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TELLING PEOPLE'S HISTORIES:
AN EXPLORATION OF COMMUNITY HISTORY-MAKING
FROM 1970-2000

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January 2010

WORK NOT SUBMITTED ELSEWHERE FOR EXAMINATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature.....

University of Sussex

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AN EXPLORATION OF COMMUNITY HISTORY-MAKING FROM 1970 – 2000

SUMMARY

This thesis explores the practice of community history-making in England in the period 1970 to 2000. Community history has been seen as a radical challenge to conventional history-making, with process and participation often as important as the end product. I explore the origins and development of community history, taking History Workshop, the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, and the Oral History Society as the starting points. These movements all sought to democratise the practice of history, and to challenge ideas about who could make history, and I consider the influence of these movements on understandings and practice of community history.

I examine how groups committed to democratic history-making work in practice, and the tensions that may arise in the process, through three in-depth case studies of community history groups: QueenSpark, Brighton; Bradford Heritage Recording Unit; and Living Archive, Milton Keynes. Whilst initial critiques tended to focus on the 'value' and content of the histories produced by such groups, my findings suggest that these critiques have ignored the complicated factors at play in the making of these histories. These groups had to contend with a rapidly changing political and social climate, and balance conflicting needs. The complex mix of external and internal factors such as funding, technology, the structure and organisation of groups, personalities and interests of key 'members', sales viability and audience expectation, has all shaped how the groups worked and crucially what histories got told and how.

Fundamentally this thesis challenges conventional understandings and meanings of community history and demonstrates that definitions of community history are historically, regionally and politically contingent. In doing so it adds to the debates about the production of knowledge and intellectual authority within history making.

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Bibliographic Note

The following abbreviations have been used:

AUGB	Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain
BHRU	Bradford Heritage Recording Unit
BIM	Bradford Industrial Museum
BIRS	British Institute of Recorded Sound
CCCS	Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies
CCE	Centre for Continuing Education
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CP	Community Programme
CEP	Community Enterprise Programme
CLUTCH	Computer Literacy Understanding Through Local History
CMK	Central Milton Keynes
CNT	Commission for New Towns
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
DCMS	Department of Culture, Media and Sports
ELM	Exploring Living Memory
EVW	European Volunteer Workers
FWWCP	Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers
GLC	Greater London Council
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
HWJ	History Workshop Journal
LA	Living Archive
LHWC	London History Workshop Centre
MKBC	Milton Keynes Borough Council
MKCT	Milton Keynes Community Trust
MKDC	Milton Keynes Development Corporation
MKHA	Milton Keynes Heritage Association
MMH	Make Multimedia History
MERC	Migration and Ethnicity Research Centre
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NCPH	National Council on Public History
OHS	Oral History Society
OU	Open University
QS	QueenSpark
SCDG	Stantonbury Campus Drama Group
WEA	Workers Educational Association
YAC	Yorkshire Arts Circus

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Introduction

‘Is “community history” merely a footnote to history with a capital “H?”’¹

Since the advent, in the late 1960s, of the History Workshop, which sought to democratise the practice of history, there has flourished a movement that argues that ‘ordinary’ people should become their own social historians by creating ‘community histories’.² Morley and Worpole have framed the movement as a radical challenge to conventional history-making, and Thompson and Frisch have argued that the recording of social histories is made more relevant and powerful through the involvement of the communities themselves.³ Yet while this ‘grassroots historical activity’ has become relatively commonplace and entered academic curricula, there has been no meaningful examination of the development or the significance of this movement.

Academics and researchers, whilst acknowledging ‘community history’ as an exciting and developing field, focus primarily on the histories of communities. As examples, the journal *Family and Community History* publishes articles researching communities and manuals such as Drake & Finnegan’s *Sources and Methods for family and community historians: A Handbook* (1994) show how to set about recording community histories, focusing on methodological issues. There is an absence however of any recent analysis on the significance of communities making their own history. Initial studies on this emerging practice tended to focus on the ‘value’ of these histories, asking whether they were critical and reflective or parochial and nostalgic. These studies echoed debates of the late 1970s which centred on political issues (in particular the relationship between history and politics) and reflected contemporary concerns at that time, most notably around theory and experience and how these should be brought together.⁴ More recently there have been debates around the educational value of

¹ Yeo, S, 1986, ‘Whose Story? An Argument from within current historical practice in Britain’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21, p.300.

² I use the term ‘ordinary’ to indicate a non-elite perspective; those whose histories would not normally be told.

³ Morley, D & Worpole, K (eds.), 1982, *The Republic of Letters: Working class writing and local publishing*, London, Comedia; Thompson, Paul, 2000, *The Voice of the Past* (3rd ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press; Frisch, M, 1990, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, Albany, SUNY.

⁴ Samuel, R (ed.), 1981, *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

communities making their histories,⁵ and a re-evaluation of the content of, in particular, Federation of Worker Writer and Community Publishers' publications.⁶ However little attention has been paid to actual working practices, and the factors that influence these, and the subsequent impact on community history-making over the past 30 years.

This study investigates community history-making in England between the years 1970 and 2000. The study has two aims. First, to examine the beginnings of the movement and its subsequent development, identifying the key drivers and barriers, including social and political movements, academic influence, external funding, new technologies, and the 'empowerment' of participants. Second, to consider the place of community histories within the writing of modern history, in particular how community history might challenge and change the field.⁷

The starting points for investigation are History Workshop, Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP), and the Oral History Society (OHS), all of whom challenged ideas about who could make history. I explore the influence of these movements on community history.⁸ Using three in-depth case studies of community history groups I seek to examine how groups committed to democratic history-making work in practice, and the tensions that may arise in the process. The three case study groups are QueenSpark Book, Brighton, Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, and Living Archive, Milton Keynes. Whilst these groups have been dedicated to documenting the lives of others, the histories of the groups themselves have not been told before. The origins of the groups and their reasons for forming have been previously described, but beyond this there has been no conscious effort to record their own histories. Certainly in the case of at least one group, QueenSpark, this has led to a mythologising of its origins. The case studies offer an opportunity to examine in detail the trajectories of the groups and consider how internal and external factors such as funding, technology and ways of working have shaped the way they have developed and made community histories. They also serve as exemplars in order to consider the

⁵ Mace, J, (ed.) 1994, *Literacy, Language and Community Publishing*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters; Woodin, T, 2005a, 'Building Culture from the Bottom Up: The Educational Origins of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers', *History of Education*, 34(4).

⁶ See for example, Jones, B, 2010, 'The uses of nostalgia: autobiography, community publishing and working class neighbourhoods in post-war England', *Cultural and Social History*, 7, which challenges the idea that such publications are nostalgic and of little historical merit.

⁷ Whilst it is beyond the scope of this research to explore in depth the success of this challenge, I will pose questions for further research.

⁸ For the purpose of clarity and consistency I will use the term 'movement' for all three.

ways in which community history sought to change attitudes towards who ‘makes’ history and whose stories get told.

The historical specificity of the formation of each group is contextually significant when considering the set-up of the groups and how they organised. Equally important is a consideration of how these community histories are made, of the form/s they take, of the motivation of participants, and the importance for the participants of learning (and sharing) skills. By comparing the three groups I draw out the similarities and differences in their working practices, and their strategies for response and adaptation to internal and external factors. By doing so I illuminate the complex and contradictory ways in which the groups have tried to challenge ideas about whose story should be told, by whom and how.

My interest in community history developed through my work with QueenSpark and my active involvement in community history projects. Consequently, in Chapter One, whilst I consider the methods and the sources used in this research, I also reflect on my own involvement with community history to provide the context to my approach to this study, and how this involvement has impacted upon it. In addition I discuss briefly my developing academic interest, in particular in collaborative work, and how this affected my approach in this work.

Chapter Two explores how community history is defined and by whom, drawing together evidence from a variety of fields including oral history, community publishing, autobiography, local history, women’s history, and public history. Particular consideration is given to the growing field of public history, the debates about ‘people’s history’ and how these relate to community history, as well as a discussion of the meaning of ‘community’ and how its multiple meanings complicate understandings of community history. Through these diverse discussions three distinct areas of enquiry emerge that will be explored through the case studies. The first concerns who or what history is about. The second is concerned with who the ‘historians’ are, and the third with the extent to which the histories produced are analytical and critical or celebratory and descriptive (thereby reinforcing dominant histories or offering safe versions of the past). These discussions raise the question as to whether community history is a study *of* communities or a history *with* communities where process and participation are key to the practice.

Chapter Three provides an historical context in which to examine the emerging community history movement by briefly examining the development of History

Workshop, FWWCP and OHS. These movements were pioneers in challenging ideas about the content and production of historical knowledge, and were influential in inspiring many community history groups that started during the 1970s and 1980s. Each movement had different foci, and in different ways came to reflect the inherent tensions between the popular and the academic in understandings of community history. This tension is examined through an analysis of their development and way of working. This chapter also provides a discussion of the emergence of public funding for community history groups, most notably from the Manpower Services Commission in the 1980s and the Heritage Lottery Fund in the late 1990s, and explores how these funding streams affected the further development of community history groups. It also highlights how factors such as the way groups organise, their working practices, technological developments and the motivations and interest of key individuals all converge to influence the types of histories that get produced.

Chapters Four, Five and Six set out the case studies of QueenSpark, Bradford Heritage Recording Unit and Living Archive respectively. Whilst the history of each group is potentially a thesis in its own right, the purpose of these case studies is to examine how the groups worked and made community histories, and the factors that influenced their ways of working and the histories that were recorded; in other words to explore how democratising history-making works in practice. By looking across the case studies I compare their approaches and responses to both internal and external factors raised in Chapter Three, and consider what these groups might tell us about the process of community history-making today. The structure of each case study is informed by the history of the group and reflects the specificity of each.

In my conclusion I examine the significance of the three groups in relation to understanding community history, its purpose and relevance, the production and ownership of historical knowledge, impact of audience, and the changing nature of social movements and voluntary organisations and factors influencing these changes.

Fundamentally this research demonstrates that understandings of community history are historically, regionally and politically contingent, and in doing so adds to the debates about the production of knowledge and intellectual authority within history making. It also raises questions about the purpose of community history and whether it is an historical study of communities, a strategy for social reform, a political movement or a radical challenge to the academy, and ultimately what this can tell us about community history-making today.

Chapter One: Methods and Sources

We inevitably bring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process, and this influences the questions we ask and the ways in which we try to find answers.¹

Introduction

Polkinghorne states, ‘The researcher begins with questions such as “how did this happen?” or “why did this come about?” and searches for pieces of information that contribute to the construction of that story that provides an explanatory answer to the questions.’² The selection and ordering of this information shows the development of the ‘story’ and this process of narrative making is, according to Spiegelman, ‘a kind of lying because you select and in the process of selection you suppress some information and foreground others.’³ Clearly, when we are using a variety of sources to investigate our research questions, choices need to be made regarding what we use and what we reject, but these decisions need to be evident within the writing, to show how we as researchers came to our interpretations. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter argues, the researcher ‘inevitably’ brings in their own ‘agenda’ – preconceptions, prejudices, theories, bias – determined by their own life story.⁴ A reflexive approach and critical thinking about the practices we engage in, and reflection on what we as researchers bring to the research are recognised increasingly as an important part of the research process.⁵ Yet we need to take care not to over-analyse our involvement and motivation to the point that the research becomes dominated by our own self-discovery, instead ensuring that our reflection adds an important framework to the research, and demonstrates how messy and complicated the process of research can be.

The reflexive process is made more complex when the researcher is also part of the research subject, bringing both experience (which can be viewed as a positive) and assumptions (which can be seen as a hindrance) to the research process. How do we carry out our research when the question ‘how did this happen?’ is already partly

¹ Cameron, D et al, 1992, *Researching Language: Issues of Power and Method*, London, Routledge, p.5.

² Polkinghorne, D.E, 1995, ‘Narrative Configuration in qualitative analysis’ in Hatch, J.A & Wisniewski, R (eds.), *Life History and Narrative*, London, Falmer Press, p.15.

³ Spiegelman, A, 1995, ‘Art on art’, *The Complete Maus CD*, Voyager.

⁴ See the special issue of *Rethinking History*, ‘Academic autobiography and / in Discourses of history’, 2009, 13(1) which explores the relationship between the academics’ autobiography and scholarship.

⁵ See for example, Davies, C.A, 1999, *Reflexive Ethnography*, London, Routledge; Denzin, N.K & Lincoln, Y.S, 1998, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, California, Sage; Gluck, S.B and Patai, D (eds.), 1991, *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, London, Routledge.

answered by our own experiences that led us into the research in the first place? How do we maintain clarity and critical distance when the lines between researcher and researched are blurred? These are key questions within this research, and as I have tried to be reflexive in my approach I have discovered how multifaceted my involvement is with my subject. While this has in many ways enriched the process, it has also complicated my study. Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is not only to discuss the sources available and the methods I used in conducting my research, but also to explore my own involvement with the research subject and how this has impacted on my critical thinking and the approaches I have adopted.

My interest in this research area began with my active involvement in QueenSpark from 1994-2001, beginning as a volunteer and later as a paid worker and committee member. This personal involvement led me gradually to reflect upon the changes that affected QueenSpark during the 1990s, in particular the move away from a political rhetoric, the intellectual shifts that occurred as a new generation of people became involved, and whether these changes reflected broader issues in community history. I perceived these shifts to be heavily influenced by issues of funding, with funders often exerting a strong influence on a group's priorities and direction. This process of reflection took a long time to consolidate into this study, and in 2004 I finally began my DPhil with the idea that I would use QueenSpark along with other groups to explore community history making. It was always my intention to use QueenSpark extensively within the research, and it was from this that the idea of doing in-depth case studies of groups that did community history grew. The intention was that the case studies would enable me to compare and contrast the trajectories of the groups and the factors that influenced their development in order to understand how community history groups work in practice.

I developed my understanding of community history from within QueenSpark, and this was nurtured through connections with FWWCP and OHS (of which I was a committee member from 1999-2005). My involvement inevitably impacted on my approach to interrogating meanings of community history (described in chapter two), as well as shaping my sense of the significance of History Workshop, FWWCP and OHS to community history, and my decision to use these as starting points to place into context the debates around community history in chapter three. My 'insider' status has been important in having an informal network already in place, as well as enabling perhaps easier contact with other groups by 'being one of them' rather than being

perceived solely as an academic. This polarisation of community activist and academic is a tension evident throughout this field and is considered at various points in the thesis. Attempting to write this chapter in a way that combines the personal with a practical discussion on methodology has proved challenging, as the two are so interwoven, and the result is a more personal narrative than is conventional.

My involvement with QueenSpark impacted on the overall study and especially on my attempts to research and write the QueenSpark case study, as this is part of my own personal history. For example, on a practical level I am present in the minutes of meeting (some of which I wrote), annual reports and other documentation, and I have written about QueenSpark. In other words I am part of QueenSpark's history. However, as a researcher I am trying to investigate significant changes in community history and so the struggle throughout has been to acknowledge my feelings at the same time as being critical and analytical with the material. This and other 'methodological' challenges are discussed in this chapter. First, in the spirit of acknowledging subjectivity within research, and taking a reflexive approach, and to provide some context to how I have undertaken this research, an overview of my involvement with QueenSpark and my own intellectual journey is set out. This leads into a section on researching QueenSpark and the difficulties I faced being an 'insider'. I then consider the selection of my two other case studies. A discussion on the sources I have used, and how I have worked with the material follow.

QueenSpark and I: a personal reflection

I became involved with QueenSpark in 1994 when I was studying for a Certificate in Media Studies in the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) at the University of Sussex. I took the course purely out of interest, having completed an undergraduate degree in Environmental Science some years earlier. Al Thomson, who had become a lecturer at CCE after several years of working for QueenSpark and FWWCP, was keen to link QueenSpark with the University and devised a module on community publishing for the certificate in Media Studies with QueenSpark as the vehicle for our practice-based learning. As part of the module, we students formed a book-making group, the product being the publication of Barbara Chapman's *Boxing Day Baby* (1994).

QueenSpark was not entirely unknown to me as my partner John had been involved since 1988, initially as a member of the 'Nightwriters' writing group. He was on the original management committee and by 1994 was Chair of the Manuscripts

Group, and Secretary of FWWCP, becoming Chair of QueenSpark in 1996. Although I knew many QueenSpark members socially, I was not involved in any activities as I was not interested in creative writing and saw QueenSpark as 'John's activity'. The course gave me an opportunity to become involved in QueenSpark in my own right and gradually I became an active member of the Manuscripts Group. I became involved with many book-making groups and in time became a member of the management committee as the Company Secretary. In 1996 I became QueenSpark's part-time paid administrator, but at the same time remained very much an active volunteer.

QueenSpark was a huge part of our lives, not only as a place of work, as many close friendships were formed. By 1997 John had withdrawn from QueenSpark due to increasing work commitments. In 1998 I also withdrew from QueenSpark to take my MA in Life History Research, but returned to the management committee as Vice-Chair in 1999. I finally left in 2001 after my daughter was born, primarily as I felt detached from all the changes that were occurring in QueenSpark, mainly due to changing funding requirements, and found that the enthusiasm and energy I once had was no longer there.

The timing of my involvement was also important. I had returned from a long period of overseas travel in 1992 and as I had previously worked with environmental groups I wanted to continue working with community / voluntary groups but was undecided as to exactly which field. As it turned out QueenSpark completely changed my career path. I enjoyed working on the manuscripts and felt very connected to the ideals of QueenSpark. I gradually became more interested in thinking about the processes we engaged in, particularly when I co-ordinated the editing and production of *Catching Stories* (1996). This was a large oral history project and, with no experience of oral history at this point, I found it a steep learning curve. It was during this period that I studied for the Certificate in Life History Work at CCE. The course, set up by Thomson, provided a theoretical framework for people engaged in life history work. It offered a framework in which to think critically about the work I was doing and in particular to develop my interest in collaborative life history work. While I enjoyed the practical side of book making, I found I was also stimulated by the theoretical debates and this led me to take the MA.

I took a year's break from QueenSpark while I did my MA, but I was no longer involved in QueenSpark book making as I had begun a long-term oral history project with Arthur Thickett (another QueenSpark member), which resulted in our book,

Seeking the Enemy.⁶ By this stage, though I was ready to move on, I found it very hard to separate from QueenSpark, as I had been involved so intimately for so long and I struggled to let go of a group that had substantially influenced my identity. I had begun teaching oral history in CCE, and struggled with the tension of moving into academia and potentially leaving behind the community work about which I had been so passionate. This perhaps highlighted my own anxiety regarding what I perceived as a polarisation between the academic and community, a polarisation that I wanted to bridge. I wanted to develop my academic interests as I was particularly interested in the way QueenSpark was changing, and how community history seemed to be becoming 'mainstream'. For example community history officers were increasingly being employed in museums, as museums strove to connect with 'their' communities. I wanted to explore the factors contributing to these changes. In addition to this interest, through my MA and the work with Thickett, I developed a strong interest in collaborative work, and in exploring the tensions inherent in sharing authority with our interviewees in oral history projects.⁷ Equally I became interested in examining the processes involved in moving from 'data' to final product.⁸ These interests have had a significant impact on my own practice, and have informed my approach to this research.

Researching QueenSpark

Working on the QueenSpark case study has been difficult for a variety of reasons. The sheer volume of material that QueenSpark amassed over the years caused considerable challenges. I was not writing a general history of QueenSpark: I was looking for material that was relevant to my specific research questions. Unfortunately, although QueenSpark has kept a considerable amount of material it has never been properly archived and what was kept or discarded depended on who was around at the time. In a sense this is the irony of groups such as QueenSpark that document the lives of others but have no time to document their own history. The few archive boxes I had put together as administrator, in an attempt to keep some order over the vast amount of documentation that was accumulating in the office, had all been dismantled and the material dispersed around the office, with some files completely missing. Equally,

⁶ Sitzia, L & Thickett, A, 2002, *Seeking the Enemy*, London, Working Press.

⁷ Sitzia, L, 2003, 'A Shared authority: an impossible goal?', *Oral History Review*, 30(1); Sitzia, L, 2003, 'Whose Story? Collaborating on a life story,' *Federation*, 25; Sitzia, L, 1999, 'Telling Arthur's Story: oral history relationships and shared authority', *Oral History*, 27(2).

⁸ Sitzia, L, 1998, 'Making a Community Oral History Book', *Oral History*, 26(1).

boxes of some pre-1990 material that had been given to the local reference library in the early 1990s had been brought back to the office and pulled apart for information for an archival website relating to the books. This material was then left randomly throughout the office. Hence it took a considerable amount of time to go through boxes and filing cabinets in the QueenSpark offices to find relevant information. In addition I had my own collection of QueenSpark books, meeting minutes and other source material such as policy documents. At times I felt I was sinking under paper – a considerable amount of which was not directly relevant, but was nonetheless very interesting. This was particularly true when going through minutes and documents that related to my own involvement. Not infrequently I found myself distracted from my focus, caught up as I was in my own remembering.

As a researcher, it has been challenging to write the history of a group in which I was so involved and which had a significant influence on me. While in some ways I found it quite uncomplicated to explore and describe the ‘history’ of QueenSpark prior to my involvement, I found it difficult to write about the QueenSpark I helped shape. I struggled with writing myself into the study, concerned that it was becoming too autobiographical, and at times found myself drifting towards sentimentality.

One particular tension concerned the ‘early’ and ‘later’ phases of QueenSpark’s development. The origins of the group had always been part of the consciousness of QueenSpark activists and volunteers and I found in talking to group members (especially former members) that there was a sense of nostalgia for the early years which were characterised as radical and co-operative and ‘authentic’ in a way that faded as the years went on. This was highlighted for me at an event in 2005 to launch the online QueenSpark book archive. The celebrations provided a potted history of QueenSpark that left out any mention of the 1990s. It presented a QueenSpark that had flourished up to the 1990s and then was resurrected in 2004, when it received substantial Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Funding. Those of us who had been part of QueenSpark through the 1990s were upset and angry that that our contributions appeared to be being written out of the public history of QueenSpark. In a sense this sentiment reflects far more about tensions over ‘ownership’ of QueenSpark and its past than anything else, and indeed ownership of the groups and their history is a theme that runs through the case studies.

Due to my own involvement I wanted to move away from what I saw as a general perception of QueenSpark’s history being pre-1990. Yet despite my resolve I

and other key members were absent in early drafts of the case study. In my struggle to keep a critical eye on what I was writing and step away from my emotional response, I ended up removing any reference to myself, as I was concerned that it was distorting my research. On reading an early version of the case study, Tom Woodin⁹ wrote, ‘Consider whether and how you will discuss your own involvement in QueenSpark – at the moment you are absent, yet your writing betrays an active involvement and engagement with the issues.’¹⁰ There is of course precedent in the interweaving of personal and public history. Historians such as Sheila Rowbotham have written as witnesses / participants of historical events, weaving the personal and the historical together.¹¹ However, my challenge was to include the personal in QueenSpark whilst making the case study consistent in style with the other two. The study was not about my memories and experiences, placed in an historical context, but was a study of QueenSpark as a group that I happened to have been involved with. Therefore it seemed more appropriate that this chapter on methodology would be the best place to acknowledge and discuss my involvement with QueenSpark and how it impacts on my research more broadly.

A further complication regarding QueenSpark is that my first principal supervisor, Al Thomson, had also been very active in QueenSpark and FWWCP in the 1980s. QueenSpark, at different times, had played very significant roles in both our lives, and there were certainly underlying tensions over who ‘owned’ QueenSpark’s history, and which history should be told. Indeed, what I was writing also affected my supervisor; it was his personal history too. Yet, there were also assumptions and understandings that we both shared and did not always recognise, not always having enough critical distance from the material. Claire Langhamer, who took over my supervision when Thomson left halfway through my research, had no connection to QueenSpark or community history and therefore challenged and questioned in a different way which made me question and crucially explain my underlying assumptions and ideas.

I would not wish to suggest that my own involvement has been a negative factor in my research, although it has complicated the process at times. As an ‘insider’ I already had knowledge of QueenSpark and how it worked, and some of the key changes it had gone through, and I had a network of sources readily available. In a sense I was

⁹ Woodin is an ex-QueenSpark member and former FWWCP Chair who has written extensively on FWWCP and related topics.

¹⁰ Email correspondence with Tom Woodin, 19.12.07.

¹¹ Rowbotham, S, 2001, *Promise of a dream*, London, Verso.

well placed to undertake this research, but I have had to acknowledge my personal investment in this case study, at the same time as using my personal knowledge to think and write critically about QueenSpark.

Choosing two other case studies

The process of choosing my other two case studies was, in retrospective, fairly organic. The knowledge and connections I brought to this study led me to develop a list of possible groups. Alongside this list I considered the purpose of studying different groups: did I want to compare groups that had all developed at the same time and produced similar community histories? Or groups that had similar aims, but had developed at different times, and used different ways to tell the histories? These two questions helped me consider what I did and did not want, for example,

- As QueenSpark was a member of FWWCP, I chose to avoid other FWWCP groups as I felt they would be a significant degree of homogeneity in ethos and ways of working.
- I wanted the groups to emphasise different forms of presenting histories (allowing for some cross-over), which I thought would help explore the different ways community history groups worked and the factors which influenced these decisions.
- I decided not to focus on groups only in the South-east of England, as I thought that perhaps regionally specificity might add another dimension to the comparisons.
- I did not want groups that had been short-lived, they had to have been established for at least ten years and still active in 2000 in order to be able to make worthwhile comparisons over time. This minimum life-span was important as I wanted to avoid groups that formed for one-off projects, and then disbanded upon completion.
- I wanted groups that believed in the importance of enabling people to tell their own histories and making them public, who encouraged some form of participation. I was not interested in local history societies as I judged these, rightly or wrongly, as groups whose main interest was place and the lives of local 'elites', typically individuals not in living memory.
- I wanted groups whose own histories had not been told.

As I gradually narrowed the field two groups emerged strongly as possible cases: Bradford Heritage Recording Unit (BHRU) and Living Archive in Milton Keynes. BHRU had started as a Manpower Service Commission (MSC) scheme attached to the Library and Museum Service, and combined oral history with photography to document community histories in Bradford. I was aware of its work through its publications, which were quite different to QueenSpark's, particularly in relation to the anonymity of narrators, editorial voice and use of photography. I also knew that Rob Perks¹² and Donald Hyslop,¹³ both of whom were on the OHS committee with me, had started their oral history careers with BHRU. Whilst I was interested in their 'journeys', I hoped their personal contact might be helpful in accessing the group and its history, and indeed this turned out to be the case.

Living Archive had its origins in People's Press, and although never a FWWCP group, had appeared in the first FWWCP publication, *Writing*, in 1978. As a group it employed a wide range of forms in making community histories, and appeared to have been more successful than both QueenSpark and BHRU in securing funding. Its output was substantial in comparison to the other two groups. In addition when I started my research I met Roger Kitchen, who had started both People's Press and Living Archive, and Rib Davis (who had been involved in both), through OHS, which again proved to be a fruitful way into the group. Whilst my contacts were particularly helpful and were a factor in my choice of groups, in retrospect I settled on what turned out to be three very distinct groups with which to explore community history making.

Sources

But in actual Archives, though the bundles may be mountainous, there isn't much in fact, very much there [...] The Archive is made up from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and just ended there. [...] And nothing happens to this stuff, in the Archive. It is indexed and catalogued, and some of it is not indexed and catalogued, and some of it is lost. But as stuff, it just sits there until it is read, and used and narrativised.¹⁴

None of the three case study groups have 'archives' in a conventional sense: they have filing cabinets and boxes containing material deemed necessary to keep for their own

¹² Rob Perks has been curator of oral history at the British Library Sound Archive since 1989 and is secretary of OHS and co-editor of the journal.

¹³ Donald Hyslop is vice-chair of OHS.

