describe a place, a sonic identity, a sonic memory, but always a sound that is pertinent to a place’ and put into practice by oral historians by blending excerpts from interviews with original sounds recorded in a specific area. Done effectively, this creates an immersive soundscape where past and present collide and the listener discovers new ways of understanding the history of a particular time and place—as Toby Butler and Graeme Miller, creators of *Linked: a Landmark in Sound, a Public Walk of Art* comment, this encourages ‘a shifting and dynamic reflection of memory and place that embraces new audiences.’⁷⁴ David Walker has recently piloted a *memoryscape* and short edited film on the hidden history of Sheils Farm and King George V Dock in Glasgow, now derelict.

As well as looking towards future developments in oral history, we need to think carefully about how we safeguard the oral histories that are already in existence. Many of the words of T.C. Smout in his report of the first oral history conference in Scotland in 1971 still ring true:

The scene in Scotland has certain depressing features. The first is the acute shortage of transcriptions. . . Along with this goes a great need for a published index of work on tape [. . .]. Thirdly, we are handicapped by

⁷⁴ T. Butler & G. Miller, ‘Linked: A. Landmark in Sound, a Public Walk of Art’ in R. Perks & A. Thomson, *The Oral History Reader: Second Edition*, (Oxon, 2006), 425; also see, for example, T. Butler, ‘Memoryscape: integrating oral history, memory and landscape on the river Thames’, in P. Ashton and H. Kean (eds), *People and their Pasts: Public History Today* (Basingstoke, 2009); for links to soundscapes and *memoryscapes* around the world, see <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/refugeeyouth/going-places-memoryscape-montreal/curricula/sound-scapes-tours> [Accessed 27 Oct 2010].

a very complacent individualism: everyone works away in their own little corners making recordings for themselves, which may be useful to them: but they make little effort to tell other scholars of their contents (except in an accidental and fortuitous manner) and (outside the School) there is no guarantee their tapes will ever be kept. Indeed, there is no indication whether tapes would be welcome gifts to local archives or libraries, or that archivists and librarians have given the problem of oral records much thought.⁷⁵

There is a wealth of oral history material 'out there' but, without a central record, it frequently lies undiscovered and unused. It is often the case that no thought is given to the value of recordings/transcriptions after the project for which they were conducted has ended. Consequently, many interviews conducted are never archived at all, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that numerous tapes lie languishing in drawers or cupboards of the interviewer's home or workplace. Proper archiving and cataloguing could avoid interviews being conducted unnecessarily, allow for comparative work to be done between existing and new interviews (or between two existing collections), and safeguard these valuable sources for future use. The issue of cataloguing and, increasingly, the digitisation of existing collections is an urgent one, and one that is certainly beginning to bear fruit. A number of access points to catalogue entries of various rich oral history collections do exist, and some websites, for example the School of Scottish Studies Archive, do have lists of accessible material and projects currently on the go. But what is needed is a systematic trawl of what is out there and its format, location and accessibility, and a dedicated website that can be maintained and updated on a regular basis.

Oral history has the potential to facilitate a *refocused* history that enables poorly documented areas of everyday life in Scotland to be investigated and made known. This can be achieved by targeted questioning on particular topics and issues, by addressing areas of experience that have barely been explored, and by working together with colleagues from other disciplines and subject areas to examine themes in new ways. We believe that it is important to find ways of meaningfully engaging with the public in identifying what gaps exist in our collective social history, and to work with them in decisions about future research agendas and, in fact, in a model of 'sharing practice' that is truly collaborative. Nonetheless, oral history is time, labour and cost intensive and an ongoing problem is that of resourcing funds for such projects. Collaboration between academic, public sector and community/local groups in Scotland to identify the key gaps in sources, develop a research agenda, and source funding could really

⁷⁵ Smout called for an index to the tapes in the School of Scottish Studies and 'by other workers in Scotland'. The School have certainly resolved this, and have a very detailed catalogue available on their website; recordings by other individuals and organisations are less easy to locate. See Smout, 'Scotland', 13.

invigorate this field and provide a model for oral historians in other parts of the world. This reflects the growing position of public history in society and ticks the boxes we are increasingly being asked to tick in terms of interdisciplinarity, knowledge exchange and partnerships with non-HE bodies, and impact with the public, policy makers and other audiences. Furthermore, we need to consider how new digital technologies and more effective use of web-based communication, cataloging and public engagement can further shore up the position of oral history in Scotland, and allow for meaningful collaboration and cross-fertilisation with the numerous projects taking place both within and outside the academy.

Final Comments

Oral history has been important in Scottish history since the 1950s, pioneered by the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University, and Scotland has participated (albeit belatedly) in the expansion of oral history in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the paradigm shifts that Alistair Thomson identified in an influential article in the *Oral History Review* in 2007. Memory became more important as a source for historical research from the 1970s, with a growing appreciation that people were what George Ewart Evans referred to as 'walking books'. Local and community oral history projects proliferated, recording the everyday lives of individuals and communities largely ignored in the historical record and, crucially, enabling people to be involved in making their own histories. This led to a remarkable growth of memory recording in public history across the country. Stung by criticisms from conservative historians about the unreliability of memory, oral historians in Scotland (and elsewhere) have responded over the past couple of decades by embracing the methods of other disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology and social psychology and by powerfully demonstrating how the perceived weakness of oral history (the subjectivity of memory) is actually its major strength.

Oral history in Scotland has joined the shift from largely 'reconstructive' to 'interpretive' by embracing and even celebrating the *subjective* nature of this kind of evidence, to deconstructing and decoding memories, aided by the ideas and methods of cultural theorists, linguists and narrative analysts. So, whilst there are still relatively few oral history practitioners in Scottish universities, doing oral history has become accepted in higher education. Concurrently, oral history scholarship has made a difference, bringing the human perspective, rich texture and individual experience—both physical and emotional—to our history. Cumulatively, both the 'recovery' and 'interpretative' types of oral history have added significantly to our understanding of Scottish society to the point where now serious academic work on recent Scottish history, especially in social and

cultural history, must critically engage with the findings and the interpretations of oral historians.

Looking to the future, we ideally require a Scottish Sound Archive, or at least the establishment of a central electronic catalogue of oral history resources which is searchable by subject index; the digitisation of existing archived recordings; more opportunities for meaningful communication between those working in the field of oral history in Scotland, on top of and as a complement to rather than a replacement for existing forums like the UK Oral History Society and Oral History H-Net; and the initiation of a series of new research projects.⁷⁶ At the centre of all of this should be dialogue and co-ordination between all those involved in the creation, storage, and interpretation of oral history in Scotland.

⁷⁶ An audit of oral history resources in Scotland has recently been commissioned by the Scottish Parliament and discussions are underway – led by the National Library of Scotland – on the creation of a Scottish Sound Archive.