¹⁴ Steedman, C, 2002, *Dust*, Manchester University Press, p.68.

organisation and records and general interest, but none is ‘catalogued’ and most is barely ordered. While some are archiving the material relating to their ‘products’ (Living Archive in particular), the groups are still functioning, and their history is still being made. I was fortunate to be given access to all material in each case, which provided enough information to chart the group’s development and draw out key themes for comparison and discussion. As an oral historian there was an assumption that oral history interviews would be an important part of my source material. However I had not intended this to be an oral history based thesis, but planned to conduct interviews if and when I felt they would complement the material I was working with.

QueenSpark had by far the largest volume of material and I used minutes of meetings, annual reports, newsletters, publicity documents, policy documents, letters, funding applications, published articles about QueenSpark (both by members and ‘outsiders’), QueenSpark publications, as well as book reviews, and any other relevant documentation. As indicated I already had ideas regarding key factors affecting QueenSpark in the late 1990s, in particular funding, and this was one theme I searched for in the material. I also looked at the earliest documentation of QueenSpark’s origin and early influential actors to begin the process of charting its organisational development. This helped me focus when confronted with so much material, and formed a framework with which to analyse the various sources. As indicated, I did not intend to have an oral history based analysis, however initially I thought I would interview QueenSpark members; this reflected my own personal desire to have the voices of those involved in the 1990s recorded. In the event, the volume of documentary sources available to me, and the knowledge that so many people had made significant contributions to QueenSpark’s development (and so would need to be interviewed) made me reconsider my purpose and motivation. At this point, reasoning that QueenSpark was one of three case studies, not the basis for the whole thesis, and this was not about people’s memories of QueenSpark, I decided not to do any interviews for this case study. However, I was still swayed by my own personal sense that whilst previous research had focused on the origins of QueenSpark and its founding members, active members particularly through the 1990s had not been acknowledged. While to interview them all was beyond the scope of the research, it was important (to me) that the case study reflected their contributions appropriately. As a compromise I decided to

invite active members to reflect on their involvement with QueenSpark.¹⁵ The letter of invitation asked seven questions:

- How and why did you get involved with QueenSpark?
- When did you stop being involved and why?
- What did you get out of being involved?
- What do you feel QueenSpark achieved during your particular time
- Any key moments you remember?
- Any regrets?
- What do you think has been QueenSpark's lasting contribution to community history?

I identified 30 key individuals who had made active contributions; these individuals represented the life-span of QueenSpark, they were individuals for whom I had contact details, and more importantly whom I thought would engage with my request and take the time to respond. I received twenty responses ranging from a brief acknowledgement of what I was doing to several pages of reflection. In an attempt to engage the ten others I offered the option of commenting on a draft of the case study. Eight read the draft (which included three who had provided an initial response to my letter). Whilst the responses were useful in helping me think about motivations of participants, how they saw QueenSpark, and also about some of the personal relationships which impacted on the development of QueenSpark, they did not in fact play a significant role in my analysis. In reality I found the information I was seeking within the minutes, policy documents and other documentary material. Nevertheless the comments on the draft chapter added an extra layer to the analysis (as discussed below), and therefore I adopted this approach with the other case studies.

My approach to BHRU was necessarily different as there was far less published material in the public domain and I did not have the knowledge of the group that I had of QueenSpark. My first step was to interview Perks, who was the first co-ordinator as I wanted to get a sense of BHRU's origins and how it worked and developed, and who had been involved. It began as an MSC scheme and so I did some background reading on the MSC to understand the context of its formation. The interview with Perks helped

¹⁵ Responses to this request are referred to as 'QS questionnaire' in the QueenSpark chapter.

me get a sense of BHRU and concentrate more sharply on my areas of focus when I visited its base in the Bradford Industrial Museum. Perks loaned me his collection of BHRU articles, newspaper cuttings and publicity material, and crucially introduced me to Tim Smith who had joined BHRU a couple of years after it started and took over as co-ordinator when Perks left. The interviews with Smith and Perks provided a detailed account of the history of the BHRU, as well as the narrator's own experiences and thoughts about its development. By the time of the interview with Smith, in 2008, BHRU no longer existed as a working entity, but Smith was still connected with the museum in a freelance capacity and seemed the only one person who knew where all BHRU 'archive' material was stored. Fortunately for me, through Smith I was given full access. There was considerably less material than at QueenSpark, and it appeared that a lot of early material, such as minutes from meetings, had simply been lost over the years. However there were still some minutes, publications, publicity material, newspaper articles, letters, documentation regarding its set-up and advisory group, and yearly files of letters for the years 1992 to 2004.

Interviewing was not central to this case study but a complementary source to help with my analysis. I had wanted to interview Olive Howarth who had been at BHRU throughout the MSC period, and as a woman I thought she may offer a different viewpoint, but I learnt that sadly she had died. I attempted to contact Steve Kelly and Carole Greenwood who had set-up the BHRU with an invitation to read a draft of the case study, but received no response. Both Perks and Smith read and commented on the chapter (with Smith this involved a long telephone discussion). Donald Hyslop who had been involved in BHRU for one year before leaving to co-ordinate the Southampton Oral History Unit, another MSC scheme, also kindly read a draft. Their comments were useful in filling in gaps in the written evidence and providing further context.

My approach to, and experience with, Living Archive was not dissimilar to BHRU. In the first instance I chose to interview Roger Kitchen for an overview of Living Archive, as he had been there from its inception in 1984 to 2003. As Milton Keynes was a post-war new town and this seemed to add a particular dimension to Living Archive, I also undertook some background reading into new towns and Milton Keynes, again to place into context the uniqueness of Living Archive. Again I was fortunate that Kitchen provided the route into the archive material at Living Archive, which was, unlike QueenSpark and BHRU, well-ordered and easy to find. The newsletters, which commenced in 1992, in particular were very informative and helped

provide a chronology of activities and developments. However pre 1990 material was unavailable, as it could not be located. Despite all the documentary sources I was using, when writing the case study I was very conscious of only having Kitchen's 'voice'. I made several attempts to contact Roy Nevitt, a co-founder of Living Archive with Kitchen, and his wife Maggie, who had been the first paid worker, but was unsuccessful until Kitchen kindly handed them a draft copy of the case study to read. This was a useful intervention as they not only sent me detailed comments on the chapter, but also several pages of their own reflection about their involvement with Living Archive until their departure in 1992. I also sent Rib Davis, who had been an active member, a copy and followed this up with a telephone interview.

It would of course been much easier not to have had fifteen people's comments on the case study relevant to them, and certainly less challenging for me. However given that I was writing part of their history I felt it was important that they had the opportunity to read the case studies, and possibly question my interpretations. My sense was that whilst I was opening up my own work for scrutiny, the process would in fact enrich my research. My approach was a natural progression from my previous work, but I had to keep in mind that this was my research, that my 'informants' would have their own agenda and story to tell, and I was not doing a thesis by consensus. In fact there were not any points of tension in this respect, but I was aware at times of an unconscious advocacy on my part. I was in sympathy with the different groups' aims and I liked the people I interviewed, and my perceptions were tainted by my involvement with QueenSpark and my understandings of community history. Consequently I had continually to question my interpretations and the way I was constructing the narratives, using the work of Valerie Yow and Ken Plummer for guidance.¹⁶

In keeping with the spirit of returning work back to the community, it was important to me that this research was accessible both in the academy and the community. I did not want the work to be removed from those who had actively sought to democratise the practice of history through community history, and those who participated in the process.¹⁷ In a sense I hoped that the research would go some way to

¹⁶ Yow, V, 2005, *Recording Oral History: a guide for the humanities and social sciences* Altamira Press; Plummer, K, 2001, *Documents of Life 2*, London, Sage.

¹⁷ See Patai, D, 1991, 'Is ethical research possible?' in Gluck & Patai, (eds.) for a discussion on the tensions in engaging in this type of process.

bring the academic and the community together through reflective historical and analytical work which was inclusive to all.

In conclusion the purpose of this chapter has been to not only reflect upon the methods and sources I have used in my research, but also to situate myself in relation to this work. I have attempted to unpick the many layers of my involvement in community history, and the approaches I have adopted in my analysis. This has not always been an easy task, but the challenge has been to use my knowledge and experience to enrich this research at the same time as maintaining a critical distance from the work. I have sought to do this by acknowledging what I bring to this research, questioning how this might impact on my interpretations.

Chapter Two: Defining community history

I have avoided as far as possible the word ‘community’; it is properly the right word to be used, but it has been so distorted [...] that in some cases I think it is a word and an idea that we will have to re-appropriate at a later point in time, when it once again suits our needs and not the needs of those who are so concerned to impose the sense of “community” upon us as a cheap substitute for a radically different, and better, society. Community, like history, is not something which happens by accident; not given, but made.¹

Introduction

‘Community History’ is a term frequently used but rarely defined or examined, as if somehow its meaning is self-evident and requires no explanation. Yet as Grele, an oral historian, comments in what he calls his ‘friendly critique of oral history,’ ‘We must begin to explain to others what we mean by “community history” and what we mean by community.’² However, in encouraging us to consider these meanings he offers no indication as to how he is using or defining these terms. In recent years, definitions have begun to emerge which are historically specific and reflect how community history is currently perceived. Twells claims community history has come to be defined loosely as a popular practice of history making outside of universities.³ Whilst for Flinn, whose interest is community archives (a recent development), community history (which he equates with community archive) is a grassroots activity where ownership and control of the project is with the community, but which may be carried out in partnership with formal organisations.⁴ Nevertheless, we cannot understand the nature of community history today without understanding its development, which has been complicated. By examining where community history is located at particular historical moments, this chapter explores how community history is understood in a variety of contexts, and brings together the discussions and debates around community history in a way that has not been done before.

What becomes apparent throughout the discussions is the problem of definition. There are assumptions of meanings of terms inherent in many of these discussions, for

¹ Worpole, K, 1977, *Local Publishing and Local Culture*, London, Centerprise, p.20.

² Grele, R, 1991 (2nd ed.), *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, New York, Praeger, p.202.

³ Twells, A, ‘Community history’, www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/commuinity_history viewed 21.11.08.

⁴ Flinn, A, 2007, ‘Community Histories, Community Archives’: some opportunities and challenges, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 28(2).

example in the use of the term ‘ordinary people’. Meanings of ‘ordinary’ may be complex and its use problematic but ordinary people has become an enduring term used to signify a non-elite perspective.⁵ Yet as Worpole and Wilkinson have so succinctly stated, in relation to naming FWWCP,

When it comes to explanations and definitions, we have a problem with language. [...] We seem to get caught between the wrong words and no words. Wrong words like ‘workers’, ‘ordinary people’ and ‘middle class intellectuals’: who are the idlers, the extraordinary people, the working-class intellectuals?⁶

This comment highlights a tension in the usage of many terms within the debates explored in this chapter. For example, ‘academic’ is often used with an assumed understanding of scholarly intent, yet does this only mean scholarly work carried out in universities which is subject to peer review? Or does it also apply to trained historians working outside the academy producing scholarly work? And what then does non-academic mean? To complicate matters further we can question what exactly constitutes scholarly work, who decides, and who validates it, which raises an important issue concerning the ‘voice’ of authority, a theme that is discussed throughout this research.⁷ Often terms are used interchangeably, for example, ‘professional’ and ‘academic’ historian, implying they are one and the same. Yet in other instances the terms are used to denote historians working outside (the professional) and within (the academic) the academy. Whilst it is not my intention (or indeed possible) within the scope of this chapter to interrogate the meanings of all the terms used, it is important to recognise that subtle differences exist in the way certain terms are employed by different people in a variety of contexts. These differences have implications for our understanding of community history. Moreover definitions are not fixed, they are fluid. Language is historically rooted and can change over time, as meanings are constantly changing and evolving, and being negotiated by both the individual and society. As Lowenthal has

⁵ The use of, and meaning of the term, ‘ordinary people’ has been the subject of considerable debate within the Sussex-based Mass Observation Project. See for example Bloome, D, 1993, Introduction: Making Writing Visible on the Outside, in Barton, D et al, *Ordinary People Writing: the Lancaster and Sussex Writing Research Projects*, Working paper No.51, Centre for Language in Social Life, Lancaster.

⁶ Worpole, K & Wilkinson, G, 1978, Afterword, in Worker Writers and Community Publishers, *Writing*, London, p.247.

⁷ See Ashton, P & Hamilton, P, 2009, ‘Connecting with History: Australians and their pasts, in Ashton, P & Kean, H (eds.), *People and their Pasts: Public History Today*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, on the issue of authority in different historical practices.

stated, 'History is protean. What it is, what people think it should be and how it is told and heard all depend on perspectives peculiar to particular times and place.'⁸

As noted in the previous chapter, my involvement with QueenSpark has had a significant impact on my approach to this research. My initial understanding of community history as a form of people's history means that the starting point for investigation in this chapter is the emergence of people's history within the discipline of history, and a consideration of its nature. This discussion is followed by an overview of the emerging field of public history, which examines how debates within public history over audience, participation and professionalism of practice may impact on how community history is understood. The third section considers the complexity of the term 'community', and how the various meanings of the term may affect understanding of community history. The fourth section examines the connections between local history and community history drawing out the similarities and differences, in particular in relation to subject matter. The fifth section looks at community oral history, and interrogates debates within this field to explore how these may apply to understandings of community history. The final section reflects on community publishing and how community history is understood and practised within this movement. Through these diverse discussions a number of distinct areas of enquiry emerge that will be explored through the case studies. These concern the subject of history itself, the identity of the historian, and the different approaches adopted.

Towards a New History: bringing the 'people' into history

In 1976 in the first issue of *History Workshop Journal*, the editorial collective shared their concern with what they saw as a, 'narrowing of the influence of history in our society,' and argued, "'Serious history" has become a subject reserved for the specialist,' with only academics able to be historians. In explaining their purpose in producing the journal they stated, 'we shall try to restore a wider context for the study of history, both as a counter to the scholastic fragmentation of the subject, and with the aim of making it relevant to ordinary people', and in doing so they emphasised the need for democratic scholarship.⁹ Whilst the development and impact of History Workshop on community history will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, these comments

⁸ Lowenthal, D, 1997, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge University Press, p.104.

⁹ Editorial Collective, 1976, 'Editorials', *History Workshop Journal*, p.1.

are useful in considering how history is perceived in terms of its purpose and relevance. Therefore the aim of this section is to look briefly at the discipline of history to examine how developments and ideas in mainstream history may be relevant or applicable to understanding community history.

The 1960s marked a key turning point in approaches to history. The emergence of new fields such as social history, and women's history, which called for more inclusive, expansive histories concerned with all human activity facilitated a move away from a 'grand narrative', and a recognition of multiple voices within the historical record. Those previously excluded from history began to have their histories told, and these new histories challenged traditional approaches to history and opened up new ways of 'doing' history.¹⁰ Marxists historians and History Workshop, in particular, played a significant role in the development of social history in Britain.¹¹ Certainly the publication in 1963 of Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* was highly influential and marked a turning point in history writing.¹² Indeed Schwarz sees this as the 'arrival of a cultural history' which marked a further development in radical history through the 1960s and 1970s.¹³ Similarly, Rowbotham commented that, 'Making [...] broke new ground by presenting class dynamically, by combining the political with the social and by linking work with community – all ways of seeing which were to be crucial for the emergence of what later came to be called "women's history."'¹⁴ In fact until the mid-twentieth century Marxist approaches to history tended to be found outside the academy, 'in the alternative intellectual and pedagogical environments of labour movements,' for example, in the Workers Educational Association (WEA) and Ruskin College, Oxford.¹⁵ However from the 1960s as the number of universities and history departments expanded and funding through research councils became available, many of these historians such as E.P Thompson took up positions in academia, bringing with them their approaches to history writing, and history in general.

¹⁰ Burke, P (ed.), 2001 (2nd ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, London, Polity Press; Iggers, G, 1997, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press; and Tosh, J, 2002, *The Pursuit of History*, London, Longman.

¹¹ Eley, G, 2003, Marxist Historiography in Berger, S, Feldner, H & Passmore, K (eds), *Writing History: Theory and Practice*, London, Hodder.

¹² Thompson, E.P, 1963, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, Penguin.

¹³ Schwarz, B, 1982, 'The "people" in history; the Communist Party Historians' Group,' 1946-56, in Johnson, R; McLennan, G; Schwarz, B & Sutton, D (eds.), *Making Histories: studies in history-writing and politics*, London, Hutchinson, p.61.

¹⁴ Rowbotham, 2001, p.75.

¹⁵ Eley, 2003, p.63.

Central to these ‘new’ histories was a concern with understanding the lives of ordinary people and their experiences of social change. This practice was increasingly referred to as ‘history from below’, and Sharpe argued that it expanded the audience of the professional historian by making history relevant to ordinary people. On considering whether history from below was an approach to history or a distinct type of history, he concluded that it could be both, depending on the way it was being applied.¹⁶ Likewise Burke commented that history from below could change its meaning in different contexts, asking, for example, ‘Should a political history from below discuss the views and actions of everyone who is excluded from power, or should it deal with politics at local or grass-roots level?’¹⁷ Certainly as history has broadened and new approaches have developed historians have faced new challenges and problems of definition which raise questions about who or what history is about and who decides.

Within the discussions on developments in history since the 1960s there appears a gradual shift from the use of the term ‘history from below’ to that of ‘people’s history’. Samuel states that people’s history has in fact a long history, with its focus reflecting the particular concerns of any given time. He suggested the term ‘people’s history’, could be applied to a variety of different ‘cultural initiatives’ which emerged in the 1970s and included the work that was being undertaken at QueenSpark. Equally it could be applied retrospectively to ‘those various attempts to write an archive-based history from below which have played such a large part in the recent revival of English social history.’¹⁸ What distinguished the form of people’s history that emerged from the 1970s was a focus on the (subjective) experience of everyday life. However Burke highlights the difficulties in determining who the ‘people’ are in people’s history. He shows the complexities in the usage of the word ‘people’, and how it is an ambiguous and often exclusive term, where some people are ‘judged’ to be more ‘people’ than others. For example, for some Marxists historians, the working-class, and those involved in radical movements were deemed to be the proper subject of ‘people’s’ history.¹⁹ This tension over subject matter and whose story should be told was brought

¹⁶ Sharpe, J, 2001, ‘History from Below’, in Burke (ed.).

¹⁷ Burke, 2001, p.10.

¹⁸ Samuel, R, 1981a, ‘People’s history’, in Samuel, R (ed.), 1981, *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, London, Routledge, p.xv.

¹⁹ Burke, P, 1981, ‘People’s History or Total History’, in Samuel (ed.).

into sharp focus by the impact of feminism and the re-writing of history to include the experiences of women.²⁰ Women's history blurred the boundaries between public and private history, and brought what had been deemed personal and outside mainstream history, such as the 'family', into historical understanding.²¹ It precipitated a shift towards a more nuanced understanding of the everyday, which embraced the subjective and questioned approaches to history writing.

What becomes evident is that a history focused on experiences of everyday life requires new methodologies and approaches that ask different questions and obtain different perspectives on events, making use of new sources.²² Samuel claims that people's history is often used to represent a more local-based history and, 'always represents some sort of attempt to broaden the basis of history, to enlarge its subject matter, make use of new raw materials and offer new maps of knowledge.'²³ For some this has meant using documents previously seen as irrelevant such as household inventories.²⁴ Autobiographies, memoirs and photographs have become sources, and oral history has been one of the main approaches in generating new source material. It is not the purpose of this section to debate the merits of these new sources - and there are issues around using and interpreting any source to make histories - but oral history in particular has brought the subjective experience of people into history and challenged the way history is written. As Tosh states, 'They [oral historians] see oral history rather as a democratic alternative, challenging the monopoly of an academic elite. Ordinary people are offered not only a place in history but a role in the *production* of historical knowledge with important political implications.'²⁵ The importance of oral history in the development of community history is considered later in this chapter.

Underlying all these discussions was a reflection on the importance of bringing the everyday into history, but the descriptive (and often unreflective) nature of the resulting narratives was often criticised. Hobsbawm asked, 'What is the object of all these exercises? It is not simply to discover the past but to *explain it*, and in doing so to

²⁰ For an introduction to the significance of women's history see Scott, J.W, 2001, 'Women's History' in Burke (ed.); Holloway, G, 1998, 'Writing women in: the development of feminist approaches to women's history, in Lamont, W (ed.), *Historical controversies and historians*, London, UCL Press.

²¹ Tosh, 2002, p.128.

²² Burke, 2001, p.11.

²³ Samuel, 1981a, p.xvi .

²⁴ Samuel, R, 1988, 'What is Social History?' in Gardiner, J (ed.), *What is History Today?*, Hampshire, Macmillan Press.

²⁵ Tosh, 2002, p.302.

provide a link with the present.’²⁶ Samuel urged historians to adopt a more theoretical approach to their work, and the relationship between history, theory and politics was the basis of a key debate within History Workshop in 1979 on socialist theory and people’s history. This debate brought to the fore the tensions around whose history should be told, by whom and crucially how these histories should be written (and is considered later in the chapter).²⁷ In particular the debate drew attention to whether the ‘people’ were a ‘subject’ of history or were themselves ‘history makers / writers’.

Whilst there is scant mention specifically of community history in these debates, when we consider the work that emerged from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, in 1982, we find specific reference to community history as a radical form of history. Bommers and Wright saw community history as part of the development of people’s history in Britain, stating that, ‘the starting point for socialist community-based history projects is the effort to reclaim and draw upon the cultural experience of local people.’²⁸ Such projects involved people in the production of their own history as researchers, writers and publishers not as the object of research by others.

Whilst at times people’s history and history from below seem to be used interchangeably, there does appear to be a subtle difference. In seeking to delineate people’s history and history from below, my sense is that history from below tends to denote the writing of history (or re-writing) to include the experiences of ordinary people, but a history not necessarily written for those people. In contrast the emphasis in people’s history that began to emerge in the 1970s was that of a history *for* and *about* the majority of the population. For some this came to represent a more participatory form of history making, where the people were no longer the subjects but also active participants in history making. In other words people had some degree of agency in making history. For CCCS this was to be found within the community history projects that were emerging in the 1970s. More recently the use of the term people’s history appears to have declined as ‘public history’ is increasingly used to define a history for and about the general population, demonstrating the fluidity of terms and practices.

²⁶ Hobsbawm, E, 1997, *On History*, London, Abacus.

²⁷ Samuel, R, 1981b, ‘History and theory’, in Samuel (ed.).

²⁸ Bommers, M & Wright, P, 1982, “‘Charms of residence’: the public and the past’ in Johnson et al, p.299.

Public History: a place for community history?

The current interest in and development of the field of 'Public History' provides a useful starting point to explore community history in a recent historical context, and draw out issues relevant in any discussion on community history, drawing on international debates. In an aptly titled article '*What is Public History?*' Liddington considers this question in depth. By comparing the development of public history in the United States, Australia and Britain she seeks to uncover the meanings of 'public history' and to look at how it is used by both its practitioners and academics. While seeing public history as an umbrella for all forms of popular history, she also concedes that public history is a 'slippery concept', which is used in such a variety of ways that it becomes confusing to those seeking to understand and situate this growing field.²⁹ However Liddington indicates that at least two distinct meanings of public history have emerged. At one end, she argues, there are the 'amateur-activists and community history projects' promoting the idea of history as a pursuit for everyone. At the other end are the highly polished public histories that are found on television or populist books by Simon Schama.³⁰ Jordanova also finds public history hard to define, but her central discussion focuses on public history as popular history for a mass audience with history as a form of entertainment for the public. She argues that 'amateur' history, often found in the form of local and family history, is not public history because, crucially, the audiences are small.³¹ Whilst Jordanova makes the point that being an amateur does not necessarily imply having less skills in historical research than a professional historian, the notion that audience size is a factor in determining 'types' of history adds another layer of complexity in situating community history. The question of amateur versus professional and issues of audience are important concerns, which are examined further through the case studies.

Whilst Liddington and Jordanova find public history a difficult term to describe, in the US public history has, it would appear, a very clearly defined role and place. This is largely due to the fact that the US has a strong public history movement, which has developed over the past 25 years and that in its present form emerged as a response to a

²⁹ Liddington, J, 2002a, 'What is Public History? Publics and their Pasts, Meanings and Practices', *Oral History*, 30(1).

³⁰ Liddington, J, 2002b, What is Public History? www.leeds.ac.uk/heritage/liddington.htm viewed 28.6.04

³¹ Jordanova, 2000, *History in Practice*, London, Arnold, p.152.

job crisis for history graduates in the 1970s.³² There is a journal *The Public Historian*, a National Council on Public History (NCPH) and an extensive programme of public history courses at universities throughout the country.³³ Whilst precise definitions vary what becomes apparent in the US context is an emphasis on the professional employed to present the past (in a variety of contexts such as museums, heritage sites, films, books etc) to the public. Public history is thus broadly described as meaning ‘any professional practice of history outside an academic setting or the education of those who would engage in such a practice.’³⁴ Yet as early as 1981, Grele took issue with this narrow focus on the professional historian (and employment), and the idea that public history somehow represented something ‘new’, and an alternative to academic history. For Grele, preceding the ‘arrival’ of public history, it was the local history movement that ‘offered the most thoroughgoing alternative to the historical work done in the academy,’ with amateur and professional often working together.³⁵ Furthermore, it was within this movement that debates about the purpose of history, how history was made, and by whom, had taken place, and it was these traditions that Grele argued public history should draw upon. He argued that, ‘the task of the public historian, broadly defined, should be to help members of the public do their own history and to aid them in understanding their role in shaping and interpreting events.’³⁶

This idea of the public ‘doing their own history’ is not one that appears dominant in any of the discussions (in the US) on public history, the emphasis being on popular history made by professionally trained historians outside of the academy. However Grele is not alone in his critique. *Presenting the Past*,³⁷ a collection of essays that emerged in 1986 from the American journal *Radical History Review*, provides a more inclusive and informative way of thinking about public history. Influenced by the antiwar, civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s the editors argue that a new generation of historians emerged who were keen to uncover those histories that had been ‘hidden from history’ and to engage with history outside of academia. In examining what public history is, the editors identify three types of public history, each

³² An interesting reflection on the development of public history in the US can be found in *The Public Historian*, 1999, 21(3), an issue devoted to the NCPH 20th anniversary.

³³ The NCPH website lists 69 public history courses available in the US: www.ncph.org.

³⁴ Bookspan, S, 1999, ‘A Word for Our Sponsor’, *The Public Historian*, 21(3), p.1.

³⁵ Grele, R, 1981, ‘Whose Public, Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?’, *The Public Historian*, 3(1): p.43.

³⁶ Grele, 1981, p.47.

³⁷ Benson, S.P, Brier, S & Rosenzweig, R, 1986, *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press.

with different aims. The first they describe as being the most influential in ‘shaping popular historical consciousness’ and is found, for example, in mass media, museums, and historical buildings. This type is seen as being ‘slick’ and serving dominant interests. The second type they identify as being the professional public history, and the third they term ‘people’s’ history. Whilst acknowledging that people’s history is difficult to define they state that it, ‘generally refers to efforts to encourage a progressive, accessible and frequently oppositional historical vision in a variety of community and organisational contexts.’³⁸ Whilst recognising that these three varieties of public history may overlap and are not as clear-cut as the definitions would indicate, what appears to distinguish ‘people’s history’ is the emphasis placed (by some practitioners) on the process (of telling or ‘making’ the history) as being as important as the content of the history, and an attempt to work collaboratively with the community.³⁹ Breaking down public history into these three categories appears a more perceptive way of examining public history, and provides a more usable framework in which to situate different types of public history. From this perspective we begin to see community history as a form of people’s history (as indicated in the previous section), and as a ‘branch’ of public history, with its own characteristics and debates.

Whilst the US has the most established public history movement, Australia also has a well-developed public history movement that is worth considering. As in the US the emphasis is on a ‘professional’ historian, and there is an organisation, the Professional Historians Association, and a journal, *Public History Review*.⁴⁰ Nevertheless Liddington sees public history in Australia as being more radical in its approach than in the US, engaging in community battles and being more politically involved.⁴¹ While the emphasis is still on the ‘professional’ there is a strong sense in Australian public history of engaging with the community, and with local and national debates about the past and its contemporary political significance, in particular in relation to Aboriginal history.⁴² It is from the Australian model that Liddington argues Britain has taken inspiration, and compared to public history in the US and Australia,

³⁸ Benson et al, 1986, p.xvii.

³⁹ See for example, Green, J, 1986, ‘Engaging in People’s History: The Massachusetts History Workshop’, in Benson et al, (eds.).

⁴⁰ For an overview of public history in Australia see Rickhard, J & Spearritt, P (eds.), 1991, *Packaging the Past? Public Histories*, Melbourne University Press.

⁴¹ Liddington, 2002a, p.86.

⁴² Burgmann, V & Lee, J, 1988, *Australia Deconstructed* in Johnson, S & Macintyre, S (eds.), *Making the Bicentenary*, University of Melbourne.

British public history appears in its infancy. However as Kean, reflecting Grele's concerns, remarks,

Some have argued that the origins of public history were a new phenomenon. But to write history in imaginative and accessible ways, to engage with topics relevant to the present, to value experience and knowledge outside the academy is not new, although the term to define it might be.⁴³

What Kean describes is an approach influenced by the ideals of Raphael Samuel, and History Workshop, which sought to blur the relationship between the academic and the amateur, and breakdown boundaries between notions of public and private histories.⁴⁴ She argues that Liddington defines public history too rigidly, ignoring the long tradition of (amateur) local history in Britain, and placing too much emphasis on the role of the professional (paid) historian in presenting the past to the public. Kean also takes issue with the role of funding and accountability in determining what public history is and states, 'the framework for validation seems to be who pays.'⁴⁵ In other words those grassroots historians who do not seek a wide audience and are not paid for their endeavours cannot be seen to engage in public history. This consideration of who pays, in particular the role of the state in funding 'history making' outside the academy is a fundamental part of interrogating public history.⁴⁶ Certainly, the historical 'product' is shaped by the public historian, but it is also influenced by those organisations providing the funding. Consequently public history is political, in that while it can be radical (and used to promote a history that is open to all) it can also be a 'tool of the establishment' used to foreground some histories over others.⁴⁷ Indeed the increasing importance of funding in supporting history projects and its impact on these projects is explored in the next chapter and through the case studies.

At the centre of these discussions on public history is the underlying tension between the professional and amateur historian. On the one hand there is the call for professional standards and a professional historian who enables the public to understand their past; on the other a call for a breaking down of hierarchies and knowledge barriers,

⁴³ Kean, H, 2004, 'Public History and Raphael Samuel: a forgotten radical pedagogy,' *Public History Review*, 11, p.59.

⁴⁴ See Kean, H, Martin, P & Morgan, S.J, 2000, *Seeing History: Public History in Britain Now*, London, Francis Boutle and Samuel, R, 1994, *Theatres of Memory*, London, Verso.

⁴⁵ Kean, 2004, p.58.

⁴⁶ Jordanova, 2000, p.155.

⁴⁷ Jordanova, 2000, p.141.

and a recognition of all the ways in which people make history. Indeed the popularisation of history in the 1980s and the rise of historians working outside the academy, often in areas traditionally the arena of the amateur, has led to an active questioning of the ownership of history, raising issues around audience and public participation in the making of history. Yet within all the debates is the acknowledgement that public history, however defined, is a collaborative process, which uses a wide variety of methods and approaches to make history public.

So far I have been concerned with exploring shifts within historiography and how this relates to community history. Whilst we can see it as a type of people's history, and more recently situated within public history, for some, such as Grele, community history follows a radical tradition and is at the heart of what public history should be (in other words involving people in making their history). Yet, for others it is sidelined and viewed as an amateur endeavour for a limited audience with little historical significance. Certainly Shopes argues that community history is public history only when the community history has a degree of critical analysis, and she defines public history as 'serious history for and with non-specialists outside an academic setting.' She draws attention to what she considers 'the essential disjunction between professional history and history as it is popularly understood,' emphasising the need for dialogue between the two.⁴⁸ This comment again highlights the tension over who the historians are and where the authority lies. However even within these debates community history is often linked with local history, or the terms are used interchangeably. Therefore before examining local history and its relationship to community history it would seem that one of the key ways to make sense of any difference is to consider the many ways the term 'community' is used.

'That wonderful warm sea of community'⁴⁹

In his review of articles in *Family and Community History* Mills suggests that authors should be explicit in how they are using 'community' and in doing so this could, 'help move 'community' from having only a descriptive function towards having a conceptual function as well'.⁵⁰ In considering community history Finnegan states, 'we

⁴⁸ Shopes, L, 2002, Oral History and the study of communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities, *Journal of American History*, 89(2), p.598.

⁴⁹ Taken from chapter title, Sitzia, & Thickett, 2002, p.137.

⁵⁰ Mills, D, 2004, 'Defining Community: A Critical Review of "Community"' in *Family and Community History*, 7(1), p.6.

need to look a bit more closely at that central term community. For, unless we know what it means, it is scarcely easy to investigate its history.’⁵¹ She lists at least five meanings of community. The first as locality which traditionally has been the most common meaning; the second as a group sharing common interests which are not necessarily localised; the third as a locality or group that is bound by ties such as kinship or neighbourliness; the fourth is formed by a sense of belonging; and the fifth as a ‘claim or exhortation to observe common ties or interests.’ In other words communities can be formed through groups having shared experiences. This list highlights three different ways of grouping meanings of community; the physical (geographical location); social (as indicated by networks); and psychological (the sense of belonging).⁵² The idea of a sense of belonging fits in with Anderson’s notion of ‘imagined communities’, where people may feel connections with others even though they do not know each other or live in the same geographical location.⁵³ Deacon and Donald suggest that, ‘community is better viewed as a process rather than a place.’ And in response to Mills they argue that, ‘surely it is the breadth of those interpretations of “community” that is so striking rather than the effectiveness of such a list in delineating the term.’⁵⁴

Indeed ‘community’ as a term, concept or keyword is not easy to define. For example, Hillery, in 1955, found 94 definitions with the only common factor being that community involved people.⁵⁵ Certainly community as a concept, ‘is used to perform many different functions in the description and analysis of society’,⁵⁶ but its contested meaning across disciplines has meant that some have called for the term to be discarded.⁵⁷ Yet use of the term continues and as Smith writes, ““Community” cannot

⁵¹ Finnegan, R, 1994, ‘Community: What is it and how can we investigate it?’ in Pryce, W.T.R (ed.), *From Family History to Community History*, Cambridge, Open University Press, p.210.

⁵² See Christenson, J.A & Robinson, J.W, 1989, *Community Development in Perspective*, Iowa State University Press.

⁵³ Anderson, B, 1983, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London, Verso.

⁵⁴ Deacon, B & Donald, M, 2004, ‘In Search of Community History’, *Family & Community History*, 7(1), p.14.

⁵⁵ Hillery cited in Bell, C & Newby, H, 1971, *Community Studies: An introduction to the sociology of the local community*, London, Allen & Unwin.

⁵⁶ Dennis, R & Daniels, S, 1994, “Community” and the Social Geography of Victorian Cities’ in Drake, M (ed.), *Time, Family and community: perspectives on family and community history*, Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁷ Delanty, G, 2003, *Community*, London, Routledge provides the most extensive investigation into meanings and understandings of the term.

be discarded, although it is best to see it as a problematic, a sensitising notion that focuses our thoughts on important issues.’⁵⁸

By exploring the historical development of the use of the term community, Williams highlights key periods in which the meaning of community changed. In the 19th century community was connected to locality. In the 20th century community was used, in the example Williams gave of community politics, to distinguish it from national and more formal local politics, and involved some form of direct action, a grass-roots initiative. The emphasis was on ‘working with the people’ as distinct from ‘service to the community’. Yet significantly, while acknowledging community as complex, Williams concluded that, ‘What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation etc) it never seems to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive, opposing or distinguishing term.’⁵⁹

Eileen and Stephen Yeo, in assessing the significance of keywords (of which community is one), reflect,

[keywords] have been influential as ways of living, acting upon others. They have been ways of seeing with particular, class locations at particular times, with particular uses and functions for those who employ them, and with power to constrain and to shape the ideas and actions of those about whom and by whom they are used’.⁶⁰

The Yeos considered three key uses of community and their historical development and in doing so raised the issue of class and power, and the tensions between formal and informal networks. The first use was community as mutuality, which was democratic, bottom-up, as defined by working-class activists in the 19th century. The second was community as service, which was seen as working for the good of others, a top-down approach but philanthropic in nature (and usually carried out by amateurs / volunteers). The third was community as state, which had a discourse of service but through legislative and professional practice. In other words delivering state welfare policies through paid workers. Through their analysis of community as state they draw attention to the appropriation of the term community by the state, through government (both national and local) departments and services, and the negative implications this has for

⁵⁸ Smith, G, 1996, ‘Elastic Bund: Community in the Postmodern City’, *Community Development Journal*, 31(3), p.52.

⁵⁹ Williams, R, 1976, *Keywords*, London, Fontana, p.66.

⁶⁰ Yeo E & S, 1988, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’: From Owenism to the present’ in Yeo, S (ed.), *New Views of Co-operation*, London, Routledge, p.229.

its use by imposing 'community' on groups of people. Indeed Popple states that the radical left has been critical of 'community' because of its use by the state. In an informative overview he looks both at the debates in sociology, and what he calls the 'romantic socialists' (where he appears to place Williams) whose views on community have been determined by a 'nostalgic picture of working-class culture.'⁶¹ However, Popple concludes:

We can see that definitions of community are elusive, imprecise, contradictory and controversial. Community has both descriptive and evaluative meanings, and is as much an ideological construct as a description of a locality. The term not only exists in a geographical and material sense but also reflects people's thinking and feeling as to where they believe a community exists.⁶²

Rather than attempting to define community Cohen tries to understand its use by considering the 'symbolic construction of community'. He suggests that community implies both similarity and difference. In particular a community has boundaries (whether physical or psychological), and it is how these boundaries are perceived, 'not only by people on opposite sides of it, but also by people on the same side,' that he argues need exploring, in particular the meanings people give to their communities.⁶³

Whilst some of the discussions on community appear to indicate that community is about consensus, a shared sense of belonging felt by all in that community, Samuel reflects that 'the notion of 'community', though freely invoked, is, or ought to be, problematical.'⁶⁴ He urges us to be aware of the 'undercurrents' within the community, the conflicts as well as the shared interests. Boswell highlights the perception of difference from others as being crucial in the development and identity of a community.⁶⁵ Likewise Popple reminds us to recognise that traditional concepts of community (those focused on community as locality) can often hide social inequalities and power struggles and fails to recognise diversity in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality.⁶⁶ Equally 'community' is not static and people can belong to different

⁶¹ Popple, K, 1995, *Analysing Community Work*, Open University Press, p.3.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Cohen, A.P, 1985, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, London, Routledge, p.12.

⁶⁴ Samuel, 1976, p.197.

⁶⁵ Boswell, D, 1999, Introduction in Boswell, D & Evans J (eds), *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, London, Routledge, p.11.

⁶⁶ Popple, 1995.

communities at different times or several communities at the same time.⁶⁷ As Taksa argues, ““Community” is an extremely complex social phenomenon and not simply a static formation in which people with common concerns and interests, because they happen to live in the same area perhaps, are united and distinguished from others.’⁶⁸

‘Community’ is both fluid and dynamic and is as Kelly argues, ‘an active and self-conscious process.’⁶⁹ It is not something that can be imposed on a group of people who live in the same locality, or happen to have similar interests. These may be determining factors yet as Kelly argues,

[T]hey are not on their own sufficient, for it is also necessary that the members of a community acknowledge their membership, and this acknowledgement plays a recognised part in shaping their actions. [...] Community then is not an entity or even an abstraction, but a set of shared social meanings which are constantly created and mutated through the actions and interactions of its members, and through their interaction with the wider society. [...] Community grows as its members participate in, and shape, its growth; and it grows because of its members’ participation.⁷⁰

This active participation and consensual membership of a community are important points to be explored through the case studies. Equally, they reflect Worpole’s comment about ‘community’ being something that must be ‘made’ by the people themselves, not something imposed on them, a process, which also expresses a need for belonging.

This section has reflected briefly upon the different ways in which community is used and understood. While the term is problematic, understanding the way in which community is used in the context of community history is important in understanding the ‘type’ of history being made and by whom, and the motivations of those making the histories. For example, community history can be the history of a community as defined by, for example, a locality, but it can also, by invoking the ideas of community as mutuality, be about communities making their own histories. By thinking about the way in which community is used we can investigate the different types of community history, and think critically about the aims and motives of community histories. Equally,

⁶⁷ Finnegan, 1994, p.211.

⁶⁸ Taksa, L, 2003, ‘Defining the Field’, *History and Communities: A Preliminary Survey*, in Community History Program, NSW, Australia, p.13.

⁶⁹ Kelly, O, 1984, *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels*, London, Comedia, p.49.

⁷⁰ Kelly, 1984, p.49-50.

by exploring community we can look critically at the communities of community history and how community history can re/create communities.

‘Community history’ - another name for local history?

Local history has a long tradition in Britain, but has often been seen as the domain of the amateur historian, an antiquarian and anecdotal pursuit with little critical reflection or interpretation. Indeed the journal *Local Historian* was called the *Amateur Historian* until 1968.⁷¹ Yet while local history continues to be an activity practised by the ‘enthusiast’, it has also entered the academy.⁷² Tosh, in his consideration of mainstream history and its fragmentation into specialisms, makes the claim that for those historians who desire a ‘total history’ (a thematically integrated view of the past): “‘total history’ turns out in practice to mean *local history*’. He continues by stating that, ‘local history has been increasingly taken up by professional historians because of the opportunity it offers of straddling the conventional demarcations between specialisms.’⁷³ Within discussions on local history the terms community history and local history are often used interchangeably, and the concept of community appears as a significant factor within local history.⁷⁴ Therefore within this context it is useful to consider how those engaged in the fields of local and community history make their distinctions, and to draw out the similarities and differences being made between the two.

So what exactly is local history if it has the potential to lead us to a total history? Local history sections in libraries or bookshops display books that focus on a particular town or county or other locality, usually providing the history of the development of the area, which will often include some information about the important families that lived there.⁷⁵ Finberg, one of original heads of the Centre for English Local History at Leicester University, stated that the function of the local historian is to document the ‘origin, growth, decline and fall of a local community.’⁷⁶ He does however indicate that a community does not have to have ‘fallen’ in order to be studied, and he draws a

⁷¹ Bisceglia, L, 1980, ‘Writers of small histories: local historians in the United States and Britain’, *Local Historian*, 14(1).

⁷² Finberg, H.P.R & Skipp, V.H.T, 1973 (2nd ed.), *Local History: Objective and Pursuit*, Devon, David & Charles.

⁷³ Tosh, 2002, p134.

⁷⁴ For example, Broome, R, 1990, ‘Reflections on the Flesh and Bones of Local History’, *Victorian Historical Journal*, 61(1).

⁷⁵ See Hey, D (ed.), 1996, *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History*, Oxford University Press, for an overview of the development of modern approaches to local history.

⁷⁶ Finberg, 1973 in Finberg & Skipp, p.10.

distinction between what he sees as national history that is localised, and local history as a study in its own right. In doing so he considers ‘community’, and begins to use the term ‘local community’, implying that local history is the study of communities within localities. Likewise, for Rogers, local history is the study of the interrelation between people and place (which he claims is not so obvious in other types of history), where community is one possible ‘unit’ for this investigation.⁷⁷

However, Samuel comments on the sameness of much local history arguing that the documentary sources used contribute to this. In considering various sources he suggests that the use of visual evidence led to more focus on place rather than people, and he argues for the benefits of using oral history as a means of obtaining the voices of the ordinary people within the area.⁷⁸ He claims this can redefine what local history is about by making people’s experiences central to the history.⁷⁹ Certainly from early on amateur local historians have practised oral history. The work of George Ewart Evans in the 1950s, which resulted in publications such as *Ask The Fellows Who Cut The Hay*,⁸⁰ and Ronald Blythe’s *Akenfield*⁸¹ were hugely important to both local history and oral history, (and signified the ineffectiveness of rigid demarcations between the academic and amateur ‘historian’). However the emphasis within this work was on redefining local history by uncovering people’s own experience through oral history, not through their participation in the process of making history.

In the above discussions what we have is an emphasis on ‘community’ as a significant factor in local history, often with an assumed understanding of how community is being defined. There is no mention of community history as a separate entity. Yet in later work we begin to find community history as a form of study in its own right. While some ‘historians’ (and here I use the term to denote both academic and non-academic historians, and research in its broadest form) make clear distinctions between local and community history, this distinction often appears a grey area with community history seen as form of local history.⁸² However, what is clear is that at

⁷⁷ Rogers, A, 1977 (2nd ed.), *Approaches to Local History*, London, Longman, p.4.

⁷⁸ Samuel, R, 1976, Local History and Oral History, *History Workshop Journal*, 1.

⁷⁹ See also Caunce, S, 1994, *Oral History and the Local Historian*, Harlow, Longman.

⁸⁰ Ewart Evans, G, 1956, *Ask The Fellows Who Cut The Hay*, London, Faber. See also Howkins, A 1994, ‘Inventing Everyman: George Ewart Evans, Oral History and National Identity’, *Oral History*, 22(2).

⁸¹ Blythe, R, 1969, *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village*, London, Penguin.

⁸² See www.local.history.co.uk, the website for the *Local History* magazine, viewed 26.1.04. Also see Tiller, K, 2006, ‘Local History brought up to date’, *Local Historian*, 36(3).

some point community and local history have been separated out into two types of practice.

The Open University, which in 1994 pioneered the course, *Studying family and community histories: 19th and 20th centuries*, produced a series of handbooks for students. By devising this course they were reflecting a growing trend that was occurring, outside the academy, with people increasingly researching their own family histories. Brennan has suggested that this interest may stem from a desire for a sense of belonging.⁸³ Yet whatever the reason (and it is beyond the scope of this research to investigate family history), family historians are, as Bashforth recently claims, ‘probably the single biggest constituency of practising historical researchers within the wider public history community.’⁸⁴ The bringing together of ‘family’ and ‘community’ in this course suggests their use as ‘units’ (to use Roger’s term), as conceptual organising tools for micro historical investigation, with the focus on people. While the handbooks are useful in considering methods and sources and how to research families and communities, they provide little in the way of an examination of exactly what community history is. However, Mills, one of the authors, states, ‘*Local* history is concerned with the history of any aspect of human endeavour at the local level [...] *Community* history, it can be claimed, has begun to focus more sharply on a particular group of concepts.’⁸⁵ He presents community history as a more inclusive form of history, in terms of subject matter, with the focus on studying communities where locality is the determining factor. In contrast Pryce offers a clearer definition in which he states, ‘Community History, because it deals with localities, is a form of local history. It deals with families, groups, organisations and institutions in their specific *local* settings, in context’.⁸⁶ In this respect community history is effectively a subset of local history, but when we consider the word ‘community’ we see that this is not necessarily the case; community does not always indicate a local setting.

The journal *Family and Community History* began in 1998 with the aim of bringing together both the professional and amateur researcher to, ‘provide a forum for detailed, down-to-earth studies of family and community informed by wider social and historical perspective.’⁸⁷ There is an emphasis on scholarly research, and the ideals of

⁸³ Brennan, T, 2000, ‘History, family, history’ in Kean et al (eds.).

⁸⁴ Bashforth, M, 2009, ‘Absent Fathers, Present histories’ in Ashton & Kean (eds.), p.203.

⁸⁵ Mills, D, 1994, ‘Community and nation in the past: perception and reality’ in Drake (ed.), p.281.

⁸⁶ Pryce, W.T.R, 1994, ‘Conclusions’, in Pryce, (ed.), p.215.

⁸⁷ Drake, M, Finnegan, R & Weinbren, D, 1998, Editorial, *Family and Community History*, 1: p.6.

History Workshop are evident in the intention to democratise history. However even in the inaugural editorial we find no clear definitions. Though the terms family and community history are used throughout this introduction, towards the end ‘family and local history’ appears, implying community equals local, blurring the boundaries once again.

While it may appear that attempting to separate out local and community history, within this context is a fruitless task, in 2004 *Family and Community History* published two articles which reflected on the purpose of the journal and the field more broadly. In the first article Mills reviews earlier editions of the journal and argues that researchers should be more explicit about how they are using the word ‘community’ and how their work relates to the question ‘what is community history?’ He develops his earlier discussion on community versus local history, and sees local history as a more general term, arguing that, ‘it is fair to say that community history writing is more consistently analytical and academic in approach than a great deal of local history.’⁸⁸ Mills sets out a continuum for local history, with ‘scholarly’ works at one end (for example the type produced by those at the Centre for English Local History), and at the other end what he calls ‘the poorer examples of millennium parish histories, which vary considerably in quality.’ He makes the point that many of these are in fact, “‘community” histories in that they are the result of “community” projects.’⁸⁹ Implicit in this sentiment is that while community history, for Mills, is an academic pursuit, community projects that result in community history publications belong in the realm of antiquarian local history. This is a significant point that will be considered in the section on community publishing. However, what is useful in Mills’ analysis is that the focus in community history is on people rather than place. He also raises the issue as to whether community history is in fact social history at the local level, a history from below, whereas local history can be viewed as mainstream history with a focus on the elites. Yet even this distinction becomes blurred as the democratisation of local history from 1945 through extra-mural activities such as the WEA saw a change in the types of local history

⁸⁸ Mills, 2004, p.10.

⁸⁹ Mills, 2004, p.9.

produced, with amateur and professional often working together.⁹⁰

What is evident in these discussions is that ‘community’ is used as a conceptual tool for historical analysis. However, Deacon and Donald reject the idea of a rigid definition of community and urge practitioners to reflect upon and think critically about how they are using the term community:

Attempts to pin community down to particular kinds of networks or types of places seem to be too constrictive. The thing that differentiates community history from other histories must be methodology, the quest to understand how general processes work out and are transformed in actual place.⁹¹

Throughout these discussions it is clear that community history is research *on* communities not research *with* the community. Community history, as defined in this context, is seen as a scholarly pursuit (which can be undertaken by both academic and amateur historians). Its purpose is not to bring communities together to enable them to record their own histories, but to research the past, and understand the nature of community. In contrast, Grele draws a distinction between community historians and local historians by reflecting upon the tradition of local history in the US and its focus on local elites with a researcher who is separate from the community. He states,

Community historians, most of them imbued with the organising ethos of the New Left, argue that their work is an attempt to bring the people of the community into the process of historical work, to develop within the community itself a historical ethos which, they hope, will serve as a counter to hegemonic culture of the local elite.⁹²

What this comment indicates is not only a focus on people in community history, but also involving the community in the process of history-making. However in considering the relationship between local history and community history, and whether they are in fact the same, there are clearly distinctions being made between the two by some practitioners within the wider local history field. For many it is about methodological approaches and the focus of the investigation, which require different questions to be

⁹⁰ See Unwin, J, 1994, ‘Local history research projects in adult continuing education’, *Local Historian*, 24(1); Lambert, S, 2004, ‘Making it personal: community history on the Marsh Estate’, *Local Historian*, 34(1), Drake M, 2005, ‘Inside-Out or Outside-In? The case of family and local history’, and McKay, J.H, 2005, ‘Community Historians and their work around the Millennium’ both in Finnegan, R (ed.), *Participating in the Knowledge Society: Researchers beyond the University Walls*, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹¹ Deacon & Donald, 2004, p.17.

⁹² Grele, R, 1996, ‘Directions for Oral History in United States’ in Dunaway in D.K & Baum, W.K, *Oral History: an interdisciplinary approach* (2nd ed.), California, Sage, p.81.

asked of the material. Community history, as a 'branch' of local history, is not an antiquarian pursuit but a scholarly endeavour where there is a 'lessening of the significance of the boundary, and greater attention paid to among other themes, inclusive studies of the local people of a place, and the recording of the history that is held within living memory.'⁹³ One of the key ways in which people have been written into these histories in recent times has been through oral history, and within the field of oral history discussions on community history are extensive, and take on a different emphasis to those discussions within local history.

The field of community oral history

As the interest in re-writing history to include the experiences of women, the working-class and minority groups gained momentum in the 1970s, oral history became an apparently ideal means by which to record these histories. Oral history was perceived as a way to include the words of the people who experienced it, to challenge official versions of history and advocate a people's history. It was seen as a practice that was accessible to all, one in which anybody could participate. Thompson has promoted oral history as a means, 'for a radical transformation of the social meaning of history',⁹⁴ and Tosh has remarked that, 'oral history promises a sense of place and community accessible to ordinary people, while at the same time illuminating broader features of social history.'⁹⁵ Frisch, in his seminal book *A Shared Authority*, has argued that oral history has the 'capacity to redefine and redistribute intellectual authority, so that this might be shared more broadly in historical research and communication rather than continuing to serve as an instrument of power and hierarchy.'⁹⁶ From these comments it is evident there is a strong sense of the potential of oral history to make the process of history making a more democratic pursuit, one in which anyone could participate. As Thompson states;

The co-operative nature of the oral history approach has led to a radical questioning of the fundamental relationship between history and the community. Historical information need not be taken away from the community for interpretation and presentation by the professional historian.

⁹³ Jackson, A.J.H, 2006, 'Opinion: published parish and community histories – a starting point in adult learning and retheorising of local history', *Local Historian*, 36(1), p.42.

⁹⁴ Thompson, 2000, p.24.

⁹⁵ Tosh, 2000, p.301.

⁹⁶ Frisch, 1990, p.xx.

Through oral history the community can, and should, be given the confidence to write its own history.⁹⁷

Whilst this may appear a laudable claim it is not without problems or critics. However the purpose of this section is not to critique oral history as a method, but to look at it specifically with respect to understanding the aims and objectives of community history.⁹⁸ Although community oral history has opened up discussion on the many meanings of community and helped broaden accepted ideas of what a community's history is or should be about, this does not mean there is a consensus about what community history is.⁹⁹ Shopes has stated, with regard to community oral history, that it, 'is a protean term, invoked by scholars and grass-roots historians alike to describe a variety of practices developed for a variety of purposes.'¹⁰⁰ However it is within this field of community oral history that we find broad discussion on the purpose of history, and about the possibilities of enabling people to tell and make their own histories.

Bornat identifies two distinct forms of oral history: one situated within an academic discourse that avoids issues of process (in other words, how the accounts are produced and the impact on the participants) where the oral history is essentially data collected for analysis and interpretation. The other she describes as community-based oral history which she argues, 'has been propelled by a political commitment to change, both in terms of changing the historical record and to produce change in and for those engaged in interviewing and being interviewed.'¹⁰¹ In a thoughtful analysis she examines the differences between these two types of oral history, crucially in their practice and the level of critical analysis employed. Within academic history, community is used as an 'organising tool' of investigation (as is evident through the discussions on community history in the journal *Family and Community History*); in community oral history, community is often used as an identity and characterised in terms of agency and practice. While it is useful to separate out the two for discussion, it would be wrong to assume that these polarities are absolute. For example, the work of (academic) feminist oral historians has been influential in moving away from the more

⁹⁷ Thompson, 2000, p.17.

⁹⁸ See Thomson, A, 2007, 'The Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History', *Oral History Review*, 34(1) and Grele, R.J, 2007, 'Commentary', *Oral History Review*, 34(2), for an overview of developments within oral history.

⁹⁹ See Bornat, J, 1993, 'Two Oral Histories: valuing our difference', *Oral History Review*, 21(1); and Ritchie, D, 1995, *Doing Oral History*, New York, Twayne.

¹⁰⁰ Shopes, 2002, p.588.

¹⁰¹ Bornat, 1993, p.74.

positivist use of oral history by encouraging the development of reflexivity in one's practice. In doing so they have explored the impact of differences, such as gender, age, class, ethnicity, between interviewer and narrator on what is said (or not said) in the interview, and have highlighted the ethical issues involved in such work, in some instances moving towards more participatory approaches.¹⁰² However within the context Bornat describes, the assumption is that the two practices have different aims and objectives, (and audience), which impacts both on the way the work is done and upon what is produced. She highlights the tensions inherent in doing community oral history, most notably with respect to issues of ownership in the process and product, and suggests that while community oral history changes the way historians work (for example, more democratically), the end product does not necessarily, 'reproduce the diversity and contradictions that are at the core of its inspiration and its processes.'¹⁰³ In her argument Bornat draws attention to the criticisms of community oral history, in particular its unchallenging and unreflective nature where issues of conflict and complexity are ignored. She advises more critical awareness in community history projects, especially in relation to thinking about exclusions and diversity within communities, bringing together theory and practice.

In a similar vein, Shopes, in a discussion on the community oral history projects that emerged in the 1980s in the US, shows that while the projects were very diverse, they were intended to bring together professional historians and ordinary people in creating community histories that involved the community in the process. She highlights some of the key aims of this movement, such as the use of community history to foster community identity, and to encourage respect and appreciation for ordinary people's histories, as well as encouraging community activism by providing an historical perspective to current local concerns.¹⁰⁴ Through an examination of her own involvement in a community history project, The Baltimore Neighbourhood Project, Shopes assesses the success of the project and concludes that,

[D]eveloping links between a community history project and its community is difficult. Any such project that seeks to involve local people in producing

¹⁰² Gluck, S.B & Patai, D (eds.), 1991, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, London, Routledge. See also Bornat, J & Diamond, H, 2007, 'Women's history and oral history: developments and debates', *Women's History Review*, 16(1).

¹⁰³ Bornat, 1993, p.92.

¹⁰⁴ Shopes, L, 1986, 'Oral History and Community Involvement: The Baltimore Neighbourhood Project,' in Benson et al, p.249.

their own history and to have meaning for the community itself must confront complex social relationships and problems of interpretation.¹⁰⁵

Shopes demonstrates the tension between the professional historian and the community, with the professional wanting a more critical reflective history and the community wanting a more celebratory unchallenging reflection of its past. This tension is inherent in many such projects where the community members must live with what becomes public long after the professional historian has left. However, there is also an issue in the way the community sees itself (for example, in who belongs and who does not, and the possible boundaries of that community), which may not be how the historian sees the community. Nevertheless, implicit in this discussion is the 'historian' as a professional working with the community, yet as Shopes acknowledges, in a later article in 2002, community oral history can come in many guises falling between two poles. At one end we have the grassroots projects initiated and carried out by groups to document their own experiences, and at the other projects conducted by scholars for the purposes of their own research. However the issue of authorship (and interpretation) in the final product complicates this proposed continuum.¹⁰⁶ Indeed Plummer, reflecting on the different ways oral history may be presented, indicates that the process of ordering the material is one of interpretation and the level of interpretation can be placed on a 'continuum of contamination', with the narrator's 'raw' account at one end and the researcher's own theoretical account at the other. This continuum can be used to consider the extent to which the 'historian' is imposing his / her own views and interpretations on the material, and the extent to which the narrator's material is left untouched.¹⁰⁷

What these discussions highlight are the contradictions and complexities of doing community oral history, and what becomes apparent is that in many ways community history appears to be synonymous with community oral history, and is thus defined by one methodology - oral history. Whether or not this is in fact the case will be explored in the following chapters, however it is within the field of community oral history that we find extensive discussion about process and participation, not just about subject matter. Central to this is a concern that the histories produced are descriptive and anecdotal often avoiding issues of conflict and complexity, a theme evident

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Shopes, 2002.

¹⁰⁷ Plummer, 2001.

throughout the discussions in this chapter.¹⁰⁸ This accusation is one particularly levied at grassroots groups where the assumption is that a ‘professional’ historian would facilitate a more ‘critical’ history working with the community, than a group left to its own devices, indicating a tension over interpretative authority.¹⁰⁹ One movement that has challenged these criticisms and addressed issues of authorship and authority, and been the means by which groups have made their histories public is the community publishing movement in Britain.

Making and publishing community histories

Community publishing has been the way in which many people have written and made public their own histories rather than having their histories written for (and about) them.¹¹⁰ Many community publishers have been or are linked to FWWCP, founded in 1976, which is considered in detail in the following chapter. FWWCP challenged dominant ideas of who could be a writer and whose histories got told and blurred the boundaries between literature and history.¹¹¹ Through publishing these histories, groups took control of the production of their work and enabled people to have their experiences validated by a wider audience.¹¹² Community publishing was not just about publishing oral histories, but also individual and collective (written) autobiographies, creative writing and poetry. Certainly in the early days autobiographies were one of the main forms of expression, with writing seen as a way of bringing people together to share and talk about their experiences. Writing from experience meant that anyone could join in, no formal skills or education were necessary; it was a democratic approach.¹¹³ Worpole identified autobiography (along with poetry) as,

The first form of writing for many working people [...] because it is one means by which people affirm and explore their own lives, their families, their neighbourhoods. [...] Autobiography is both personal and social. It gives writers a chance to reassert the personal identity which our present

¹⁰⁸ For example, Orser, W.E, 1988, ‘Toward a New Local History: The pitfalls and possibilities of personal narrative’, *Oral History Review*, 16(1), and Gordon, M.A, 1989, ‘Seeing and Fleeing Ourselves: Local Oral Histories of Communities and Institutions’, *Oral History Review*, 17(1).

¹⁰⁹ See *Oral History Review*, 2003, *Special Issue on Shared Authority*, 30(1).

¹¹⁰ Gregory, G, 1984, Community-published Working-class Writing in Context in Meek, M & Miller, J (eds.) *Changing English: Essays for Harold Rosen*, London, Heinemann; Thomson, A, 1991, ‘People’s History and Community Publishing: The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers’, *Oral History*, 18(1).

¹¹¹ See Morley & Worpole, 1982, for an extensive discussion on the formation of FWWCP.

¹¹² Woodin, T, 2009a, ‘Working-class writing, alternative publishing and audience participation’, *Media, Culture & Society*, 31(10).

¹¹³ Yeo, 1986, p.298.

society falsifies or obscures; while enabling us to place ourselves in a social class and its history.¹¹⁴

In the 1970s the focus was on book publications but this gradually expanded to include a variety of different forms such as exhibitions, radio programmes and more recently websites. The subject of many of these histories reflected concerns of the time, which were initially working-class histories, which tended to form around work and community. In what was an influential debate on people's history and socialist theory in 1979, Worpole, White and Yeo debated the merits of community publishing projects. White was critical of such endeavours that did not seek to challenge and enable the working-class to understand their own oppression, and place their histories within a socialist framework of understanding. For White the material produced was the 'raw material' to make socialist history, it required a secondary analysis. However Worpole and Yeo argued that the very act of the working-class telling (and through community publishing 'making') their histories was in itself a political act, it was part of a 'long revolution'.¹¹⁵ The debate raised the issue of participation and access to the means of production (i.e. publishing), with Worpole and Yeo seeing community publishing as the means by which the working-class could claim authorship of their own histories, and democratise historical practice. Indeed inherent within some of the criticisms of these publications was an assumption that people were unable to reflect critically on their own experience without the intervention of an 'expert' to interpret their histories. This exchange highlighted the tension at the time between community-based history groups and academics, and their different needs; the 'populist' versus the 'elite'.¹¹⁶ A point powerfully summed up by Yeo, 'History looks different, IS different from different points of view, different locations, different class positions.'¹¹⁷

Within the Worpole, White and Yeo debate we find people's history used interchangeably with community-based local history or the 'new local history'; very occasionally community history is used. This may indicate that within these discussions in the 1970s, people were trying to make sense of these new ways of writing history and challenging ideas about whose story was told, and therefore terms were 'experimented'

¹¹⁴ Worpole, 1978, p.245.

¹¹⁵ Worpole, K, 'A Ghostly Pavement: The Political Implications of Local Working-Class History'; White, J, 'Beyond Autobiography' & Yeo, S, 'The Politics of Community Publications', in Samuel, R (ed.), 1981.

¹¹⁶ Worpole, 1981, p.28.

¹¹⁷ Yeo, 1981, p.46.

with in order to encapsulate the different types of history being explored. Individual preferences also played a part; for example, for some people there was an unease in using the term community as indicated by the quote at the start of this chapter. Others, such as Yeo, expressed a dislike for 'local', preferring to use community, which reflected his interest in community as a process of active engagement and belonging.¹¹⁸ Bommes and Wright have argued that a shift in the meaning of community in the mid-1970s saw an emphasis placed on an approach that highlighted 'the cultural autonomy of the community'. They situated this approach within a framework of community activism, one which was significant in the formation of QueenSpark.¹¹⁹ This rethinking of the nature of community may explain the shift towards the term community history, which encapsulated something far more dynamic than the term 'local' history. In addition there were also external factors that contributed to the shift towards a more frequent use of the term community history which are explored in the next chapter.

In considering the significance of community writing and publishing in 1994, Bornat states,

The traditions of community publishing have done much to promote the idea of writing about oneself and a self-defined community. Groups of people for whom the idea that their lives could have any wider worth and value beyond their immediate family or community found new ways to record their histories and recognition both as historians and as creative writers.¹²⁰

The use of the term 'self-defined community' is significant, as one of the criticisms of community publishing has been with regard to this idea of self-defined communities and the subsequent exclusions and potential distortions of the past this implies.¹²¹ In considering Bornat's discussion on the exclusions from community histories, Woodin argues that rather than create artificially integrated communities, community publishers, 'aim to encourage marginal groups to articulate their own stories.'¹²² His sentiment reflects the idea of the 'long revolution', in the sense that in the first instance a space needs to be created for people to begin to articulate their histories in ways that are comfortable for them. It also highlights the complexity of community as an organising concept to which people may or may not feel that they belong. However, Woodin does

¹¹⁸ Yeo, 1986.

¹¹⁹ Bommes & Wright, 1982, p.299.

¹²⁰ Bornat, J, 1994, 'Is Oral History Auto/biography?', *Auto/biography*, 3 (1&2), p.22.

¹²¹ Bornat, J, 1992, 'The Communities of Community Publishing', *Oral History*, 20(2).

¹²² Woodin, T, 1992, 'Recent British Community Histories,' *Oral History*, 20(2): p.69.

not address the issue of silences and exclusions that can also occur within marginal groups, which again raises the question as to whose story is being told and by whom, and who defines the community, tensions which are explored within the case studies. Community publishing created a 'space' for people to write and share their histories, and many groups were vocal in challenging those who criticised the work for being subjective and unreflective, arguing for a need to rethink the way history is produced and by whom. Yeo, in his discussion on historical practice in Britain in the 1980s, states that if the answer to the question 'whose story?' (i.e. whose history should be told) is everyone's, then he argues, '*how* histories are made has to differ from how history is made by historians.'¹²³

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to identify and explore community history in a variety of different historical practices. Having hoped to find one definitive meaning it is apparent through this exploration that community history can be located in many different contexts depending on one's criteria for its definition, and therefore has different meanings for different people. Certainly, meanings are often not clear or fixed and are open to multiple interpretations. This is particularly true when we consider the complexity and varied meanings of 'community' and how the term is being applied. It is also clear that meanings change over time, and often reflect the social / political context of the time. However from this investigation three clear working definitions of community history emerge which are distinct in their aims and outcomes. These are community history as:

1. The study of the history of a community / communities (however defined). This is research *on* a community.
2. A community-based history where a 'professional' works with a community to document its history. This is history-making *with* and *for* a community.
3. Grassroots history, which is defined as history *by* and *for* the community, where process and participation are often as important as the final product.

This research seeks to explore community history as practised by groups committed to democratic history-making - in other words history *by* / *with* and *for* the community - and to examine how this works in reality. As indicated at the start of this

¹²³ Yeo, 1986, p.298.

chapter there are three key questions that emerge from this exploration of community history: who or what history is about? Who are the historians? And to what extent is the history produced analytical and critical or descriptive? Underlying these are concerns with methods and sources, active participation, audience and intellectual authority. These questions emerge from debates that occurred at specific historic moments and the next chapter seeks to place these debates in context primarily through an analysis of the development of History Workshop, FWWCP and OHS, all of whom advocated more democratic and participatory approaches to history.

Chapter Three: A genealogy of community history: origins and influences

Can anyone join this history lark?¹

Introduction

This chapter takes three key movements/organisations as the basis for exploring the development of community history from 1970 to 2000.² History Workshop, Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP), and the Oral History Society (OHS) are often linked together in discussions on people's history and radical approaches to history and collectively are credited with 'greatly extending the range of forms available for "people's history"'.³ These three movements grew out of activities in many areas such as adult education, the labour movement, community politics, and people's history. While separate with their own distinct features, they shared a common goal of democratising the practice of history, albeit in different ways. In the early years many activists moved between the three (but were usually aligned more strongly with one) thus influencing and shaping each movement in the process. However the paths taken by the movements have been different, as each one has adapted to a changing society with different needs to those of the late 1960s and early 1970s. By examining each movement the purpose of this chapter is to assess the impact of these movements on community history, and draw out the key developments in, and influences on, the history of community history in Britain.

These movements emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however their roots can be traced to post-1945. The formation of the Communist Party Historians' Group (CPHG) in 1946 was especially important, as central to its aims was a commitment to take history to the people, and 'the study of history as politics'. What distinguished history as politics, and became especially important for radical history practice was, 'the commitment to the conditions of the production of historical knowledge as a political question.'⁴ Key members such as Raphael Samuel and John Saville were founding members of History Workshop and OHS. The CPHG continued

¹ Worpole, K, 1984, 'The History Lark', *Oral History*, 12(2), p.19.

² For the purpose of clarity and consistency I will use the term 'movement' for all three.

³ Yeo, 1986, p.295. See also, Popular Memory Group, 1982, 'Popular Memory: theory, politics, method', in Johnson et al.

⁴ Schwarz, B, 1982, 'The 'people' in history; the Communist Party Historians' Group', 1946-56, in Johnson et al, p.95.

in its original form until 1956 when the Hungarian Uprising, amongst other events, caused a rupture in the British Communist Party that was to have a lasting effect on left politics in Britain.⁵ Many such as Samuel and E.P Thompson left the Party and became prominent in the New Left. Much has been written about the New Left and its successes and failings, but what distinguished the New Left was that it embraced a broad definition of political activism.⁶ The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) played a central role, and the emergence of the women's movement was hugely important, as was the influence of the civil rights movement in the US. Rowbotham states that, 'the sixties saw the beginning of a politicized [sic] labour *movement* [her emphasis] which spilled over existing institutions and was to mobilize on a bigger scale during the seventies. [...]. In an era of expanding radicalism like the sixties, individuals criss-crossed over boundaries,' both socially and intellectually, bringing together the personal and the political.⁷ Middle-class radicals joined up with the working-class left, not always an easy alliance but one that was especially important in the formation of FWWCP and other grass-roots movements. History as a subject became important to many activists. The need to re-write history to include the experiences of those who had been excluded combined with a desire to break down barriers between the professional and the amateur challenged ideas about who could and could not write history. It was within this context that these movements initiated and developed.

While History Workshop was concerned with the politics of history making/writing and theoretical debates about the nature and purpose of history, FWWCP and OHS were more practice based and demonstrated the contradictions and complexity inherent in democratising historical practice. All three movements highlight key tensions inherent within this goal, especially the relationship between theory and practice, academics and amateurs, and professionals and volunteers. In particular they foreground a significant question as to whether the purpose of making history accessible to all is to enable political change or is in fact for social good. One movement that was explicitly about social good and which at times brought together groups and individuals within History Workshop, FWWCP and OHS was the reminiscence movement, which is discussed in this chapter in relation to its connections with the other three.

⁵ The CPHG continued until 1991 and then reformed as the Socialist Historians Group in 1992, www.socialisthistorysociety.co.uk viewed 17.06.06.

⁶ For example, Chun, L, 1993, *The First New Left*, Edinburgh University Press.

⁷ Rowbotham, 2001, p.xiii. See also Ali, T, 1991, *Street Fighting Years*, New York, Cidatel Press, for two fascinating accounts of personal involvement with left movements of the 1960s.

A key theme that weaves through this chapter is the role of funding on the development of these movements. Various funding bodies have provided support, most notably the Arts Council, which supported FWWCP, and the Manpower Services Commission Community Programme (MSC), which played an important role in establishing community oral history in the 1980s. However it was the introduction of the National Lottery in the 1990s, in particular the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which has had a critical impact on community history more recently and is thus considered within this chapter.

History Workshop

The development of History Workshop as both a movement and journal was instrumental in promoting people's history, and challenging the ways in which history was produced and by whom. History Workshop promoted democratic scholarship by seeking to break down the barriers between the popular and the academy, and advocated an engagement with the personal; people's lives and experiences were seen as legitimate historical subjects. Similarly History Workshop acknowledged the interrelationship between the past and present, and engaged with public debates on history in education and public life.⁸ The Popular Memory Group considered History Workshop to be the closest to an '*alternative* [their emphasis] historical apparatus',⁹ and Martin has stated, 'It is sufficient to say, and without exaggeration, that its [History Workshop] effect was to revolutionise approaches to history in Britain.'¹⁰ It also influenced historians overseas with History Workshops developing in, for example, the US, Germany and South Africa.¹¹

While the history of History Workshop has been recounted elsewhere it is important for the purposes of this research to briefly consider History Workshop and its relevance to community history.¹² History Workshop began in 1966 at Ruskin College,

⁸ Samuel, R, 1981, 'History Workshop, 1966-80', in Samuel (ed.).

⁹ Popular Memory Group, 1982, p.216.

¹⁰ Martin, P, 1991, 'Look, see, hear: A remembrance, with approaches to contemporary public history at Ruskin', in Andrews, G; Kean, H & Thompson, J (eds.), *Ruskin College: contesting knowledge, dissenting politics*, London, Lawrence & Wishart.

¹¹ For example see Green, J, 2000, 'The Massachusetts Workshop: Bringing the boundaries of history closer to people's lives', *HWJ*, 50.

¹² For example, Samuel, R (ed.), 1991, *History Workshop: A Collectanea 1967-1991*, Oxford, History Workshop 25; Schwarz, B, 1993, History on the move: Reflections on History Workshop, *Radical History Review*, 57; Wallis, L.A, 2000, *History, politics and tradition: A study of the History Workshop 1956-1979*, PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham.

Oxford,¹³ under the guidance of Raphael Samuel, a history tutor at the college, as informal seminars that were a, 'loose coalition of worker-historians [students] and full-time socialist researchers'. The students (who were working men and women from the labour and trade union movement) were encouraged to bring their own life experience into their research, in order to 'construct their own history as a way of giving them an independent critical vantage point in their reading.'¹⁴

It is unclear exactly how these small seminars, that started as a pedagogical exercise, began to grow, but Sheila Rowbotham suggests that Samuel's enthusiasm for bringing people together and inviting those outside Ruskin to speak of their research was a key factor.¹⁵ The first full day meeting was held in November 1966 entitled 'A day with the Chartists' and drew around 50 participants from outside Ruskin College. This became known as History Workshop 1, and subsequently the Workshops became annual events that attracted hundreds of participants from around the country and internationally.¹⁶ Colin Ward describes an early Workshop as, 'a carnival of scholarship utterly different from the atmosphere of any place of higher learning I had ever visited.'¹⁷ The Workshops were attempts to democratise historical practice by bringing together tutors and students as equals, and exploring new ways and approaches to writing history, with an emphasis on the use of primary sources. Academics (such as E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill and Tim Mason who were all connected with the workshops), as well as Ruskin students and students from outside Ruskin (such as Rowbotham and Anna Davin) presented papers. However, Samuel was the driving force behind these events, bringing in like-minded people to help in addition to Ruskin students.

History Workshop was as much an exercise in progressive education as it was about history,¹⁸ and Left politics played a significant role in shaping History Workshop. As Samuel noted, 'Workshop meetings in these years [late 1960s] were tense with political expectancy, and there is no doubt that many of those who came to them did so in the course of a search for (or in some cases perhaps as a substitute for) political

¹³ For more background to Ruskin College see Pollins, H, 1984, *The History of Ruskin College*, Oxford, Ruskin College Library; Kean, H, 1996, 'Myths of Ruskin College', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 28(2).

¹⁴ Samuel, 1981, p.410.

¹⁵ Rowbotham, 2001.

¹⁶ See Samuel, 1991, for a complete list of the Workshops from 1-25.

¹⁷ Ward, C, 1989, *New Statesman*, 17th November, p.28.

¹⁸ Steedman, C, 1997, 'Obituary: Raphael Samuel, 1934-1996', *Radical Philosophy*, 82.

belonging.’¹⁹ There was an underlying sense in the Workshop that the way the past was interpreted had political implications, and history and politics were seen to be inseparable. Certainly history was viewed as a weapon in the class struggle. Wallis, in an extensive analysis of History Workshop remarked that, ‘History Workshop was above all an “event”; a social and intellectual gathering and a “place” of dialogue in which the participants of the moment merged with a loosely mutual politics and were focused through audience with the viscous past.’²⁰ In this sense, History Workshop was very much a product of its time, a non-aligned ‘left’ movement, formed in a decade characterised by immense social change and increasing radicalism outside of traditional political parties, a decade where old systems were challenged and new ways of living and working sought.

Davin writes affectionately of these first years, the friendships that were formed, working collectively without formal structures in place (symbolic of many left groups of the time), and of course breaking down boundaries. She states, ‘the boundaries between academy and community seemed unimportant; activism and research were not in contradiction: the only problem was time.’²¹ Indeed there is a strong sense that this was an exciting time, a time when anything was possible, where people felt a commitment to change. From these perspectives it is easy to see the appeal of History Workshop, as Wallis argues,

What seems to converge at Ruskin in the late 1960s is a movement, which appropriates and redefines aspects of the leading political groups of its day. [...] The Workshop wanted to be inclusive, grassroots and accessible. These were not simply value judgements on the exclusivity of academic history but were also seen as the pre-conditions of political legitimacy.²²

The emphasis in the early years was on labour movements, but with the emergence, in particular, of the women’s movement - whose first conference in 1970 had its origins in Ruskin History Workshop²³ - ‘there was a shift in research attention from the reservoirs of revolt to the structures of social dominance, and a new attention to the role of ideology.’²⁴ Subsequent workshops such as Childhood in History (1971) and Women in History (1973) helped extend the participant base drawing in, for example, teachers,

¹⁹ Samuel, R, 1980, ‘On the Methods of History Workshop: A Reply’, *HWJ*, 9, p.165.

²⁰ Wallis, 2000, p.7.

²¹ Davin, A, 2000, ‘The Only Problem was Time’, *HWJ*, 50, p.240.

²² Wallis, 2000, p.24.

²³ Rowbotham, S, 2000, ‘Shush Mum’s Writing’, *Socialist History*, 17.

²⁴ Samuel, 1991, p.11.

adult educators, and community activists. Samuel's background in community studies also had an influence on the Workshop, as did the growing interest in the idea of community both socially and historically during the 1960s.²⁵

During the early 1970s History Workshop (under the aegis of Samuel) also published 12 pamphlets (each the size of a small book at 25,000 words) written by Ruskin students, as well as a play. These were nearly all the result of work undertaken in addition to their college work. Samuel comments, 'The publication of these pamphlets was thought of by some of the writers as a political act, "giving back history to the people it came from", and politics was often the original spark which kindled the research.'²⁶ A natural progression from the pamphlets was the publication of a regular journal. *History Workshop Journal* was launched in 1976 and was subtitled a 'journal of socialist historians'.²⁷ It was intended to be non-sectarian and to push further on debates on history and theory at the same time as making history more accessible and relevant to the 'ordinary' person. As the inaugural editorial stated,

We believe that history is a source of inspiration and understanding, furnishing not only the means of interpreting the past but also the best critical vantage point from which to view the present. So we believe that history should become common property, capable of shaping people's understanding of themselves and the society in which they live.²⁸

The journal was an eclectic mix of research-based articles, work in progress, commentaries on what would now be defined as public history, such as 'history at large', details of workshop meetings around the country, and the notice board section. This formed the link for the 'movement' by announcing news from groups, meetings, publications and other relevant information. However despite the intention of making the journal accessible to all, it did not always work in practice, and much of the language used in the journal was seen as academic 'jargon' that did not bring history closer to ordinary people.²⁹ There was also a series of over 30 History Workshop books.

²⁵ Wallis, 2000.

²⁶ Samuel, 1991, p.69, see 'Ruskin Historians' in *Collectanea* for a list of pamphlets.

²⁷ *HWJ* was self-published by the editorial collective from 1976-1983, then by Routledge. It is now published by Oxford University Press. The subtitle was changed to a 'journal of socialist and feminist historians' in 1982, see Editorial, 1982, 'History Workshop and Feminism', *HWJ*, 13(1). In 1995 the subtitle was dropped completely prompting a stream of letters reflecting a sense of disillusion with the journal, see 'Changing Names', 1995, *HWJ*, 40.

²⁸ Editorial Collective, 1976, Editorial, *HWJ*, 1, p.2.

²⁹ See Durr, A, 1979, Reader's Letters, *HWJ*, 7(1), p.208; also Worpole, 1981 p.24.

These included monographs, multi-authored collections, and collections derived from papers given at the annual Workshops.³⁰

History Workshop flourished through the 1970s and 1980s with local groups forming around the country, such as Manchester History Workshop, Islington History Workshop, and South East London History Workshop. These were autonomous groups, inspired by the aims and ideals of the Ruskin History Workshop, which brought together a diverse range of people, on a regular basis (but much smaller in scale), to debate and share ideas on history and its purpose. One of the most successful and longest-running of these was the London History Workshop Seminar group which, sponsored by the *History Workshop Journal*, met monthly with an invited speaker followed by an informal discussion. The London History Workshop Centre (LHWC), which opened in 1983, was an equally successful venture. Its aim was to provide a resource centre on London history, and run courses and events to encourage Londoners to explore their history. Central to the work of LHWC was the establishment of a sound and video archive, in part to provide a home for the many oral history collections that were the result of various projects increasingly being undertaken from the 1970s onwards. However, the end of the Greater London Council (GLC) in 1986, which had funded the Centre, and the termination of MSC, which had been the largest funding source for many oral history projects during the 1980s, signalled the beginning of the end for the LHWC. The London Boroughs Grant Scheme, who took over funding, gradually withdrew support, and without core funding the LHWC was unable to attract funding from other sources and closed in 1991.³¹ In addition there was also briefly a History Workshop Centre for Social History based in Oxford which co-ordinated History Workshop activities, and at one point, in 1980, a Federation of History Workshops was formed in an attempt to link up and co-ordinate the various groups. However, these efforts were short-lived. Lack of time, funding and organisation were significant factors in their demise.³²

History Workshop inspired many other groups and projects, especially those involved in community publishing, to think differently about history. Certainly several individuals who participated in History Workshop were also involved in setting up

³⁰ See History Workshop Books p.182-189 in Samuel (ed.), 1991, for a complete list of books.

³¹ Dixon, R & Rowe, D, 1991, 'London History Workshop: Past, Present And .. Future?' in Samuel (ed.), 1991. The LHWC archive is now housed at the Bishopsgate Institute, London, and the oral history collections are stored at the Museum of London.

³² See Wallis, 2000 & Davin, 2000.

FWWCP groups. For example, Stephen and Eileen Yeo helped form QueenSpark, and Ken Worpole, who was active in Centerprise, was inspired to form a people's history group in Hackney:

There is no doubt that many of the community history projects were directly inspired by attendance at one or more of the Ruskin Workshops. It was at the Workshop on Childhood in May 1972 that many political activists, but non-historians, were inspired to see the political importance of the new history movement. Producing shareable and common history from the spoken reminiscences of working-class people seemed a positive and important activity to integrate with various other new forms of 'community politics'. This development coincided with many activists' involvement in some kind of alternative newspaper or printing resources centre which provided the material and productive basis for local publishing.³³

From this account so far, it is easy to see how History Workshop can be mythologised, not least because of the impact Samuel appears to have had on so many of his students and colleagues. Over the years History Workshop and Samuel have become synonymous with each other, and Samuel's legacy has been far-reaching.³⁴ However, History Workshop was not without its critics; for example, Pollins disputed Samuel's 'mythical' version of the beginnings of the Workshop, and suggested that Samuel provided a retrospective justification for its origins. Pollins made the point that while there was much emphasis on democratic scholarship and allowing students a voice at these events, Ruskin students began to oppose hosting Workshops because of the 'decreasing participation by students in the content of the Workshops and their increasing occupation with organization.'³⁵ Selbourne was critical of the methods employed by History Workshop, most notably its use of qualitative data and descriptive accounts.³⁶ Floud argued that much of the style of the Workshop bordered on the 'antiquarianism of the left' which detracted from the wider historical (and political) context,³⁷ a point also made by Flett, who stated, 'History from below as practised by Samuel and others has also met its limitations. In many cases it has led towards an

³³ Worpole, 1981, p.28.

³⁴ Kean, 2004.

³⁵ Pollins, H, 1981, 'History Workshop: the making of a myth', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 42: p.18.

³⁶ Selbourne, D, 1980, 'On the Methods of History Workshop', *HWJ*, 9 and Samuel, R, 1980, 'On the Methods of History Workshop: A Reply', *HWJ*, 9.

³⁷ Floud, R, 1984, 'Quantitative History and People's History: Two methods in conflict?' *HWJ* 17, p.116.

interest in ephemera and detailed micro-histories which, while of interest to the historian, are certainly not about changing the world.’³⁸

The tension within the Workshop between the academic and non-academic, professional and amateur, as well as the underlying political uneasiness, was to cause the biggest rupture in the movement at the 1979 History Workshop 13. Entitled ‘People’s History and Socialist Theory’ this event became something of a watershed in terms of the development of the Workshop. It brought to the fore the growing unease between ‘people’s historians and socialist theoreticians’, the debates around history and theory, and the crisis of the Left, questioning the very identity of the Workshop.³⁹ This event also marked a turning point in the relationship between Ruskin students and the Workshop, as the students voted to no longer host Workshop events and formed their own Ruskin Labour History School.⁴⁰

While the debate between E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall and Richard Johnson has been the focus of many discussions about History Workshop 13,⁴¹ it was the strand on people’s history which featured the discussion between Worpole, Jerry White and Stephen Yeo that was significant with respect to community history. As already noted in the previous chapter, this debate brought to the fore growing tensions inherent in democratising the practice of history, and removing academic hierarchies. On the one hand was a call for a more analytical (and socialist) approach to people’s history, on the other a call for recognition of the value of the ‘authentic’ experience devoid of abstract theorising. Through their discussions, Worpole and Yeo demonstrated the collaborative nature of their approach to people’s history where process was as important as the end ‘product’, which was in sharp contrast to the theoretical debates taking place at this Workshop. This exchange went to the heart of debates on theory, politics and the practice of history, and sowed the seeds for the gradual fragmentation of the movement as many grassroots practitioners found homes in other movements, such as FWWCP.

³⁸ Flett, K, 1997, ‘Obituary: Artisan of history’, *Socialist Review*, 204.

³⁹ See the review of Ruskin 13, *Oral History*, 8(1). The *New Statesman* ran a series of papers presented at the conference over several weeks starting with Samuel’s ‘The Truth is Partisan’, 15th February, 1980. For a thorough examination of the significance of this event in the history of History Workshop see Wallis, 2000.

⁴⁰ Pollins claims the nature of the audience, which was mostly made up of academics and university and polytechnic students, and the fact that the speakers were nearly all academics caused the Ruskin students to vote, in 1973, not to hold Workshops at Ruskin anymore. They forgot to record their decision and it continued to be held at Ruskin until 1979. History Workshop returned briefly to Ruskin in 1989 after Stephen Yeo became principal at Ruskin in 1988.

⁴¹ For example, Kettle, M, ‘The experience of History’, *New Society*, 6th December, p.542 and Schwarz, 1993.

After History Workshop 13, from 1980, the annual Workshop events were held around the country organised by local workshop collectives, so there was no longer a central base at Ruskin.⁴² As a result the gap between the journal and these annual events widened. The journal was ‘sucked into academic respectability,’⁴³ published by Oxford University Press.⁴⁴ As Worpole remarked, ‘Marvellous and inspirational as the History Workshop movement has been [...] I feel it is in danger of becoming rather too wordy, too textual and retreating into the quieter havens of seminar rooms and lecture theatres’.⁴⁵ In 1991 the Workshop returned to Ruskin to celebrate its 25th anniversary. One strand, ‘History, Writing and Community Publishing’ was run by FWWCP, in part to counteract the view that such work was theoretically uninformed and nostalgic (linking back to the debates at the 1979 Workshop). In a review of this strand, Thomson argued,

In all of the workshops the discussion was friendly, accessible and often inspirational, and belied the myth that community history activists are theoretically uninformed. [...] If the History Workshop conference and journal want to attract people with varied intellectual experiences and from all walks of life, then they must look to the forms as well as the contents of their offerings. Otherwise the people of ‘people’s history’ will be the objects rather than the subjects of history, as they have been by generations of elite historians.⁴⁶

History Workshop can no longer be seen as an active movement (the last conference was over 15 years ago) but without doubt it has made one of the most significant impacts on the teaching and writing of history in Britain since the 1960s.⁴⁷ It was a meeting place that brought together a wide group of people and inspired them to think differently about how to ‘make / write’ history (sources and form), and crucially ‘who’ could make history. The Workshop was formed in a particular political climate, and while that climate has now changed, its legacy remains. The different path that community publishing groups took, away from the Workshop, was indicative of deeper internal rifts within the movement that the Workshop could not or would not address. For all its rhetoric, History Workshop ‘meetings’ and the journal became more

⁴² See Samuel, 1991 for more detail on these workshops, p.146-147.

⁴³ Flett, 1996, p.204.

⁴⁴ See Davin, 2000, p.244 for brief overview of the history of *HWJ*.

⁴⁵ Worpole, 1984, p.19.

⁴⁶ Thomson, A, 1992, History, Writing and Community Publishing, *Oral History*, 20(1): 23.

⁴⁷ Samuel’s aims and ideals live on at Ruskin most notably through their public history programme, see Kean, 2004.

academic and removed from grassroots activity, unable to balance the needs of its different constituencies. As Worpole stated, reflecting on History Workshop and Centerprise:

The trajectory which the Centerprise initiative took veered increasingly away from that of the History Workshop movement; there were times in Hackney when we felt judged by Oxford and found wanting. For it transpired that for every working-class person who wanted to record their memories and write autobiographies, there were several who preferred to write stories and poems. [...] History was more than words [...] The traditional categories and discourses of history (even people's history), literature and *belles-lettres* simply did not fit [...] In the end, history was not enough. It was the publishing process itself that enabled so many voices to be heard for the first time⁴⁸

Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers⁴⁹

There is a general consensus in current literature that community writing and publishing began as a movement in the 1970s, resulting in the formation of FWWCP in 1976.⁵⁰ However, there is a rich and complex tradition of working-class writing and publishing (in particular through pamphleteering) from the nineteenth century and even earlier, and this lineage can be seen in the ideals and aims of many of the early community writing and publishing groups that formed FWWCP.⁵¹ Nevertheless, for the purposes of this research it is the formation of FWWCP and its subsequent development that is of the most significance. Woodin has provided the most recent comprehensive analysis and evaluation of FWWCP and its development over the last thirty years.⁵² Consequently I do not intend to provide a detailed history or critique of FWWCP, but highlight those developments that are relevant to understanding community history's influences and evolution. Certainly the Popular Memory Group, in its seminal discussion on popular memory and historical practices considered community history and the resulting

⁴⁸ Worpole, K, 1991, Local History and Community Publishing in Hackney, in Samuel (ed.), p.28.

⁴⁹ In 2007 FWWCP ceased to exist due to financial collapse and dismissal of the paid worker. An informal network has since emerged but FWWCP as it once was is no more.

⁵⁰ Morley & Worpole, 1982; Gregory, 1984; Gregory, G, 1986, *Working-class writing, publishing and education: an investigation of three 'moments'*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, Institute of Education; Smyth, C, 1987, Community Writing and Publishing in Britain, *Meanjin*, 46 (4); Kirk, J, 2002, 'Invisible Ink: working-class writing and the end of class', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5(3).

⁵¹ See for example, Worpole, K, 1983, *Dockers and Detectives*, London, Verso, and Bornat, J, 1989, 'Oral history as a social movement', *Oral History*, 17(2).

⁵² Woodin, T, 2002, *An Evaluation of Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester.

publications, in particular with respect to those emerging from FWWCP groups, to be a significant development in the quest for more democratically produced histories.⁵³

The formation of FWWCP, 'had its roots in debates on education, culture, class and the media that stretched back to the late 1950s and 1960s,'⁵⁴ debates that were also instrumental in the formation of the History Workshop. Nonetheless Woodin points to one singular event as being crucial in the emergence of FWWCP, that of the publication (without the school governors' permission) in 1971 of *Stepney Words*, a book of poetry written by a group of school children. The publication resulted in the sacking of Chris Searle, the teacher who initiated the work, which led to widespread anger, as well as student protests, with Searle eventually being reinstated after two years.⁵⁵ The widespread support that Searle, and indeed *Stepney Words* received, was influential for many groups that would form FWWCP.⁵⁶ As Searle remarked, 'The furore of cultural protest and action that surrounded the suppression of *Stepney Words* [...] helped to create a new interest and appetite for poetry and creative writing in the East London neighbourhoods where its young authors lived.'⁵⁷ Following on from *Stepney Words*, in 1973 Searle and some of his students set up Basement Writers, which became one of the key writing groups in FWWCP.⁵⁸ However, Searle was not operating in a vacuum; in nearby Hackney, East London, the Centerprise bookshop and café opened in 1971. The impetus behind Centerprise was to engage with local young people, and it began its publishing project 'with the writing of young people – their educational and cultural needs - in mind'.⁵⁹ Indeed Centerprise was to publish a reprint of *Stepney Words*.⁶⁰

One of the key motivations of both Searle and Centerprise was the desire to provide reading material that was more relevant and engaging to young people, especially those in disadvantaged areas. What Centerprise discovered (and this was also illustrated by the response to *Stepney Words*) was that many people (of all ages) were writing on their own outside of traditional educational 'spaces', and with no thought of seeking publication or money for their endeavors. The creation of places such as

⁵³ Popular Memory Group, 1982, p.217.

⁵⁴ Woodin, T, 2005a, 'Building Culture from the Bottom Up: The Educational Origins of Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers', *History of Education*, 34(4): p.347.

⁵⁵ See Searle, C, 1998, *None but our Words: Critical Literacy in Classroom and Community*, Milton Keynes, O.U.P.

⁵⁶ See Worker Writers and Community Publishers, 1978, *Writing*, London, FWWCP, where several founder members highlight the importance of *Stepney Words* in their formation.

⁵⁷ Searle, 1998, p.43.

⁵⁸ See Searle, 1998, chapter 4.

⁵⁹ Morley & Worpole, 1982, p.4.

⁶⁰ See Worpole, 1977 for an overview of Centerprise.

Centerprise, where people could go and meet other writers, was crucial in the growth of many local writing and publishing initiatives around the country. These events were occurring at a time in the 1970s when there was a shift in perception about the meaning of literacy. As Worpole argued, ‘the ability to read was not enough and [...] opportunities for writing had to be included in any fully formed definition of cultural literacy.’⁶¹

Woodin has stated that from the late 1960s the role of culture became the basis of intense debate amongst educationists,⁶² but debates on culture were cutting across all areas of life, no more so than with regard to the issue of class. Just as History Workshop was pioneering new approaches to history, groups that would come together to form FWWCP were concerned with making writing and publishing accessible to all. Central to these groups was a commitment to working-class writing and experience. As Gregory remarked, ‘What has often been thought of as working-class culture has consisted of products extensively consumed by the working-class, rather than produced by and for working-class people.’⁶³ Groups that were to form FWWCP wanted to challenge this assumption, and enable working-class people to articulate and produce their own ‘culture’. For example Richard Gray, one of the members of the Peckham People’s History Group (which was linked with the Peckham Publishing Project) argued,⁶⁴

For those who took part, the appearance of these groups in the same sorts of area with the same sorts of members was a vivid experience of how similar economic, cultural and political conditions give rise to particular responses and initiatives. The dominant culture’s commentators often explain such events by talking of an ‘underground’: in fact we were groups of people who for our own reasons and in our own places found our roots, identities and experiences obscured, destroyed or devalued and wanted to do something about it.⁶⁵

The debates on access to culture and its production were driving forces behind many FWWCP groups. As Worpole noted, ‘As long as the cultural production of, particularly, literature and history remains part of general capitalist production we cannot possibly get the range of literature and history that a cultural democracy would

⁶¹ Worpole, 1983, p.23.

⁶² Woodin, 2005a.

⁶³ Gregory, 1984, p.222.

⁶⁴ Gray, R, 1984, ‘History is What you Want to Say’ Publishing People’s History: the experience of Peckham People’s History Group, *Oral History*, 12(2).

⁶⁵ Gray, 1984, p.38.

expect'.⁶⁶ This commitment to cultural democracy - described as 'practices that ensure the active involvement of a broad public including marginalised groups' - was an important feature of FWWCP groups.⁶⁷ Likewise, control over the process of writing, publishing and distribution of material were seen as vital in reclaiming control of the means of cultural production.⁶⁸ For many FWWCP activists politics played an important role in their commitment to FWWCP and there were strong links with the Labour movement.⁶⁹ However these links did not last due, in part, to a lack of support from the trade unions and the Labour Party in encouraging the working-class to create their own culture. This was to be a disappointment for activists such as Worpole who wanted closer ties with the Labour movement.⁷⁰

FWWCP brought together groups around the country involved in adult literacy (e.g. Write First Time and Gatehouse), community campaigns (e.g. QueenSpark), local history groups (e.g. Bristol Broadsides), people's history / writing groups (e.g. Centerprise), and writing groups (e.g. Basement Writers and Scotland Road) to share and support each other in their endeavors. Informal visits and exchanges between groups were already occurring, and Centerprise (in particular Worpole) played a pivotal role in inspiring many activists to set up groups around the country. Consequently in 1976 nine groups met formally at Centerprise to form FWWCP which would act as an umbrella organisation for like-minded groups around the country.⁷¹

The initial impetus and workings of FWWCP have been well documented, most notably in Morley and Worpole's *The Republic of Letters* (1982). What is evident in its formation was the desire to create a sustainable 'movement', one with structures and aims which followed a traditional trade union format, which was in sharp contrast to History Workshop and its ad hoc approach. While there are similarities, for example, in that FWWCP also held an annual event (known as the 'festival of writing') to bring groups together, from the beginning FWWCP had a constitution which provided a structure and forum for debate that was lacking in History Workshop. Democratic structures were created, including an executive committee made up of elected members

⁶⁶ Worpole, 1983, p.10.

⁶⁷ Jordan, G, 2003, 'Voices from below: doing people's history in Cardiff Docklands' in Berger, S, Feldner, H, Passmore, K (eds.), *Writing History: Theory and Practice*, London, Hodder Arnold.

⁶⁸ For an introduction to cultural politics see Jordan, G & Weedon, C, 1995, *Cultural Politics: class, gender, race and the postmodern world*, Oxford, Blackwell.

⁶⁹ Woodin, 2005a, p.355.

⁷⁰ Worpole, 1978, Afterword, in *Writing*, p.243; see also Morley & Worpole, 1982, p.51.

⁷¹ Woodin, 2005a.

from FWWCP groups that oversaw activities. Whilst activities were dependent on voluntary help supported in part by groups' membership fees, funding was sought in order to secure a paid coordinator to further its work. FWWCP received support from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Gulbenkian) for a part-time worker for 1979 and 1980, and the Arts Council provided temporary support in the early 1980s. However it was not until 1992 that FWWCP received regular annual funding from the Arts Council (which reflected a shift in attitude towards FWWCP, which is discussed later on). This 'formal' but participatory rather than elitist approach plus regular funding enabled FWWCP to expand and develop, particularly through the 1990s.⁷²

While the emphasis was on 'working-class' writing, what this meant was open to broad interpretation and left to individual groups to determine. Attempts to define working-class writing initiated an on-going debate as to whether the movement was working class or socialist (or both).⁷³ This debate highlighted the tension evident in some groups between working-class writers and 'middle-class managers', and how to deal with the contradiction of middle-class activists helping to facilitate the writing of the working class, which brought to the fore issues of authority and ownership. Yet there was also another underlying tension within the debate, which was that some working-class people, by virtue of education and acquired professional skills, were no longer seen as being working class by other group members. This complicated matters further and drew attention to issues of identity and the complexity inherent in attempting to delineate 'working class'.⁷⁴

The term 'community publishing' was used to signify publishing that occurred at a local level and which involved, 'a process of producing and distributing such writing in co-operative and mutual ways rather than competitive and private.'⁷⁵ This use of 'community' reflected 'community as mutuality' as described by the Yeos in the previous chapter. Also as noted in the preceding chapter, writing from personal experience enabled anyone to participate, and autobiographical writing featured strongly

⁷² See Woodin, 2002, for a full insight into the structure and workings of FWWCP.

⁷³ A point that was still being debated in 2006, see Clayton, L, 2006, 'Towards a definition of Working-Class Writing', *FEDeration*, 31, p.9. There was also an on going discussion concerning the removal of the word 'worker' from its name, see for example Pollard, N & Davidson, E, 2003, 'what do we mean?' in *FEDeration* 26, and the response from Havercroft, S, 2004, 'working-class through my looking glass' in *FEDeration* 27.

⁷⁴ Morley & Worpole, 1982; Gray, 1984; Woodin, 2005a; Woodin, T, 2005b, 'Muddying the Waters: Changes in Class and Identity in a Working-Class Cultural Organisation', *Sociology*, 39(5).

⁷⁵ Extract from FWWCP constitution quoted in *FEDeration*, 2003, 26: p.6. See also Worpole, K, 1984, *Reading by Numbers*, London, Comedia, for an informed discussion on publishing in this period.

in many groups. The focus on the personal and by extension the local meant that the theme of community was a prominent feature in many publications (and has been the subject of much analysis).⁷⁶ Over time the term people's history slipped from usage, and community history came to be the more dominant term used to describe the history that some of these groups were making, which was history *by* the community, *about* the community, *for* the (wider) community.

Community publishing was seen as an important step towards cultural democracy, as it made available (and public) the writing of working people, and was possible at this point due to technological advances in the form of off-set litho printing and photocopiers. These made publishing more accessible and affordable than traditional printing processes, and crucially demystified the publishing process. The availability of computers in the 1980s, coupled with technological developments in software, in particular desk-top publishing packages which became commonplace in the 1990s, had huge impacts on the process of publishing, as did the arrival of the Internet. These developments brought with them new opportunities and challenges from some groups, which are explored in the case studies.

Not all groups who were engaged in this type of writing and publishing, and that had contact with FWWCP groups, chose to join. For example, Strong Words, in Durham, preferred to keep a more loose connection, not wanting to subscribe to the FWWCP constitution. Some groups such as Yorkshire Arts Circus (YAC) were originally denied membership, as they were not seen to be democratic in their practice. YAC was however admitted in the 1990s when FWWCP, responding to a changing political and social climate, introduced different types of memberships that were less prescriptive than earlier guidelines.⁷⁷ It is also unclear how many groups with similar aims and ideals to FWWCP member groups were working in isolation and did not know of its existence. Nevertheless it is clear that FWWCP was a significant movement that challenged conventional ideas about who could write and whose histories should be told. From an initial membership of nine groups in 1976, in 1993 there were 52 groups including several overseas members.⁷⁸ However this steady growth needs to be understood in a variety of contexts, not least with regard to more relaxed membership policies which enabled more groups to join or be affiliated to FWWCP. Also the

⁷⁶ For example, Bornat, 1992.

⁷⁷ Woodin, 2002.

⁷⁸ FWWCP, 1993, Information Sheet.

composition of group members changed and diversified. As new groups joined, older groups such as Bristol Broadside and Write First Time ceased to exist for a variety of reasons such as funding cuts, internal tensions, or simply folding as key activists moved on. Yet other groups such as QueenSpark survived by having in place structures to enable continuity, and being able to adapt to shifts in funding agendas. New member groups, particularly from the 1990s, reflected changing concerns and campaigns within society, such as Survivors Poetry, a group founded in 1991 by ‘survivors’ of the mental health system. Indeed, Worpole on visiting the 1996 FWWCP weekend after many years absence commented,

Today a lot of the energy in FWWCP comes from the homeless, from ex-prisoners, from disability groups or mental health ‘survivors’. Thus definitions of class identity have moved [...] Class, which was once principally defined by gender and occupation, is now largely defined by lack of employment, social marginalisation and even criminalisation.⁷⁹

This comment reflects on going debates around class and identity, in particular the diminishing influence of class awareness in recent years and the shift to ‘identity politics’.⁸⁰ Certainly the language of documents and publicity produced by FWWCP in the 1990s increasingly suggested that the organisation had become less explicit in terms of class and politics. For example, the 1997 mission statement claims that FWWCP aims, ‘to make writing and publishing accessible to all and to encourage people to take an active, co-operative and democratic role in writing, performing and publishing.’⁸¹

One key issue for FWWCP was whether or not the writing the groups produced could be called ‘literature’.⁸² This debate arose in part because at its inauguration, FWWCP chose to apply for funding from the Arts Council’s literature budget rather than its community arts budget. It was felt that the community arts movement was politically different to FWWCP, and had been marginalised by the Arts Council. FWWCP wanted to ‘disestablish’ literature, and challenge notions of ‘good’ literature, and make it a popular form of expression available to all.⁸³ Yet there was a paradox in that attempting to open up new ways of writing and publishing FWWCP had to

⁷⁹ Worpole, K, 1996, ‘It’s not what you say, it’s the way that you say it’, *FEDeration*, 8, p.4.

⁸⁰ Woodin, 2005b.

⁸¹ FWWCP, 1997, Annual Report, Stoke-on-Trent, FWWCP.

⁸² Laing, S, 1983, The Production of Literature, in Sinfield, A (ed.) *Society and Literature*, London, Methuen; Morley & Worpole, 1982.

⁸³ See Morley & Worpole, 1982, for a discussion on the meaning of disestablishing literature.

negotiate with 'existing structures and pre-existing ideas of what merit[ed] public money.'⁸⁴ This meant that for many years FWWCP was in conflict with the Arts Council over lack of funding and criticisms of the writing. For example in 1979 the literature panel turned down an application on the grounds that the work was, 'of little, if any, solid literary merit', and suggested they apply to the community arts panel.⁸⁵ Whilst regional arts boards were more receptive to funding member groups, it was not until 1990 that the Arts Council, under a new head of literature, recognised community publications as 'literature', and initiated and funded the Raymond Williams Prize for Community Publishing.⁸⁶ This was an annual award 'dedicated to commending two published works of outstanding creative and imaginative quality that reflect the life and experiences of the people of particular communities.'⁸⁷ Only non-profit-making publishers could submit, and many, although not all, were community histories, with a strong emphasis on community involvement (albeit to varying degrees). FWWCP was a principal partner in the scheme, offering advice and support, and by 1992 FWWCP was receiving regular annual funding to employ a co-ordinator to administer and further its aims. This support represented a significant shift in attitude towards FWWCP and what it represented, and reflected a gradual change in cultural practices, bringing the voice of the 'ordinary' person and the everyday into the mainstream. However through the 1990s, as groups changed and FWWCP was increasingly subject to funding demands, there was a subtle shift in perception of FWWCP as new members (and funders) saw it more as a service provider than a 'movement'.⁸⁸

For many people, FWWCP groups provided a space to develop and explore their writing away from 'traditional' institutions with fixed definitions of literacy, literature, and history. Even working-class educational organisations such as the WEA tended to focus on what people did not know and therefore needed to be taught. In contrast FWWCP groups were built on finding ways to express people's experience and share

⁸⁴ Jordan & Weedon, 1995, p.557. See Mulgan, G & Worpole, K, 1986, *Saturday Night or Sunday morning? From Arts to Industry – new forms of cultural policy*, London, Comedia, for a discussion of Arts Council funding in the 1980s.

⁸⁵ Kearney, M, 1979, *Worker Writer*, 1, p.17. Morley & Worpole, 1982, provide an extensive discussion of the tension between FWWCP and the Arts Council.

⁸⁶ Thomson, A, 1990, Community Publishing: The Republic of Letters Revisited, *Adult Learning*, 2(1): 15-16; Responding to the Arts Council, 1992, *FEDNews*, p.2-4.

⁸⁷ www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/ viewed 20.06.07.

⁸⁸ Woodin, T, 2009b, 'Changes in the Fed', *Republic of Letters Revisited*, New York, Syracuse University Press & New City Communities Press.

this with others, reflecting a Friirian approach to cultural politics and education.⁸⁹ As a result group members talk of a growing confidence developed through their groups; a process of self-education which both Gregory and Woodin have argued are important outcomes of FWWCP groups.⁹⁰ This idea of disestablishing literature meant that FWWCP groups actively sought to break down barriers between different forms of writing, and to bring together reading and writing through collective publishing. *Writing*, the first anthology produced by FWWCP in 1978, reflected these different approaches by bringing together poetry, short stories, cartoons, drawings and autobiographical extracts. In addition the distinctions between history, autobiography and fictional writing were blurred as people adopted a range of styles to write about their lives.⁹¹ Writers also crossed the boundaries between private and public histories, linking the past and the present, and oral history came to play an important role within some FWWCP groups, especially in representing collective experiences.⁹²

FWWCP managed to survive the major social and political changes of the past thirty years by being flexible, yet it remained both democratic and participatory. As the membership criteria broadened, new groups joined that had formed in a different political climate to those in the 1970s, bringing with them different perspectives and needs. However, this did not devalue the core essence of FWWCP as a movement that continued to challenge dominant discourses about who could write, what constituted 'good' writing, and whose history should be told, by whom and how; where the process of writing and publishing were as important as the final product. Indeed as Courtman argues,

The real achievement of the Federation was its ability to create the conditions to release denied expression: setting up projects to enable adults to acquire literacy, promoting oral history projects from groups marginalised by society [...]; and by validating the idea of working-class creativity and agency. By facilitating the publication of the outcomes, the

⁸⁹ Worpole, 1983, p.23; Woodin, T, 2007, 'Chuck out the teacher: radical pedagogy in the community', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(1).

⁹⁰ Gregory, G, 1991, 'Community publishing as self-education', in Barton, D & Ivanic, R (eds.) *Writing in the Community*, London, Sage; Woodin, T, 2005c, 'More writing than welding': learning in worker writer groups', *History of Education*, 34(5).

⁹¹ See Woodin, 1992, for a discussion on types of community histories produced within FWWCP.

⁹² For example in the work of the Ethnic Communities Oral History Project. See Kyriacou, S, 1993, 'May Your Children Speak Well Of You Mother Tongue: Oral History and Ethnic Communities', *Oral History*, 21(1).

Federation circulated a lived experience of 'difference', and provided an environment for writers to explore difference.⁹³

Oral History Society

In any discussion of the development of community history, it is important to consider the role of OHS and its influence on many community history projects. Formed in the same period as History Workshop and FWWCP, OHS has also been influential in shaping new approaches and understandings in making histories. Yet the trajectory it has taken has been different as it continues to bridge the gap between academic and non-academic practitioners and attempts to bring together theory and practice and to facilitate an on-going dialogue between a diverse range of practitioners; an ideal that History Workshop largely abandoned some time ago. Indeed we can see OHS as sitting between the two, on the one side History Workshop now firmly rooted in academia, and on the other side FWWCP, a grassroots organisation rejecting criticisms of its 'un-theoretical' approach to community history.

Given the increasing importance of oral history as a method to uncover hidden histories and make history accessible, it is surprising that OHS has not been the subject of any detailed analysis. One explanation may be that discussions to date have tended to focus on the general development of oral history theory and practice (within this country and internationally) rather than on the institutional development of oral history. Nevertheless OHS has played and continues to play a central role in promoting oral history in Britain, providing support and advice to practitioners, as well as offering training courses. Several committee members serve as expert oral history advisers to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), one of the main funding bodies of community history in Britain since the mid 1990s. Consequently it would be fair to say OHS has become the point of reference for much oral history practice in Britain, and therefore a consideration of its origins and development is necessary to assess its impact on community history.

Although oral history was seen as a means to democratise the practice of history, academics were the driving force in the formation of OHS. The growing interest in oral history in the late 1960s within academic circles was preceded (and influenced) by oral history work in broadcasting, in particular Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger's *Radio Ballads* (1958-64), which were innovative in their use of personal

⁹³ Courtman, S, 2002, 'Freirian Liberation, Cultural Transaction and Writing from "The Working Class and the Spades"', *FEDeration*, 24, p.11.

testimony collected from working-class communities.⁹⁴ OHS's first chairman, Theo Barker, was an academic who became involved with oral history through his radio activities with the BBC Radio 4 series, *The Long March of Everyman*. This brought him into contact with the British Institute of Recorded Sound (BIRS) which was instrumental in setting up OHS.⁹⁵ Indeed the links with radio (and later television) played an important role in the development of OHS.⁹⁶

While Samuel was the driving force behind History Workshop, and Worpole was central to the formation of FWWCP, Paul Thompson played a pivotal role in establishing the practice of oral history and OHS. Thompson was a social historian who worked in the sociology department at the University of Essex, one of the new universities of the 1960s, which advocated interdisciplinary approaches and where he was inspired by Sociology Professor Peter Townsend's approach to research:

He [Townsend] was actively involved in changing society, and that's what he thought research was about. And that really powerfully influenced me. He had a very powerful, moral commitment [...] which I found very very influential. And it was something I wanted at the time. I wanted to feel there was a social purpose in what I was doing.⁹⁷

This commitment to a social purpose in research is evident throughout Thompson's seminal book, *Voice of the Past*, the first key text to address the practice of oral history, which promoted oral history as a form of democratic history-making. In addition Thompson's research, *The Edwardians: Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918*, which was the first large national oral history project carried out in Britain, was important in establishing oral history as a research method.⁹⁸ Certainly, Thompson's influence on the growth of oral history in Britain has been immense, as Lummis comments, 'Part of his [Thompson's] achievement is to have played a major role in establishing oral history as a professional tool while stimulating its use outside the

⁹⁴ See Howkins, A, 2000, History and the Radio Ballads, *Oral History*, 28(2).

⁹⁵ Thompson, P, 2002, Obituary: Theo Barker 1923-2001, *Oral History*, 30(1).

⁹⁶ See Liddington, J, 2006, 'Listening to the Past on Radio in the UK 1955-2005: References and Bibliography', *Oral History*, 34(1); also Humphries, S, Obituary: Stephen Peet, *Oral History*, 34(1) for an overview of the television oral history work of Peet.

⁹⁷ Paul Thompson interviewed by Karen Worcman, Stockholm, 12/6/96, available at: <http://www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata/online/data/edwardians/biography/PaulThompsonlifestoryinterview1996.doc> viewed 25.5.06. Also Thompson, P, 2004, 'Pioneering the life history method', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(1).

⁹⁸ See <http://www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata/online/data/edwardians/original.asp> for more information on the study and the interviews as well as reviews of the subsequent book, Thompson, P, 1975, *The Edwardians, The Remaking of British Society*, London, Routledge.

universities.’⁹⁹ Due to Thompson’s involvement (and with support from his department), Essex University played a major role in supporting the growth of OHS. Several key figures in OHS (both past and present) undertook postgraduate research at Essex under Thompson, such as Alun Howkins (an ex-Ruskin student and part of History Workshop), Joanna Bornat (co-editor of *Oral History* since 1978),¹⁰⁰ and Graham Smith (OHS’s chairperson 2004 - present).¹⁰¹

The BIRS, which became the British Library Sound Archive, organised the first informal gathering of practising British oral historians in December 1969. This was described as, ‘an exploratory meeting in order to bring together some of the 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.’¹⁰² Of the 14 people attending 11 were from universities or higher education colleges, one was from the BBC, one from the BIRS and one was George Ewart Evans (with no formal affiliation, but links to Essex). In view of the previous discussion about History Workshop it is worth noting that Samuel was also present at this meeting and was involved for several years as a Society committee member.¹⁰³

OHS was not officially formed at this meeting, but a committee of four was created - Theo Barker, George Ewart Evans, Stewart Sanderson and Paul Thompson - with the remit to explore the issues raised by the meeting, and arrange subsequent meetings as well as organise a news sheet (which expanded to a journal), *Oral History*, (supported by the BIRS and edited by Thompson). *Oral History* was seen as a way of engaging in discussions on interviewing techniques and sharing experiences of oral history practice, as well as providing information about current work in an attempt to bring together those ‘doing’ oral history around the country. The main emphasis was on ‘research in social and political history making use of sound recordings.’¹⁰⁴ Much of the work listed in the news sheet was taking place in museums and libraries (for archival

⁹⁹ Lummis, T, 1987, *Listening to History*, London, Hutchinson.

¹⁰⁰ For an interesting reflection of Bornat’s experience as an oral historian see Bornat, J, 2004, ‘Oral History’ in Seale, C; Gobo, G; Gubrium, G; Silverman, D (eds.), *Qualitative Research*, London, Sage. Bornat has been one of the key figures in the Society over the past thirty years and has written extensively on community-based oral history and reminiscence.

¹⁰¹ Essex University, while still serving as the contact address for the Society, is no longer the base that it once was. As oral history has grown courses have developed around the country, initiated by many Society members such as, Al Thomson at Sussex University, Graham Smith at Sheffield University and Joanna Bornat, the first appointed professor of oral history in England, based at the Open University.

¹⁰² *Oral History*, 1972, Report of Conference on 13 December 1969, 1(1), p.1

¹⁰³ See Thompson, P, 1997, ‘Raphael Samuel 1934-96: An appreciation’, *Oral History*, 25(1).

¹⁰⁴ *Oral History*, 1972, 1(1), p.5.

purposes) as well as universities, and information was provided about the project, the number of interviews conducted, and whether there were transcripts available. As Frisch remarked, 'oral history is unique in that it creates its own documents,'¹⁰⁵ and certainly at this stage the focus was on collection and cataloguing, with an awareness of the need to preserve the collected data for archival purposes. This was perhaps not surprising given the influence and input from the beginning of the BIRS.

Early editions of *Oral History* provide a useful indicator of key concerns for those practising oral history in the late 1960s and 1970s. Central to discussions at the initial 1969 meeting was the recognition of the need to provide guidance for interviewers on recording and interview techniques, equipment, and to develop a standard approach to the way in which interviews were quoted. Equally the need for a national archive where tapes and transcripts could be stored for future use was seen as essential, and the use of oral history in teaching was viewed as an important aspect of the development of oral history. These 'practical' issues dominated early discussions about oral history, and more than thirty years later are still key concerns for OHS.¹⁰⁶

Having met regularly since the 1969 meeting, published *Oral History* and held conferences, such as the 1972 one on the potential and problems of oral history, the OHS was officially formed in 1973.¹⁰⁷ In announcing the establishment of OHS there was an explicit commitment to making OHS accessible to all and encouraging meaningful exchanges on practice. As the constitution stated,

The aims and purposes of the Society are to further the methods and practice of oral history in all appropriate fields, and to encourage the discussion of methodology, technical problems, and all relevant matters by the publication of a journal and by the organisation of conferences and meetings.¹⁰⁸

However this inclusive approach was not a view shared by all founding members. Thompson claimed that Barker wanted OHS to be 'a high fee and high expenses elite organisation on the model of the Economic History Society,' which OHS rejected in favour of a low fee and a populist approach.¹⁰⁹ Like FWWCP, OHS opted for a more

¹⁰⁵ Frisch, 1990, p.188.

¹⁰⁶ The British Library Sound Archive eventually appointed a curator of oral history in 1988, with the aim of developing a national centre for oral history. Perks, R, 1989, 'The National Sound Archive', *Oral History*, 17(2).

¹⁰⁷ *Oral History*, 1974, 2(1).

¹⁰⁸ Constitution of the Oral History Society printed in *Oral History*, 1976, 4(1), p.98.

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, 2002, p.20.

formal, structured organisation with a (voluntary) elected committee, which enabled it to grow, develop and adapt through many changes. However unlike FWWCP, individuals as well as groups could join, and there was no ‘vetting’ process. OHS was not, as Howarth remarks, ‘conceived as any kind of regulatory or professional body’.¹¹⁰ It was an organisation intended to support and further the practice of oral history in Britain by bringing together practitioners to share experiences, encourage good practice, and debate developments within oral history.

As already noted, oral history became central to many FWWCP groups such as QueenSpark and Centerprise, as well as some History Workshop groups such as London History Workshop, facilitated in part by the arrival of cheaper portable cassette recorders. Given the movement of people between History Workshop, FWWCP and OHS, it is not surprising that there was a gradual shift beyond academia to include those practising oral history in, for example, the media, adult education groups, and community groups. This was reflected in the News section of the expanded journal, and as early as 1976 FWWCP books were being reviewed within the journal.¹¹¹ However, this did not necessarily mean that these groups and individuals had become members of OHS, but it did represent a shift in recognising those projects outside the academy with their different interests and different ways of applying oral history. Certainly Bornat, (a key member of Exploring Living Memory which is discussed later), who became deputy editor of the journal in 1977, was a keen advocate of community history projects.

One of the key influences on the shift to include more community oral history away from an academic base was the MSC Community Programme, which ran through the late 1970s and 1980s and provided employment for the long-term unemployed for up to a year. Community history was given a huge boost by this programme as historical research came under the remit of ‘social and cultural work’ and public bodies such as museums, archives, libraries, schools, universities and civic societies were able to receive funding to sponsor oral history and other local history projects.¹¹² For example, Manchester Studies, which began in 1974 and was based at Manchester

¹¹⁰ Howarth, K, 1998, *Oral History: a handbook*, Stroud, Sutton, p.184.

¹¹¹ See for example, *Oral History*, 1976, 6(2) for reviews of books by Centerprise, Strong Words, Bristol People’s Publishing Project, and Bristol Broadside.

¹¹² Smith, G.R, 1984, ‘Manpower History: The Arbroath History Project’, *Oral History*, 12(2); Perks, R, (ed.), 1990, *Oral History an annotated bibliography*, London, British Library. See also Humphries, S, 1984, *The Handbook of Oral History*, London, Inter-Action Inprint, for details of setting up and running MSC schemes.

Polytechnic, received funding for many of its schemes from the MSC. With a commitment to people's history and a desire to promote links between the Polytechnic and the local community, Manchester Studies sought to 'break down the barriers between research, retrieval and teaching', and balance academic needs with community needs.¹¹³ They created a local sound, photographic and film archive, held regular exhibitions for local people and produced teaching packs for schools.¹¹⁴ Likewise, Bradford Heritage Recording Unit (BHRU), set up jointly by Bradford Council's Museums and Libraries Division and the MSC in 1983 as a community oral history project, sought to uncover the experiences of immigrants in Bradford.¹¹⁵ Oral history projects were ideally suited to the scheme, providing training and work experience, as well as engaging with the local community (where groups with common interests in a specific locality was the main determinant of 'community'). The scheme provided opportunities for projects that would not normally be undertaken due to lack of funding, particularly within museums and libraries, who were beginning to seek new ways in which to connect with their public.¹¹⁶ Certainly the importance of the MSC in developing and shaping community history cannot be underestimated, as Samuel states,

If there is a single agency that transformed 'heritage' from an enthusiasm into an industry it was not the country house owners or the National Trust, intent on rescuing private property from confiscation or ruin, but rather the local authorities, many of them Labour, and the museum curators, many of them, after their own fashion, 'new wave' social historians, and the environmentalist campaigns, all of them, in some sort, radical, who seized on Youth Training Schemes and the Manpower Services Commission to take on paid and extra hands.¹¹⁷

While the MSC's oral history funded projects were not directly connected with OHS, news and information about such projects became a regular feature of *Oral History* during the 1980s. For example, in 1984 the journal devoted a whole issue to community projects:

¹¹³ Linkman, A & Williams, B, 1979, 'Recovering the People's Past: the archive rescue programme of Manchester Studies', *History Workshop Journal*, 8.

¹¹⁴ Burman, R, 1984, 'Participating in the Past? Oral History and Community History in the Work of Manchester Studies', *International Journal of Oral History*, 5(2).

¹¹⁵ Perks, R.B, 1984, 'A feeling of not belonging: Interviewing European Immigrants in Bradford', *Oral History*, 12(2).

¹¹⁶ Jones, S, 1984, 'Oral History and Museum Education', *Oral History*, 12(2).

¹¹⁷ Samuel, R, 1994, *Theatres of Memory*, London, Verso, p.238.

[T]hese are only a sample of the work which is being pursued in many community settings, pioneering and breaking new ground with challenges to the established view of history and the profession of the historian. We welcome contributions from others for future numbers and look forward to an exciting and rewarding period of further development for oral history in the community.¹¹⁸

In 1985 OHS organised a conference 'Community History and Oral History' which focused on the MSC and how oral history could fit into the programme.¹¹⁹ The MSC, however, was a short-term solution to unemployment and by 1988 had been replaced by a new scheme, Employment Training, which did not benefit community projects in the same way as the MSC scheme had.¹²⁰ Most were unable to continue unless they had a strong volunteer base willing to step in such as the York Oral History Project,¹²¹ or they had one or two permanent posts established within, for example, a museum hierarchy such as the Southampton Oral History Unit and BHRU.¹²² This removal of funding highlighted the difficulty of sustainability for the projects once their main, or only, funding source was removed, and demonstrated how vulnerable groups were to shifts in funding priorities.

While these MSC schemes varied in approach and quality they did, as Perks reflects, 'act as test beds for new techniques and ideas, and a training base for a whole breed of young oral historians deeply committed to community history.'¹²³ Some of these new oral historians, such as Donald Hyslop, Rob Perks and Graham Smith, became key committee members during the second half of the 1980s, and this gradually impacted on the way OHS subsequently developed. Certainly one important outcome was the Regional Network of Oral Historians. The Network was originally proposed in the mid-1980s as a way to connect various community projects around the country, but was initially rejected by a committee concerned that this would imply an adoption of oral history as a profession. This highlighted, at the time, a community versus academic conflict in the direction OHS should take.¹²⁴ The Network eventually became active in 1992 with representatives around the country engaged in oral history work. Most, although not all are based outside universities, and they serve as local contacts for those

¹¹⁸ Editorial, 1984, *Oral History*, 12(2).

¹¹⁹ Conference Report, 1986, *Oral History*, 14(1).

¹²⁰ Kirrane, S, 1989, 'Employment Training: The Icing on the Cake', *Oral History*, 17(2).

¹²¹ Johnson, A, 1988 (August), 'A penny for your thoughts', *History Today*.

¹²² 'A New Zealander's View of Oral History in Britain', Helen Frizzell interviewed by Judith Fyfe and Hugo Manson, 1991, *Oral History*, 19(1).

¹²³ Perks, 1990, p.x.

¹²⁴ Email correspondence with Graham Smith 13.07.06.

interested in undertaking oral history projects (or who are already involved in projects) who want advice and guidance on ‘doing’ oral history, and to be connected with others engaged in similar work. In many ways the Network has become a network of community historians. The Network was initially led by the committee but now has its own co-ordinator that sits on the committee. It holds annual events to bring together the regional representatives to discuss issues pertinent to the practice of oral history in settings such as museums, archives and within community groups. In essence the Network has become one of the main points of contact for public engagement with OHS.¹²⁵

If the MSC scheme could be seen as marking the first phase of growth in community history projects, funding from HLF facilitated a second wave of activity from the mid 1990s. Whilst HLF is discussed separately, OHS has played an important role in advising on oral history projects and the role oral history can play in community initiatives, advocating good practice (as determined by OHS), and training in oral history techniques (usually delivered by Society accredited trainers). It has also been influential in encouraging an archival component to projects to ensure material is preserved in the long-term. However these HLF funded projects are all one-off projects, which often means that OHS has many short-term members (membership is available for a year). Equally in recent years the website has meant that many can access all the information and contacts they need without becoming a member. This was in contrast to FWWCP where membership signified an allegiance to its ideals and a commitment to a movement. However, the popularity of oral history in community settings and the increased availability of funding have provided OHS with the opportunity to take a leading role in guiding the practice of oral history in Britain. In this way OHS has become, to all extent and purposes, a ‘regulatory’ body. Yet OHS is keen to prevent oral history, ‘becoming the preserve of a narrow, self-serving professional grouping.’¹²⁶ Its interest is promoting the use of oral history, and supporting good practice. However there has undoubtedly been a gradual professionalisation of the practice since the arrival of HLF, with oral historians employed to work on funded projects.

¹²⁵ The back page of the journal lists the regional representatives with their contact details and shows the diversity of those practising oral history.

¹²⁶ Smith, G, www.history.ac.uk/making-history/resources/articles/oral_history viewed 16.07.09.

While it is not the purpose of this discussion to provide a history of developments in the practice of oral history there was a significant shift that began to occur from the late 1970s onwards which impacted on OHS. From initial concerns with practical aspects of interviewing and archiving, and the validity and reliability of narrative accounts, there was a move towards discussions on subjectivity, memory and identity, and interview relationships.¹²⁷ As Thompson reflected, 'These new approaches opened up much richer interpretative possibilities from the interviews collected and at the same time fostered a subtler reflection on the nature of oral history practice.'¹²⁸ The 1979 conference, 'Oral History and Black History' was noteworthy because it highlighted tensions as to whose story could be told and by whom, and drew attention to the political implications of oral history and the use and appropriation of people's stories.¹²⁹ The ethical dilemmas of oral history work became a common feature for reflection in the journal (and OHS as a whole).¹³⁰ However these new theoretical approaches were often in conflict with the commitment to a democratic practice and the aims and objectives of community history.¹³¹ The challenge of finding connections between theory and practice is one that OHS (in particular through *Oral History*) seeks to address by attempting to appeal to a diverse audience with varying needs. This does not always work; some still feel OHS is too academically biased, whilst others feel the format of the journal, in particular the extensive use of photographs and news items, does not give the journal academic credibility.¹³² However the journal (and more recently the website) continues to play an important role for those engaged in oral history by providing news and information - particularly with regard to developments in recording equipment and funding opportunities - as well as publishing articles concerned more with theoretical and ethical issues. By doing this the journal and OHS encourage community groups to think more critically about their work, and academics to think more about issues such as ownership and mutuality.¹³³

¹²⁷ Thomson, A, 1998, 'Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History', *Journal of American History*, 85(2).

¹²⁸ Thompson, P, 1994, Editorial, *Oral History*, 22(2), p.2.

¹²⁹ Conference Report, 1979, 'Oral History and Black History', *Oral History*, 8(1).

¹³⁰ The Society also provides a detailed guide *Copyright & Ethics*, www.ohs.org.uk/ethics/.

¹³¹ Thomson, A, Frisch, M & Hamilton, P, 1994, 'The Memory and History Debates: Some International Perspectives', *Oral History*, 22(2).

¹³² Frizzell, 1991.

¹³³ The Society conference in 2001, 'Talking Community Histories', set out to debate: whose history; what principles; what outcomes, which linked together both academic and community concerns around doing oral history. See Chadha, R, 2001, 'Talking Community Histories' conference report, *Oral History*, 29(2) for a review of the conference.

As the practice of oral history has developed and been taken up in a variety of diverse settings, OHS has grown and has tried to accommodate the needs of practitioners at the same time as striving to maintain and encourage standards of good practice. It continually strives to bring together academic and community-based practitioners and encourage dialogue and a sharing of experience between the two camps. Undoubtedly OHS has been influential in promoting oral history as a key method for community history, but the reminiscence movement has also been important in establishing oral history (along with other life history methods) within the community.

The Reminiscence ‘Movement’ and Exploring Living Memory

In a key article in 1989, ‘Oral history as a social movement’, Bornat charts the development of a movement in Britain that brought together academic oral historians, those involved in community publishing and those engaged in reminiscence work in care settings.¹³⁴ Bornat suggests that what brought together these three areas of work was the publication in 1981 of Help the Aged’s tape and slide pack *Recall*, a pack designed to be used to stimulate people’s remembering of the past. As Worpole observed,

Now the most exciting new forces in popular history are those organisations such as Help the Aged and Age Concern who with their ‘reminiscence’ techniques are using history for one of its most important functions – the restoration of personal dignity to the lives of those who have lived and made it.¹³⁵

Certainly *Recall* became a milestone in the development of reminiscence work because, as Bornat stated,

Recall encouraged an open-ended approach to the whole process of oral history work with older people, [and] because of its format, the package made it possible for anyone, whatever their background, to become an oral historian of some kind.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Bornat, 1989.

¹³⁵ Worpole, 1984, p.20.

¹³⁶ Bornat, 1989, p.17.

In many ways the boundaries between oral history and reminiscence are blurred, and reminiscence has always played an important role within OHS.¹³⁷ Both practices are concerned with memory, but whilst oral history focuses more on the content of that memory, using people's experiences as another way of looking at history and 'making' history, in other words there being an end-product, reminiscence pays extra attention to the process and impact on the narrator.¹³⁸ Reminiscence is concerned more with the 'social and personal benefits for the individuals concerned,' an activity intended to be empowering and affirming, where the process is often an end in itself.¹³⁹ Yet some reminiscence activities do produce 'products' in the form of, for example, books, exhibitions and theatre, as seen in the work of Age Exchange.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore the links between reminiscence and adult education, especially adult literacy have also been important in encouraging a process of collaboration between tutor and student, often resulting in some form of publication.¹⁴¹ Consequently with its focus on process and participation we can see how reminiscence became a central feature of much community-based oral history, and community publishing provided one of the main ways in which the outcomes of reminiscence could be disseminated.¹⁴²

Following the publication of *Recall*, in 1981, people interested in oral history and reminiscence began meeting to plan a London Life History exhibition which would 'reflect the histories and lives of all London's communities and minorities'.¹⁴³ Bringing together people from diverse settings such as hospitals, community projects, schools, community publishing groups and voluntary organisations they met regularly and held workshops in preparation for this exhibition, calling themselves Exploring Living Memory (ELM). The London History Workshop Centre was active in ELM, indeed many people were involved in both, reflecting again the fluidity that existed between movements during this period.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ For many years the Society had a reminiscence sub-committee which ran training events as well as publishing Mace, J & Lawrence, J, 1992, *Remembering in groups: ideas from reminiscence and literacy work*, London, Oral History Society to coincide with the 1987 ELM event.

¹³⁸ Bornat, J, 2001, 'Reminiscence and Oral History: Parallel universes or shared endeavour?' *Ageing and Society*, 21.

¹³⁹ Gillies, C & James, A, 1994, *Reminiscence work with old people*, London, Nelson Thornes, p.13

¹⁴⁰ Schweitzer, P, 2002, *Age Exchange: The Story so Far*, London, Age Exchange.

¹⁴¹ Mace, & Lawrence, 1992 & Mace, (ed.), 1995.

¹⁴² Bornat, 1989.

¹⁴³ Bornat, J, 1982, 'Exploring Living Memory Workshop Report', *Oral History*, 10(1).

¹⁴⁴ Chamberlain, M & Samuel, R, 1991, 'Festival of London History', in Samuel (ed.) details unsuccessful attempts by London History Workshop Centre to set up a 'Festival of London History' pre ELM.

What transformed ELM from an informal grouping to a committee with paid workers was the decision to use the Royal Festival Hall for their first large-scale exhibition. Bornat, the committee chair states,

We were the beneficiaries of a struggle between the management of the Festival Hall and the Greater London Council's (GLC) Community Arts policy (which included a policy for elderly people in arts and recreation). The GLC wanted to open up the Festival Hall to the public and to community arts. The Festival Hall management was resisting.¹⁴⁵

The outcome was a large grant for ELM from the GLC, with an understanding that ELM would put on an exhibition that would not look out of place in the Festival Hall. This reflected a concern on the part of the Festival Hall management that as most groups and individuals involved were mainly 'non-professional', the exhibition would not be of sufficient 'quality' to be on display in such a venue, a view that drew attention to the debate of 'high' culture versus 'popular' culture, and one which the GLC was involved in with its 'campaign for a popular culture'.¹⁴⁶

The first exhibition took place in 1984, followed by another in 1985 when over 100 groups participated. The group was unable to run an event in 1986 because the then Conservative Government had placed an injunction on the GLC preventing them providing funds. However there was an exhibition in 1987 staged at County Hall, post GLC, and smaller events between 1989 and 1991 after which funding was not forthcoming and the ELM ceased to exist.¹⁴⁷ This demonstrated the vulnerability of organisations dependent on public funding, particularly in what was then a hostile environment between a Labour run council (GLC) and a Conservative Government.¹⁴⁸

The exhibitions aimed to show the diversity of the people of London using a variety of formats such as tapes, slides, videos, drama and material objects over a two-week period, with groups making their own displays. While the emphasis was on people's history, Bornat suggested that the photographs, 'opened up the processes of life history and oral history to a passionately interested audience of older, and many younger, Londoners.'¹⁴⁹ Indeed photographs came to dominate the exhibitions,

¹⁴⁵ Bornat, J, 1989, *Exploring living memory, photographs and issues*, unpublished, p.2.

¹⁴⁶ Bornat, J, 2007, 'The Politics of Community Oral History: Exploring Living Memory 1981-1991', Conference Paper, Making Community Oral Histories, 07.07.07.

¹⁴⁷ Bornat, 2007.

¹⁴⁸ See Robinson, L, 2007, *Gay men and the Left in post-war Britain: How the personal got political*, Manchester University Press, for a discussion on the GLC and its policies.

¹⁴⁹ Bornat, 1989, p.7.

demonstrating the importance of the visual within community history. People wanted to know ‘how to do’ oral history and reminiscence and make it public. The ELM exhibitions enabled ordinary people to make history and share it with others, and crucially demonstrated how individuals and groups could make history as active participants, not just as ‘sources’ for professional historians. These exhibitions were practical examples of democratic history making that actively engaged with ‘ordinary’ people. That thousands attended these events demonstrated how successful they were in their endeavours. As Bornat reflected,

I felt part of a political process of recapturing and liberating the past [...] During the Exploring Living Memory exhibitions we felt we were part of a popular movement for social change. We had no time for bystanders who fretted over our commitment to a democratizing popularization of history.¹⁵⁰

In the same way that History Workshop events brought people together to debate the purpose and practice of history, ELM brought community history groups together to display their work to a wider audience, to open up the process of history making to all, and encourage participation. Despite its demise ELM brought practitioners together to share their work and experiences, and highlighted the importance of community history as an accessible and democratic form of history making where process and participation were as important as the end product.

Towards the Millennium and Heritage Lottery Funding

The issue of funding weaves through the discussions on History Workshop, FWWCP and OHS, as well as ELM. So, for example, whilst the Arts Council was important to FWWCP, and the MSC facilitated a rapid increase in the number of community oral history projects undertaken in the 1980s, since the late 1990s HLF has become the most significant funder of community history projects. During the 1990s funding in Britain underwent major changes due predominately to the launch of the National Lottery in 1994. The Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) oversees the distribution of Lottery money to the various funding bodies such as the Arts Council and HLF who take decisions on the allocation of funds ‘within a framework of policy directions that they receive from DCMS.’¹⁵¹ In other words Government priorities play a significant role in determining where funds will go, and how they will be used, and funding bodies

¹⁵⁰ Bornat, 1993, p.79.

¹⁵¹ *Guide to Arts Funding in England*, DCMS Arts Division, July 2003, p.19.

themselves must compete against one another for their funding and demonstrate tangible outcomes to justify their spending. The introduction of the Revenue Grants Programme within HLF, in 1998, which included people as well as buildings within its remit, reflected New Labour's commitment to cultural activities. The emphasis was on community engagement and community building, tackling social exclusion and increasing cultural diversity, and this facilitated a new phase in community history.¹⁵² HLF was also keen to develop new audiences for heritage, and widen participation for those from communities who had not been involved in heritage before. Viewed from this perspective community history projects, which are chiefly about process and participation, fit many of the priorities and targets of HLF, and have thus benefited from this funding. As Hewison and Holden reflect,

HLF has shifted the idea of the value and importance of heritage away from being something that is exclusively determined by experts on behalf of society, to one that recognises the importance of widespread participation in identifying and caring for what is valued collectively.¹⁵³

As already noted, oral history and reminiscence, in particular, have been key features of many projects as by their very nature they encourage participation and engagement at the grassroots level, but OHS also played a significant role in advising and encouraging HLF to support oral history projects. By 1999 HLF had supported approximately 150 oral history projects in Britain.¹⁵⁴ Through a variety of different types of funding schemes HLF has enabled community groups (defined by locality or interest or both) to apply to undertake either small or large-scale projects. Partnership bids were encouraged, and up until 2000 HLF was awarding between £5000 and £100,000 for projects lasting up to a maximum of three years. One of the schemes, 'Awards for All', was specifically designed to make it easier for small community groups to obtain funding of between £500 and £5000.¹⁵⁵

Undoubtedly this increased availability of funding for community-based projects has had a significant impact on the development of community history in recent years. It

¹⁵² Davies, S, 2000, 'A Million before the Millennium: Oral History and the Lottery', *Oral History*, 28(1) & Perks, R, 1999, 'Heritage Lottery Fund and Oral History: A quick guide for applicants', *Oral History*, 27(1).

¹⁵³ Hewison, R & Holden, J, 2004, *Challenge and Change: HLF and Cultural Value. A report to the Heritage Lottery Fund*, p.3 available at www.demos.co.uk/publications, viewed 30.04.07.

¹⁵⁴ See Davies, 2000 for an outline of the priorities/targets for HLF and overview of projects funded up to 2000.

¹⁵⁵ Davies, 2000. Post 2000 HLF has streamlined its schemes and funding can be obtained for up to 5 years see www.hlf.org.uk viewed 26.04.07.

has provided considerable amounts of money for groups to undertake projects they might not otherwise do, and has brought small community groups together to work in partnership with larger organisations such as museums. HLF funding has enabled groups to employ project workers and have sufficient resources to run projects rather than being dependent solely on goodwill and volunteers. Whilst volunteer-led projects are encouraged, to obtain funding and subsequently manage the project skills in fundraising and administration are required, which more often than not means having paid workers (or volunteers with specialised skills). Consequently, groups have become project-led, having to adapt to comply with the latest funding criteria, as Holden argues,

[Groups] have become very good at describing their value in terms of social outcomes [...] Culture now delivers government policy by other means. The effect has been to favour individuals and organisations that have become fluent in the jargon of public policy. Funding decisions have become safe, and cultural producers have tailored their outputs to meet the latest round of funding policy.¹⁵⁶

As with the MSC scheme there is an issue of sustainability. HLF funds projects for a fixed term, which is not beneficial to community history groups in the long-term. As a result there are many groups that form for a specific project, but stop once the project is completed, or are 'on hold' until further funding can be secured.¹⁵⁷ Projects are often run in partnership with larger organisations - who are increasingly required to engage with their constituent communities - such as museums, archives, and libraries and in some instances universities, all organisations with their own agendas, constraints, and ways of working, which may be in conflict with grassroots groups. In effect HLF does not support the long-term development of community history groups; its project focus in effect favours larger organisations. This raises questions as to whether community history has now become defined by funding agendas and organisational demands or by grassroots community history groups.

Conclusion

This thesis does not in any way assume that all community history groups or projects have been or are involved with one or more of the three movements discussed in this chapter. However, I would suggest that the groups have all, to varying degrees, been

¹⁵⁶ Holden, J, 2004, '*Capturing Cultural Values: How culture has become a tool of government policy*, p.1 available at www.demos.co.uk/publications viewed 30.03.07.

¹⁵⁷ For example Kings Cross Voices Oral History Project, see www.kingscrossvoices.org.uk.

influenced in some way by them. What this chapter has done is use History Workshop, FWWCP and OHS as the basis to explore key developments in community history. While they all sought to democratise historical practice they took different approaches with different emphases, in part determined by the beliefs and motivations of the individuals involved.

Through this examination it is evident that over the past thirty years external factors such as funding and technological advancements, as well as the changing face of British politics, have played a significant role in the way these movements have developed. Likewise their ways of organising and working practices have been important in terms of how well (and willing) they have been able to adapt to change. The ideals of key people have also been influential in shaping the movements. Through the following case studies, I explore how this generalised combination of internal and external factors, framed by the debates on community history raised in the previous chapter, impacted on QueenSpark, BHRU and Living Archive. In doing so I will consider to what extent these factors influence their practices, and what their specific experiences tells us about the nature of community history more broadly.

Chapter Four: QueenSpark¹

Everyone can write a book. We believe that by enabling people to speak for themselves we can make our own history.²

Introduction: the origins of QueenSpark

QueenSpark began in 1972 as a campaign to stop Brighton council allowing the development of the Royal Spa buildings in Queens Park, East Brighton, into a casino and restaurant. Local residents who used the park felt strongly that the buildings should be used for the community, in particular as a nursery school, and were angry at the lack of consultation on the part of the Council in assessing residents' needs. Realising that unless they, as residents, got together to campaign against the proposals no one else would, they began organising public meetings and lobbying the Council. However, it was the launch of the bi-monthly street newspaper *QueenSpark* in December 1972, produced initially to inform local residents of the Spa campaign, that was to mark the start of QueenSpark's gradual metamorphosis from community action group into the country's longest surviving community publishing and writing group.³

In May 1973 the Council accepted that the Royal Spa building should be used for educational and amenity purposes, and by October the Council agreed the money for a nursery school (which eventually opened in 1977).⁴ Consequently, *QueenSpark* No 3, which came out in December 1973, marked a turning point for QueenSpark and a broadening of its objectives. Having won the Spa campaign and realising the potential of working together for change, QueenSpark began to direct attention to community facilities in Brighton more widely.⁵ For example the group became involved in the Marina campaign, a Brighton-wide campaign to alter plans for the development of a new 'commercial' marina, to include public amenities for the benefit of local residents.⁶

¹ While QueenSpark eventually became known solely as QueenSpark Books and more recently QueenSpark Publishers (2006), for the purpose of clarity 'QueenSpark' will be used throughout this chapter.

² 'About the Series' on the back of Browne, K.J., 1975, *Out of the Blue – and Blues*, Brighton, QueenSpark Books.

³ While it was intended to bring the paper out 6 times a year, in reality it was often less, as production and distribution were entirely dependent on volunteers.

⁴ QueenSpark (hereafter QS), Working Notes (hereafter WN), Spa Chronology, 1975.

⁵ It was in fact only a partial victory as they had originally campaigned for a nursery school, park centre, café and adventure playground to be built.

⁶ QS, WN, Marina Campaign Documentation, 1973-74.

QueenSpark was the means by which local residents were informed of events and activities and encouraged to get involved.

QueenSpark No 3 was also significant, however, for the introduction of a local history section ‘Sparchives’. This was to have the biggest impact on the way in which *QueenSpark* gradually evolved from community action group to community history group. Sparchives comprised local historical information and residents’ personal reminiscences put together by pensioner Molly Morley, and it was a well received addition to the paper. It encouraged an awareness of the locality, with the idea that telling the area’s history would generate a sense of belonging, bringing together those who had been born and bred in the area and recent incomers. Queens Park and neighbouring Hanover had been traditionally working-class areas, but the opening of the University of Sussex in 1961 and Brighton Polytechnic in 1968 brought an influx of middle-class professionals which gradually changed the demographics of the area. More importantly this influx included people who saw community politics as the means to instigate change and restructure social power, and crucially bring people together in association:

If our say is to be effective we think we must first say it to each other, argue about it, and then say it together [...] There is so much working to separate us – everyone for themselves, the loss of local shops, families and friends moving apart. We hope some of our work is on the other side.⁷

Whilst *QueenSpark* did not form as a community history group, the introduction of Sparchives sowed the seeds of interest in the history of the area and in particular people’s own memories, which culminated in the publication in 1974 of Albert Paul’s *Poverty, Hardship but Happiness: those were the days 1903-1917*. This publication was a critical moment for *QueenSpark* and marked the start of *QueenSpark Books*, initially an off-shoot of *QueenSpark* (although the names *QueenSpark* and *QueenSpark Books* were used interchangeably for several years and lead to some confusion).

The decision to publish a book following on from the successful community paper cannot be viewed in isolation. Chapter three situated the development of History Workshop, FWWCP, and OHS within a growing debate on cultural democracy and making history (and writing) accessible to all. Two of the founding members of *QueenSpark*, Eileen and Stephen Yeo, were history lecturers at the University of Sussex

⁷ QS, WN, leaflet sent out to gather help with the newspaper and books, 1975.

in the School of Cultural and Community Studies, and were involved with History Workshop. Their particular interest in social history and the democratising of history played a significant part in the decision to publish Paul's book. At the same time, QueenSpark was connecting with, and took inspiration from, other community publishing groups such as Centerprise. In fact the move into book publishing was a natural progression from Sparchives.⁸

However, in order to publish books, QueenSpark needed to find financial support. It achieved this mainly through South-East Arts (SE Arts).⁹ By accepting its first annual grant in 1978 and subsequent annual grants, QueenSpark slowly began to change. It had to negotiate with SE Arts over the direction it took and comply with rules set out by SE Arts. The gradual move towards a more professional organisation, instigated by a funding organisation keen that QueenSpark adopt a constitution and formalise its way of working, would see QueenSpark change radically over time. In part this was a direct response to a changing social and political climate. However, it can also be viewed in light of Goetchius' comments on community group development: the gradual move from an informal, friendship based group to the final stage where the group is, 'an established voluntary body which can associate and negotiate on an equal footing with other statutory and voluntary bodies in the community.'¹⁰ As we will see in chapter six, this process also occurred within Living Archive.

In order to continue publishing and initiate new ventures such as writing workshops, QueenSpark needed money. To obtain money QueenSpark needed funding, and to receive funding it had to be deemed 'suitable' by funders; to have credibility and stability with formal structures in place. In order to grow it was inevitable that QueenSpark would change, and this chapter will explore the complex ways in which QueenSpark responded to external pressures. However, change was not instigated by external drivers alone. Internal factors such as the personalities, interests and motivations of key activists/members played an important part in the way QueenSpark

⁸ QS, Grant Information, QueenSpark Local History Book Series: Number 1, 1974.

⁹ SE Arts was one of 10 independent regional arts boards who were allocated money from the Arts Council of Great Britain (which became the Arts Council of England in 1994). QueenSpark applied to both SE Arts and the Arts Council receiving funding from one or the other (sometimes a grant made up of contributions from both), but by 1984 it was receiving funding solely from SE Arts. In 2002 the Arts Council and the regional boards joined together to form one organisation with regional offices, becoming Arts Council England.

www.culture.gov.uk/Reference_library/Publications/archive_2003/arts_funding_guide.htm viewed 30.03.07.

¹⁰ Goetchius, G, 1969, *Working with Community Groups. Using community development as a method of social work*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.38.

evolved over time and the chapter examines these in detail too. I first turn, however, to the meaning and significance of ‘community’ within the QueenSpark context.

Making a community?

In the 1970s the Queens Park area was predominately working-class, but in common with many groups in FWWCP it was the local ‘middle-class activists’ who were at the forefront of QueenSpark. This is not to suggest that they were the only committed members; many residents from different backgrounds were actively involved. However it was those who had the time, and certainly in the early days the skills needed, such as being able to research and present findings and argue effectively, who got QueenSpark up and running. Indeed it would have been impossible for QueenSpark to achieve what it did without some members taking on most of the responsibility for organising meetings, publicity and the paper production. Those members such as the Yeos, Penny and Michael Dunne, and Frances and Robin Murray came to be seen as ‘leaders’ of the group, whether they wanted to be or not. Certainly their individual interests were to influence the way QueenSpark initially worked and developed. The Yeos were history lecturers, as was Michael Dunne; Penny Dunne was a solicitor (which was important for the campaigning side of QueenSpark); Robin Murray was a radical economist at the Institute of Development Studies and later the GLC; and Frances Murray was involved in adult literacy. They were, by all accounts, dynamic and committed individuals with differing interests and ideas, who formed the nucleus of the group.¹¹ Yet, as Ursula Howard commented, ‘[it is] important to stress that many others were involved long and short term as activists, book producers and sellers of *QueenSpark*, from neighbours to students [often of the Yeos] to pensioners. It was a fluid set of people, some with more influence than others.’¹²

The name QueenSpark was a play on the name of the area and park, Queens Park, and borrowed ‘Spark’ from Lenin’s paper *Iskra* (The Spark); its name thus revealed the key activists’ political leanings. However, this did not mean that all those involved shared the same political views (or were indeed Leninists), or saw themselves as activists. People had different motivations for being involved. For some working together collectively in order to have control over local issues was an explicitly political act; for others the motivation was less politicised. Forging a community spirit and

¹¹ QS Questionnaire, Nick Osmond, 06.06.07.

¹² Howard, U, 2008, Comments on earlier draft of chapter, 28.11.08.

bringing people closer together was the key factor in some residents' involvement. There was nonetheless a common sense that the 'local' was the most effective basis for action, and a shared belief in the fundamental importance of 'community' as a tangible entity:

Our aim has been to give public voice to people normally without it. We believe in 'community' and in 'democracy', but as goods, which have to be made rather than simply defended. We wish to help towards a situation, in which decision-making, creativity, self-produced and self-controlled work, entertainment, and education, and culture become common, shared and associated possessions.¹³

Whilst understandings of community are complex, as demonstrated in chapter two, it is clear that those incomers that formed the nucleus of QueenSpark saw community as an active and self-conscious process, underpinned by ideas of mutuality. Whether this was a view shared by the old-time residents is unknown, although there were some tensions between working-class and middle-class ideas of community in the area.¹⁴ Certainly the newspaper sought to develop / enhance a sense of community and bring people together through articles and letters. However 'history' offered a key means of 're/making' a community and creating a sense of belonging. The popularity of Sparchives highlighted a groundswell of interest in people's histories.

From community paper to community books

Sparchives prompted local resident Albert Paul to write his memoirs and submit his manuscript to the paper for inclusion. The group felt that the manuscript was too interesting to be broken up and used as extracts, and decided to publish it as the first in a potential book series. By 1977 QueenSpark had published four autobiographies (although the second book by Katherine Browne was more poetry than autobiography), and had 21 manuscripts and project ideas under consideration. These included individual autobiography as well as proposals for a photography history-based book, and a book about local shops.¹⁵ Whilst QueenSpark had formed as a community campaign, and had directed its attention to other campaigns once the Royal Spa campaign was won, QueenSpark Books, as an off-shoot of QueenSpark, was gaining momentum and those involved with the book series were seeing the potential of community publishing. The popularity of Sparchives, the interests of key activists, the debates on cultural

¹³ QS, Progress Report and Identification of Needs 1974-1977.

¹⁴ Osmond, 2007.

¹⁵ QS, 1977, Progress Report.

democracy, and QueenSpark's participation in the formation of FWWCP in 1976 were undoubtedly factors in the growing centrality of books.

Whilst the paper continued to be produced alongside the book series, after producing 10 issues there was debate over its future and the direction it should take. Some felt it should have a more definite viewpoint; be more political.¹⁶ Nonetheless by issue 11 there was a shift in focus in the paper as it became less campaign focused and more 'newsy' providing information of local events and including cartoons and poems. Those activists that had been heavily involved in the paper had moved their focus and energy to the book series. However, opinions on making the books were varied and some believed that the books took energy away from the paper and should not be part of QueenSpark.¹⁷ This was felt partly because the fourth book, John Langley's *Always a Layman* (1976), was produced with people from the Sussex Society of Labour History, many of whom were not involved in QueenSpark activities.¹⁸ While the paper continued until 1985, ending with issue 33,¹⁹ the book series increasingly dominated QueenSpark activities, and it was through its books that QueenSpark developed its identity as a community history group.

Ways of organising: from group to limited company

Group organisation is directly influenced by the values and ideals of its members, and their aims and objectives in forming the group. This in turn has an impact on how the group is perceived, and the way it is able to grow. The initial structure of QueenSpark reflected a desire for openness and democracy that would encourage participation. In an attempt to move away from hierarchical structures there was no committee, except for a named treasurer, no constitution and no formal membership. This mirrored a wider desire in the late 1960s and early 1970s to organise and work in different and more inclusive ways: disillusionment with the Left meant that some people were looking to community politics as a way to make a difference, and change ways of working and organising. Indeed key activists such as the Yeos were interested in models of association and co-operative working which undoubtedly impacted on the way

¹⁶ QS, WN, 06.07.75.

¹⁷ QS, WN, 22.02.76.

¹⁸ QS, WN, 22.02.76. Many were connected with History Workshop and some such as Paddy Maguire became active in QueenSpark.

¹⁹ There was an issue in 1986 but this reflected QueenSpark's focus on writing and publishing.

QueenSpark initially developed.²⁰ Penny Dunne saw QueenSpark as an ‘experiment in political organisation’ involving as many people as possible unlike the trade union / Labour Party model of top down leadership.²¹ There were, of course, different levels of involvement, from active members (and there were different degrees of this), to general supporters (for example, those who only bought the newspaper). Ultimately involvement was dependent on time, commitment and personal interest, factors that applied throughout its history.

Initially QueenSpark was a self-financing, autonomous group. Money came from collections at meetings and donations and was used mainly for publicity purposes. Although having to pay to print the newspaper put a strain on finances, each issue usually covered its cost, and in this way QueenSpark was able to remain self-sufficient. From the outset there were working meetings held to discuss the paper and Spa campaign, and for getting people involved with production and distribution. Each issue of the paper had a work-team responsible for its production. Between 2000-2500 copies were printed and residents volunteered to act as distributors to sell the paper door to door. There was a deliberate policy not to sell through shops; selling door to door was seen as an active way to develop community consciousness and action.²²

From 1974 QueenSpark began to hold general monthly meetings, usually in a hired room in the Queens Park Tavern, which were open to all. These were intended more as forums where the paper and wider topics of local interest could be discussed away from the paper production meetings.²³ Apart from using a pub for the general meetings, all paper production was done at people’s homes with several members’ addresses being used as points of contact. It could be argued that a pub was perhaps not the most accessible of meeting places, but the stated intention was to make QueenSpark participatory and open. However, decisions were often left to a small group of people. In a sense it was natural that a core group would emerge to take over the majority of the organisational work. Nevertheless the influence this small group of mainly academics and professionals had within QueenSpark was disproportionate to their numbers, and one member came to see QueenSpark as ‘a sort of Fabian set-up’.²⁴ Some members were

²⁰ See for example, Yeo, S (ed.), *New Views of Co-operation*, London, Routledge, p.229.

²¹ QS, WN, Notes on QueenSpark by Penny Dunne, 20.9.75.

²² Woodin, T, 2009, ‘Working-class writing, alternative publishing and audience participation’, *Media, Culture & Society*, 31(1).

²³ QS, WN, 12.05.74.

²⁴ Deakin, A & Hayler, M, 1991 ‘QueenSpark Books’, *Mailout*, p.10.

concerned that the lack of structure was in fact preventing QueenSpark from being democratic and accessible. In 1980 Nicki Jackowska, a member of both QueenSpark and the Hanover Community Association wrote,²⁵

Too much structure can be prohibitive but without clearly defined procedures we can be reduced to 'in-groups' and personalities prevail [...] We see it more and more in terms of a political imperative now, that groups and movements such as ours are very accessible to a wider public.²⁶

Equally, whilst an open collective approach was thought to be more enabling for all members, with no clearly defined procedures meetings were often dominated by the more confident, articulate members. This was problematic, as the general meetings were the main decision making body of QueenSpark:

[...] a central problem to the lack of proper debate is the eloquence, intelligence and confidence of people [...] who as founders of Spark [sic] possibly feel they have the biggest investment in it. This has the effect of intimidating other people from speaking against the views of what appears to be a powerful 'in-group'. [...] The majority of people working with QueenSpark are not magnificent public speakers and in the face of such articulate 'authority' are simply intimidated and remain silent or grudgingly accept those plans and decisions that get parcelled out in such a coherent and convincing way by the 'in-group'.²⁷

QueenSpark's dependence, for its survival, on people giving their time and energy in producing the paper and associated activities meant that those who could make the biggest investment in the group often felt the greatest emotional attachment to the group and its ideals. As a result key members could become resistant to new ideas and change, leading to tensions developing between 'the old guard and the new wave'.²⁸ At the same time it was this passion and attachment that enabled QueenSpark to keep going without external support. Nonetheless this tension over the ownership of, and responsibility to, the group was to be a recurring theme as it grew.

When QueenSpark received its first annual grant (notably made to QueenSpark Books, not QueenSpark, which reinforced the importance of the books),²⁹ SE Arts

²⁵ Although several people were involved in both groups, and QueenSpark had been instrumental in helping HCA set up, their different approaches to organising – HCA adopted a more traditional working-class set-up with named officers and formal structures – led to tensions between the groups.

²⁶ QS, WN, Letter to Stephen Yeo from Nicki Jackowska, 20.03.80.

²⁷ QS, WN, Pauline Jones & Mike Sherrad, Thoughts about QueenSpark arising from the General meeting of 11th November 1979, 18.11.79.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ QueenSpark and QueenSpark Books had separate bank accounts.

required the group to formalise its practices. A constitution was one of the conditions of the award. The group (or at least those within the core group) was concerned that adopting a formal management structure would change their way of working, as Stephen Yeo's letter to Peter Carpenter at SE Arts indicates:

What we obviously want to avoid, throughout this whole series of changes following the grant, is taking shapes which will get in the way of what we want to be and do rather than enable it [...] We want to insist upon a certain amount of autonomy – the same kind of autonomy, in fact, which an individual artist has when in receipt of a grant. We are people of integrity with clearly stated objectives and have been given a grant to enable us to achieve those objectives better than we would without it. It must surely be mainly up to us as a grouping, rather than to you or to me, how precisely we use the grant [...] Do we really need tighter strings? This was not the impression I got when we were originally discussing our grant, and I am completely aware that our future grantability will depend on our use of this one.³⁰

Whilst the group discussed ways of organising that would enable it to stay as close as possible to its desired way of working, it decided to be an unincorporated voluntary organisation, which was in effect what QueenSpark already was.³¹ Although members had been visiting other groups in FWWCP looking at how they organised, there was still an anxiety that becoming a formal organisation would stifle QueenSpark, even though groups such as Centerprise and Peckham Publishing, who both had formal status, were extremely productive and dynamic.³²

The grant was used primarily to fund teams working on several new publications, as well as enabling the group, for the first time, to lease a shop front, at 71 Richmond Street, in October 1978. This became known as the QueenSpark Workshop and all activities were based here. However it was a short-lived venture and when the lease expired, unable to find suitable premises QueenSpark relocated to members' homes once more, with the Yeo's home at 13 West Drive becoming the unofficial office.

While QueenSpark recognised the need to pay someone to co-ordinate and provide administrative support for their activities, they saw this as a temporary arrangement which would enable projects to be set up and then run on their own with volunteers.³³ While a paid worker was, in reality, essential to ensure the day to day

³⁰ QS, Grant Information, letter from Stephen Yeo to Peter Carpenter, 16.06.78.

³¹ QS, WN, Minutes of Meeting, August 1978.

³² QS, WN, Minutes of Meeting, 03.09.79.

³³ QS, QueenSpark Books, 1977, Progress Report.

running of QueenSpark, there was reluctance to make this a permanent appointment. In the quest for cultural democracy there was opposition to ‘the idea that activism and commitment should become a paid occupation.’³⁴ Consequently the group was continually trying to find alternative ways of working creatively and effectively, and having tried a ‘conventional’ model of paid work in 1979, and deciding against it, the group came up with the idea of ‘Spudgets’. These were ‘specifically financed projects’ (using grant money), and anyone with an idea for a project could make a proposal at a general meeting. If the project met with approval, the persons applying would be awarded a sum of money, which would include payment for their labour. The general meeting supervised the spudget, and a spudget secretary was appointed.³⁵ The advantage of spudgets was that they were related to short-term individual tasks, which enabled money to be spread among more people.³⁶

Although QueenSpark spent considerable amounts of time scrutinizing its working practices it was still unresolved about how to organise, despite repeated requests from the Arts Council for details of its management structure.³⁷ In November 1982 QueenSpark set out its structure as an unincorporated voluntary organisation that was based on work teams formed around several activities, namely: producing the paper; the book series; Friday morning and Tuesday evening working sessions; and Spudgets.³⁸ Even though there was concern that having ‘office holders’ would restrict and dominate the group, in reality there was a reliance on a few members (namely those who were part of the weekday working sessions) to carry out the majority of the work. Projects supported by spudgets tended to have ‘convenors’, but these were often the same people involved in other QueenSpark activities. There were of course many people involved in activities to varying degrees at different times, and there were ebbs and flows within the group. However for QueenSpark to continue to function there had to be enough people to undertake the work, and during the ebbs those with the strongest attachment to QueenSpark felt the most responsibility to keeping it going.³⁹

Throughout the 1980s QueenSpark continued to grow, ‘like an amoeba, through splitting and multiplying into ever-new projects which contain but escape its

³⁴ Woodin, 2002, p.63.

³⁵ QS, WN, Spudgets 04.06.80.

³⁶ QS, WN, Minutes of Meeting, February 1982.

³⁷ QS, WN, Minutes of Meeting, 23.06.82.

³⁸ QS, WN 1980-1983, QueenSpark’s Associational Form, November 1982.

³⁹ Howard, 2008.

parenthood'.⁴⁰ The group began setting up writing groups, continued publishing books, and developed links with schools and adult education. Many of the projects sprang from members' personal interests. For example, Ursula Howard's work in adult literacy spilled over into QueenSpark developing links with adult education groups in Brighton such as the Friends Centre. Gerry Gregory saw QueenSpark as a series of projects rather than a homogenous group,⁴¹ and in 1987 QueenSpark described itself as 'essentially a "federation" of projects and workshops'.⁴² Yet as the number of projects grew a paid co-ordinator of some sort was increasingly seen as necessary to deal with, in particular, the administrative side of the work. Barbara Einhorn and Ursula Howard were employed in 1984 for a year as QueenSpark co-ordinators, and reflecting on this year Einhorn stated:

QueenSpark has always seen paid work as a matter for principled discussion rather than as a technicality: a community project like ours that tries to involve large numbers of people in co-operative, autonomous creativity has to be careful not to allow paid work to substitute for that creativity. At the same time 1984-85 has shown us how essential paid time is to enable voluntary time to be released.⁴³

In addition, in 1984 QueenSpark also took an office in Prior House, the new Unemployed Centre in Brighton. This provided a base for QueenSpark, in particular as a meeting place for the new writing groups that were being set up. From this point onwards QueenSpark always had its own office, which was especially important in establishing its identity beyond the Queens Park area, and making QueenSpark more public and accessible than when based in someone's home.

However, despite new premises and on-going projects, the mid-1980s saw a lull in activities and volunteers. Many of the original activists were moving on, either because of work commitments, personal reasons or after suffering burnout from so many years involvement: a situation familiar in many FWWCP groups at the time. There was concern that most of the administrative work was left to a small group. Communication between the various projects of QueenSpark was minimal, and again was left to those volunteers committed to keeping together the diverse activities under the QueenSpark umbrella.⁴⁴ There was a real fear that QueenSpark was close to folding, and that without

⁴⁰ QS, Annual Report, 1982-1983.

⁴¹ QS, Thesis & Dissertation on QSB, notes made by Gerry Gregory, 22.01.85.

⁴² QS, Annual Report, 1986-1987.

⁴³ QS, Development Programme 1984-87.

⁴⁴ This was a recurring problem even in the 1970s, especially in trying to organise work teams for the newspaper.

some form of paid co-ordination and a reorganisation of its activities it would not be able to continue.⁴⁵ As Kate Cornwall-Jones stated, ‘QS is a different type of project to that which it started out as and we need to sort out whether it is still worth holding together the wide variety of projects which the QS name now umbrellas.’⁴⁶

In 1987 the group employed Alistair Thomson one day a week as an administrative co-ordinator.⁴⁷ Thomson was a postgraduate history student at Sussex (supervised by Stephen Yeo) and a volunteer at QueenSpark. Under Thomson’s guidance QueenSpark consolidated its activities and increased its active membership. Thomson’s role in particular in raising the profile of QueenSpark locally as a community publisher, promoting the books, initiating education based activities and fundraising was central to re-establishing QueenSpark.⁴⁸ In July 1989, QueenSpark became a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, which Thomson remembers as partly being instigated by SE Arts, but also by his personal desire to have a ‘clear and solid structure that would ensure continuity’.⁴⁹ QueenSpark was now a legal company managed by a management committee with elected named officers, with a formal structure and a constitution that stated the aims of QueenSpark as follows:

To promote, manufacture and sell books, pamphlets and other literary works of writers living in Brighton and its environs and to promote, administer and run workshops and other events for writers living in Brighton and its environs.⁵⁰

What was meant by ‘literary work’ was left suitably vague in the constitution, no doubt to satisfy SE Arts who were keen for QueenSpark to move beyond working-class autobiography. However, the manuscripts group set out its policy more explicitly as publishing autobiography or local history based in Brighton and Hove and immediate surrounding areas, where fiction or poetry would only be published in anthologies of work from the writing groups.⁵¹

The committee comprised a representative from each workshop, the paid worker

⁴⁵ QS, WN, Invite to Emergency Meeting, 07.09.85.

⁴⁶ QS, WN, Minutes of Meeting, 04.04.86.

⁴⁷ Julie Everton was employed briefly in 1988 to co-ordinate the writing groups, after which the groups opted to self-convene. There was also a writing development worker for part of 1993, but the groups deemed the post unsuccessful and it was abandoned. Lewis, J & Sitzia, J, 1994, Review of the post of QS writing development worker.

⁴⁸ QS, Annual Report, 1987-1988.

⁴⁹ QS Questionnaire, Al Thomson, 16.04.07.

⁵⁰ QS, 1989, Memorandum and Articles of Association.

⁵¹ QS, Annual Report, 1989-1990.

and a representative from SE Arts, Brighton Borough Council and Hove Borough Council (who also provided funding at this stage).⁵² The committee was elected annually at the AGM and met four times a year. It was legally responsible for all QueenSpark decisions, but meetings were open to all members. Membership of QueenSpark, which had been open and fluid, was now formalised through the payment of a small annual fee. Workshops were free to members, but by joining QueenSpark members were agreeing to support the aims and ideals of QueenSpark. This new structure allowed QueenSpark to function as an organisation rather than a series of independent projects held together by a handful of committed members. The process of becoming a registered company also enabled QueenSpark to begin to put in place policies and formalise ways of working, that would ensure there was continuity when active members left. It was hoped that this new structure would offer a more democratic (and less chaotic) way of working.⁵³ By 1991 QueenSpark had a part-time paid worker (12 hours per week), an office group, three writing groups, a manuscript group, and several book production groups.

Although Thomson left in 1991, the role of a paid co-ordinator became part of QueenSpark's new structure, and the 1990s were marked by a period of intense activity. Rapid developments in technology changed the book production process, and enabled a greater number of books to be produced (which is discussed further on). The writing workshops, which were now well established, and QueenSpark's raised profile across Brighton and Hove, were drawing in new members, many with different interests and concerns than those in the early days; certainly class politics was not as strong as it had been.⁵⁴ The process of formalising ways of working and establishing what QueenSpark was and was not, was on-going. John Sitzia, in particular, played a central role in establishing the Manuscripts Group Policy, which for the first time set out precisely what QueenSpark published and how the book making groups would work (and is discussed later). The intention was to consolidate and make transparent processes to facilitate more efficient and clearer ways of working that were not dependent on any one individual. In addition, as Chair of QueenSpark, John Sitzia initiated another process of reflection and consultation in 1996, prompted by the departure of the then paid worker. This had highlighted a growing unease over a perceived dominance of the paid worker,

⁵² QS, Annual Report, 1988-1989.

⁵³ Deakin & Hayler, 1991.

⁵⁴ See Hayler, M & Thomson, A, 1995, 'Working with words: Active Learning in a Community Writing and Publishing Group', in Mace, (ed.) for an overview of motivations for involvement in the early 1990s.

and dissatisfaction expressed within some writing groups towards the aims of QueenSpark.

The process of review led to the post of co-ordinator being split into two; an administrator and a development worker, which was felt to be a more effective set-up. It had become increasingly evident that for QueenSpark to develop its activities, it needed someone with specific skills in fundraising and project development.⁵⁵ There were also changes to the management structure, which included meeting bi-monthly, forming an executive committee to deal with problems occurring between meetings, and the formation of a writing development group to support the writing groups.⁵⁶ The restructuring also coincided with QueenSpark obtaining new premises in 1997, which provided them with both an office and a meeting room. This meant QueenSpark's work no longer needed to be fitted around writing groups and meetings. Yet, even with structures in place to ensure continuity there were often difficulties in recruiting members to the management committee, particularly to positions of responsibility such as the chair. The formality of the posts and the perceived commitment frequently deterred people. Gradually towards the end of the 1990s, it came down to the paid workers to provide continuity and maintain QueenSpark.

However, what becomes evident through this examination of ways of working is that whilst 'core' groups inevitably emerged there was a self-awareness and a conscious effort within these groups to find co-operative and enabling ways of working that encouraged participation and a sense of ownership for all. This endless debating and reflection was in contrast to both BHRU and Living Archive's way of working, in part because they were formed under different circumstances with different priorities. While there were tensions and differing opinions within QueenSpark, it is clear that the process of working together, for example on books and the newspaper, was as important as the 'output'. Although becoming a limited company was intended to provide stability and sustainability, coupled with changes within funding policies and a push towards professionalisation, outputs and targets became more important than finding inclusive ways of working. The gradual shift from a voluntary-run group to one dependent on its paid workers reflected subtle changes that have occurred within groups such as

⁵⁵ See minutes from series of open meetings 27.11.95, 14.12.95, 08.01.96, 15.01.96, Management Committee (hereafter MC) minutes. Final agreements are summed up in the Annual Report 1995-1996.

⁵⁶ QS, Annual Report 1995-1996. The writing Development Group was a short-lived venture due to lack of interest. *QueenSpark News*, Autumn 1997.

QueenSpark over the past 30 years, and the changing nature of the role of activists/volunteers within such groups.

Paid worker versus volunteer

In the 1970s, for groups such as QueenSpark there was an emphasis on working collectively without the need for paid labour, as indicated above. There was a concern that paid workers would be seen as representatives of projects, in other words, ‘the ones whose views are most often heard because they are most readily available,’ and that this could disempower volunteers by ‘taking the decision-making out of the hands of the membership.’⁵⁷ Also there appeared to be an unwritten assumption that those who were paid for their labour would not have the same commitment and investment in the group as a volunteer / activist. Yet conversely, there was a recognition that without some form of paid work only those with time available could do much of the work, particularly work that ensured the day-to-day running of the group. This usually meant the unemployed, the retired, parents with small children (usually women), and those with flexible working hours such as students and lecturers.

As QueenSpark’s activities grew it was increasingly evident that some form of paid work was needed to co-ordinate the various activities, keep members informed, and deal with the increasing amount of administration that came with funding applications, if QueenSpark was to realise its ambitions.⁵⁸ As funding requirements changed and became more complex detailed reports of QueenSpark’s activities were required. Consequently dedicated time was needed to ensure QueenSpark was fulfilling its funding obligations. For example in 1984 SE Arts required a revised budget for QueenSpark’s proposed new developments, a monthly diary of activities for their assessment purposes, as well as quarterly accounts and final end of year accounts.⁵⁹ In addition QueenSpark was also encouraged to put together a three-year plan to expand and develop activities, which required a considerable amount of work for a group already stretched.⁶⁰ Relying on volunteers to undertake these tasks was not always possible, members’ commitments varied, and volunteers could not be held accountable if these tasks were not completed. Having a paid co-ordinator enabled QueenSpark to work more efficiently, and allowed volunteers energies to be directed towards its various

⁵⁷ Morley & Worpole, 1982, p.48.

⁵⁸ QS, WN, Minutes of Meeting 23.11.80.

⁵⁹ QS, Grant Information, Offer Letter from SE Arts, 27.04.84.

⁶⁰ QS, Development Programme 1984-1987, October 1984.

projects rather than being used to maintain the general administration. One tension was a subtle shift in responsibility for the group onto the paid worker/s:

The relationship between a paid worker and volunteers sometimes contradicts the democratic principles of a community publishing project. While the paid worker undoubtedly increases the efficiency of the group, knowledge, skills and power tend to accrue in that one person. Volunteers are often happy to leave administrative work and decisions to the paid worker.⁶¹

The role of paid worker came increasingly to include looking at ways to develop the group, which meant being aware of funding opportunities that could benefit QueenSpark. Furthermore as applying for funding became more complex and competitive, with application forms full of funding ‘jargon’, and groups needing to show how their projects fitted into funders’ priority areas, it became increasingly necessary to employ someone knowledgeable about funding policies and priorities. Subsequently skilled paid workers became essential for groups such as QueenSpark in order to survive. This meant that at times the paid workers rather than the group directed the way QueenSpark developed and as QueenSpark’s profile increased the paid worker/s was often seen as the ‘face’ of QueenSpark. Certainly from 1989 the influence of the paid worker/s was dependent on how active and strong the management committee was. A committee that accepted responsibility for running QueenSpark and supported the paid worker/s was more effective and democratic than one that handed over all responsibility to the paid worker/s.⁶² Ultimately this all depended on the time and commitment of the volunteers involved at any particular moment.

While the terms active member and volunteer were often used interchangeably within QueenSpark (and in the early days ‘activist’ was frequently used), the 1990s saw a growing ‘professional’ volunteer market and a formalisation of volunteers roles within organisations and groups.⁶³ Consequently there was a very subtle and gradual change in the nature of the role of a volunteer, and just as the role of the paid worker was formalised within QueenSpark, so was the role of the volunteer. In 1991 the group produced its first, very short, volunteer contract as well as a paid worker contract which stated that the paid worker was responsible for the co-ordination of the volunteer

⁶¹ QS, Annual Report, 1987-1988.

⁶² QS, MC minutes, 27.11.95.

⁶³ Woodin, 2002, discusses this shift in relation to FWWCP groups including QueenSpark.

workers.⁶⁴ As funding criteria changed and funders wanted groups to function more professionally it was inevitable that the role of volunteers and paid workers would gradually change. By 2000 QueenSpark had begun, with funding, a volunteer programme, briefly employed a part-time volunteer co-ordinator, and production of a volunteer manual.⁶⁵ The volunteer programme marked a distinct move as there was no longer the strong sense of ownership of QueenSpark by its members. The need for skilled paid workers to deliver services gently shifted the balance from a voluntary-run group to a professional organisation with volunteers. As Danny Birchall (Chair from 1997-1999) reflected,

It's hard to argue that any small organisation doesn't need more money, more resources, better organisation, but the way in which QueenSpark was becoming managed began to chafe against the reasons I'd joined. 'Volunteering' was becoming professionalised: where before I'd seen 'members', some active and some less active, now we were recruiting 'volunteers' to do specific tasks, recruiting people as volunteers. Meanwhile, more and more of the day-to-day management of the organisation was being done by the paid workers. While it wasn't quite like an Oxfam shop (professional managers, volunteers with a given number of hours per week), I wondered what would happen if our funding ever disappeared: QueenSpark had existed as an autonomous organisation before state funding: could it exist afterwards?⁶⁶

Funding - a double-edged sword?

Since 1978 funding has played a crucial role in QueenSpark's development. The first grant was to help QueenSpark develop its publishing activities, and the group hoped that after this initial cash injection they would be able to become self-financing through book sales.⁶⁷ However book revenue alone could not sustain its desired level of activity or ambitions and the group continued to apply for and receive funding every year. SE Arts liked to provide on-going financial support (even though groups had to re-apply each year),⁶⁸ but as a public body it had a duty to encourage new groups. Consequently QueenSpark had to continually demonstrate its worth and be prepared to have its funding reduced or even stopped. In the early years when there were no paid workers or premises to pay for, the dependency on funding was not as great as it was to become in

⁶⁴ QS, MC minutes, 01.07.91.

⁶⁵ QS, 2002, Volunteer Manual.

⁶⁶ Birchall, D, *QS Newsletter*, Spring 2002.

⁶⁷ All book revenue went back into QueenSpark and neither authors nor book makers received payment.

⁶⁸ QS, WN, Minutes of Meeting, August 1978.

the 1990s. In a sense QueenSpark became caught in a funding trap that affected many small organisations. The regular funding enabled QueenSpark to begin to fulfil its ambitions to produce a series of local working-class histories, and consequently raised expectations of what they could achieve. At the same time being dependent on funding, particularly once it began paying workers and rent, left the group vulnerable to any changes in funding priorities.

Initially, although SE Arts placed certain criteria on QueenSpark, such as being apolitical and having a formal structure, there was a certain degree of flexibility for QueenSpark to conduct itself as the group saw fit. However there was a subtle shift away from this autonomy as SE Arts gradually imposed more conditions and recommendations on the way QueenSpark worked as the regional arts bodies became more accountable to those allocating funds, in this instance the Arts Council. Essentially this was public money that QueenSpark had to demonstrate was being used as effectively as possible and, as a result, groups like QueenSpark were gradually encouraged to become fully professional in their practice.⁶⁹ To facilitate this move more funding, in the form of one-off payments, became available for training particularly in marketing and computer skills, in order to develop the skills base of groups, and help them function more efficiently. By the late 1990s this type of support was increasing, for example in 1998 SE Arts allocated QueenSpark an advisor from the Association for Business Sponsorship to find ways to improve book sales. In addition QueenSpark received funding to employ a fundraising ‘expert’ to work with the development worker on a three-year initiative to help QueenSpark move forward.⁷⁰ Consultants were also brought in to run training courses for the management committee on organisational management. Yet this move was counter-productive, as some members felt intimidated by the perceived commitment being on the committee entailed and would not become involved in an official capacity.⁷¹

Whilst funding enabled QueenSpark to move its publishing activities forward, there was often a process of negotiation over the group’s perceived vision. By accepting funding the group was obliged to accept comments and advice from SE Arts which sometimes directed QueenSpark into areas that the group had not necessarily planned for (or wanted):

⁶⁹ Hampson, J & Richardson, P, 2004, *Kitchen table to laptop: independent publishing in England*, London, Arts Council England.

⁷⁰ QS, MC minutes, Development Worker’s Report, 04.08.98.

⁷¹ QS, MC minutes, 10.06.99.

It seems churlish now to pass two further comments from the Committee but I believe that it is important for you to be aware of its thinking. The first refers to our previous discussions about the need for QS Books to branch out from its fairly limited range to tackle more demanding work particularly fiction. [...] The second concerns the distribution of QS publications outside the immediate Brighton area. Again we have talked about this and I know that this distribution has improved. We take the view however that now your project has achieved a certain level of public funding it has a responsibility to that wider public to enable it to experience your publications, and I hope you will continue to bear this in mind.⁷²

QueenSpark always resisted attempts to move into publishing fiction. Its interest was autobiography (in various forms), and it always argued for recognition of the importance of this form of writing, but it did gradually branch out from the standard one-person autobiography, as demonstrated later in this chapter. The setting up of writing groups from 1984 onwards to encourage writing within the community was viewed positively by SE Arts. Also QueenSpark occasionally published anthologies of poetry and prose produced by the writing groups, both to celebrate the groups and encourage writers to join.⁷³ As funding continued to be forthcoming it can be surmised that these moves went some way to appeasing demands for QueenSpark to branch out. However by the late 1990s SE Arts were increasingly keen for QueenSpark to be more pro-active and increase their writing activities to involve new and diverse audiences and writers. Through the regional arts lottery programme QueenSpark secured funding for the 'Write from the Beginning' project, which included creative writing courses, a performance poetry project, a reminiscence writing project, and several fee-paying creative-writing courses such as a novel writing course.⁷⁴

QueenSpark did work hard at increasing its profile (although never quite to the satisfaction of SE Arts who continued to raise the issue at regular intervals). This was in a sense inevitable as QueenSpark wanted to publicise the books and use them as a springboard for further activities. Consequently the group began moving out from the Queens Park area by working with schools all over Brighton, running writing groups and connecting with local groups such as the WEA and the Lewis Cohen Urban Studies

⁷² QS, Grant Information, Letter from John Buston, 05.03.81.

⁷³ *Writers Reign* (1991), followed by three small anthologies of poetry and prose from the writing groups (and other members) of QueenSpark, and *From Circle to Spiral* (1995), a writer's handbook and anthology.

⁷⁴ QueenSpark Books, 2002, *Write from the Beginning*, Brighton, QueenSpark Books.

Centre.⁷⁵ By the 1990s QueenSpark began several collaborations with the University of Sussex most notably, two projects on strokes – one with stroke survivors, the other with their carers.⁷⁶ The impact of these moves was a shift in focus from the community of East Brighton to the communities of the whole town. This shift was reflected in the books that were published through the 1990s.

As well as increasing distribution, SE Arts also wanted QueenSpark to increase the cover price of books, and make them more profitable.⁷⁷ However QueenSpark wanted to keep the cost of the books low and therefore affordable for the local community, at the same time as ensuring the books covered their costs.⁷⁸ As a result pricing and marketing the books was an on-going dilemma for the group,⁷⁹ mainly because QueenSpark had to demonstrate to SE Arts that their books were well received, and more importantly bought by the public. Consequently sales viability began to be an important factor in choosing which books to publish as a letter to a potential author demonstrates:

We have to consider sales viability as one of our primary criteria if we are to survive financially and our manuscripts group feel that it would not be easy to retail and distribute a detailed statistical historical survey such as yours. This in no way detracts from the quality of your work and says more about our own limitations as publishers.⁸⁰

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s SE Arts as QueenSpark's main funder was keen for the group to seek funding from other organisations. The aim was to encourage QueenSpark to move away from its dependence on SE Arts, as well as joining up with other groups to make joint bids. From the mid-1980s QueenSpark received small grants from the WEA to run writing workshops and from the local councils to support and develop writing groups in the local area.⁸¹ Most notably in 1997 QueenSpark received £10,000 from the Foundation for Sports and Arts to update its computer and office equipment.⁸² Prior to receiving the grant QueenSpark had two outdated computers which prevented the group from keeping up with the rapid changes in computer

⁷⁵ Funders were keen for QueenSpark to make contact with other local groups and collaborate on projects.

⁷⁶ Osmond, N, 1995, 'Life after Stroke: Special Interest Book-Writing Groups', in Stuart, M & Thomson, A (eds.), *Engaging with Difference – the Other in Adult Education*, London, NIACE

⁷⁷ QS, WN, Minutes of Meeting 09.12.79.

⁷⁸ QS, Annual Report 1989-1990. For information on factors affecting the independent publishing industry such as distribution and sales, see Hampson & Richardson, 2005.

⁷⁹ QS, Development Report, 1984 -1987.

⁸⁰ QS, Manuscripts Group (hereafter MS), Letter to author (Mr Roberts) 24.05.90.

⁸¹ East Sussex County Council (ESCC), Brighton Borough Council and Hove Borough Council. When Brighton and Hove became a unitary council in 1997 funding from ESCC stopped.

⁸² QS, MC minutes, 17.02.97 & 09.12.97.

technology. As a result members often used their own equipment to produce the books, as was the case with *Catching Stories* (1996). The significance of the grant also needs to be seen against QueenSpark's regular funding. For the period 1997-1998 QueenSpark received £8300 from SE Arts and £2200 from Brighton and Hove council; consequently a grant of £10,000 for equipment was a major achievement.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, from the late 1990s onwards the National Lottery and HLF had a major impact on groups such as QueenSpark by providing funding to undertake community history projects that previously would have been deemed unsuitable for public funding. This funding, in the form of time-limited project grants, whilst enabling a wide range of projects to receive funding, left groups such as QueenSpark in a more vulnerable position. The pattern of funding started to shift from core funding (which supported on-going services and was vital to a group such as QueenSpark) to project funding which favoured larger organisations, such as museums. The effect of this was that small organisations like QueenSpark, with low financial turnover and few paid staff, relied heavily on volunteers who were not always deemed suitable by funders to manage large grants.⁸³ Equally within QueenSpark itself there was a degree of anxiety about its ability to manage large-scale funded projects. For example, on completion of *Catching Stories*, a book resulting from a large-scale oral history project carried out by QueenSpark (which received no additional funding other than the yearly SE Arts grant), the group decided not to carry out another large project without additional external funding. The project had exhausted volunteer resources and core finances; it was felt that another project of this scale needed to be properly resourced with paid project workers. In pursuing this policy in 1997 QueenSpark secured funding of £4500 through the National Lottery *Arts 4 Everyone Express* scheme to initiate the first stages of a project on youth culture in Brighton and Hove from 1950 to the present day.⁸⁴ Although there were two paid project workers (four hours each per week), the project nevertheless was dependent on volunteer support. This anticipated support was not forthcoming, as many volunteers had moved on after *Catching Stories*, and although QueenSpark fulfilled its commitment to the project, plans to apply for further funding and develop it into a large-scale project were shelved.⁸⁵

⁸³ QS, Development Fund Bid, July 1999.

⁸⁴ QS, Annual Report, 1996-1997.

⁸⁵ QS, MC minutes, Youth Culture Project Report, 04.08.98.

Underlying this decision was a tension over the direction QueenSpark was moving in; its increasing reliance on paid work to undertake projects, and how this might change QueenSpark further. This was a dilemma for a group such as QueenSpark, which had always celebrated its strong voluntary base and distinctive way of working. Yet without increased funding it was becoming more difficult for the group to realise its ambitions. SE Arts, who were undergoing their own changes, became more insistent on QueenSpark developing projects that would bring in funding from other sources and expand its range of activities, such as the 'Write from the Beginning' project. There was a subtle move from the group deciding their own priorities to being directed more by funding priorities. For example the *Children's Millennium Anthology* (2001) resulted from a project specifically designed on request by Brighton and Hove Council for its 'Place to Be' initiative.⁸⁶

Funding undoubtedly had an impact on the way in which QueenSpark worked. It enabled it to achieve many of its goals, but the group had to adapt and gradually changed from a radical grassroots group to a professional community arts group. It increasingly had to compete against other groups and organisations for funding and therefore demonstrate its worth and its ability to successfully run projects, which meant a growing dependency on paid workers. In addition changes in funding priorities also affected the group, from being able to decide its own priorities and interests it had to adapt to a funding climate that was policy driven, but without full-time core staff it struggled to maximise funding opportunities. As Sheena Macdonald reflected, 'It was a shame that there was a constant struggle for funding, which became dispiriting. What we needed was core funding, rather than project based funding.'⁸⁷ Ultimately by the late 1990s funding had come to dominate QueenSpark's activities, and the rapid changes in technology that occurred through the 1990s, whilst enabling QueenSpark to expand its publishing brought further demands from funders.

Technology: From Letraset to Internet

Technological advances in the past 25 years brought their own challenges and significantly affected QueenSpark's working practices. Until 1985 the group had used typewriters, Letraset and offset litho printing in order to produce its books and newspaper. This was a laborious process in which members had to physically layout the

⁸⁶ QueenSpark received £15,000 over two years. QS, MC minutes, 21.07.99.

⁸⁷ QS Questionnaire, Sheena Macdonald, 22.02.07.

text and then paste it up as intended for the final copy.⁸⁸ However in 1986 QueenSpark ran a weekend workshop, supported by the WEA, on making books, with the aim of pasting up Olive Masterson's *Circle of Life*. This marked a milestone in that the group used a word processor for the first time, which 'revolutionized the process' of producing the text, and revealed the potential of computers in making books.⁸⁹

The arrival of Desktop Publishing (DTP) and laser printers significantly transformed the process of publishing and made it cheaper, easier and more accessible.⁹⁰ Initially QueenSpark used the equipment at the Lewis Cohen Urban Studies Centre, where QueenSpark occupied an office on a part-time basis (after moving from Prior House in 1989), but in 1991 QueenSpark acquired its own computer and DTP software.⁹¹ This along with major improvements in photocopying equipment facilitated QueenSpark's move into a new phase of publishing through the Market Books series. From 1974 QueenSpark published approximately two books a year with a print run of 2000 copies per book. Most were perfect-bound and increasingly expensive to produce due to rising printing and binding costs,⁹² although some, in the early days, were stitched, depending on size, numbers required and budget.⁹³ Market Books were 'printed' by photocopy, not offset litho printing and had a stapled card cover rather than a colour, glossy card cover. These kept costs down, but meant the books could be no longer than 64 pages, approximately 20,000 words. Photocopying was more cost-effective and enabled a shorter print run, usually between 300-500 (with the possibility of further copies depending on sales), unlike offset litho printing which cost considerably more and needed a larger print run (at least 1500) to make it cost effective.⁹⁴

With lower production costs and using DTP, QueenSpark hoped to bring out 12 Market Books a year, enabling it to get more authors into print and thus increase the range and variety of books available. It also wanted to revive its informal sales outlets, which had gradually dwindled over time, and return to its roots of breaking down

⁸⁸ QueenSpark did not have its own printing equipment as it was too expensive, but offset printing allowed the group to do everything apart from the final stage of printing.

⁸⁹ QS, WN, Minutes of Meeting, 13.08.86.

⁹⁰ DTP enabled users to use a personal computer with the relevant software package to do page layout for publishing.

⁹¹ It moved to its own premises in the Brighton Media Centre in 1992.

⁹² This meant the 'content' of the book – in other words the pages – had a cover made from heavier paper, which was glued at the spine.

⁹³ Howard, 2008.

⁹⁴ See Sitzia, L, 1997, 'QueenSpark Books - publishing life stories for the local community', *Local Historian*, 27(4) for more information on the printing of market books vs. perfect-bound books.

traditional routes of publishing and selling.⁹⁵ QueenSpark never achieved this target because despite improved technology, the books were made by volunteers and dependent on the time people were able to give, as well as there being available funds to publish. More importantly though, regardless of technology, bookmaking in QueenSpark was an inherently slow process. It was a democratic process, working as a team, with tasks divided, where the editing was done co-operatively, with the author involved as far as possible. It was also a learning process, where those with skills taught those new to bookmaking. Moreover whilst the cost of these books was purposely kept low to be affordable to the local community (they were sold for £1 increasing to £1.50 in 1996⁹⁶), this barely covered the cost of making them. Nonetheless by the mid-1990s, declining sales suggested that the low cost was not sufficient incentive to buy. It became apparent that the pamphlet style of market books was not encouraging sales, and Nick Osmond, one of the instigators of the Market Books, remembers at least one author withdrawing their manuscript when they discovered it would not be published as a ‘proper book’, in other words perfect-bound.⁹⁷ Despite these problems however, the introduction of Market Books was an important move for QueenSpark in expanding its range of books and reconnecting with the local community by raising its profile. While it did not publish as many books as hoped, the early 1990s was a period of great productivity with 28 Market Books produced between 1991 and 1996.

QueenSpark continued to publish the occasional perfect-bound book alongside the Market Book series. These publications were either personal histories over 64 pages long, such as Ron Piper’s *Take Him Away* (1995), or collective oral histories such as *Catching Stories*. Publishing some books that conformed to conventional/commercial ideas of a ‘book’, at the same time as publishing the Market Books that challenged perceived notions of a book, proved problematic. Certainly some members of the public associated the cheapness and ‘look’ of Market Books with poor quality content, which was not the case, but it became increasingly difficult to justify what appeared to be a two-tier system.⁹⁸ By 1997 advances in printing and book-binding technology meant that it was possible to produce short runs of photocopied perfect-bound books at a comparable cost to the Market Books. This, coupled with poor sales, led QueenSpark to

⁹⁵ Hayler, M, & Osmond, N, 1992, ‘Voices Waiting to be Heard: QueenSpark Market Books’, *Oral History*, 20(2).

⁹⁶ QS, MC minutes, 29.01.96.

⁹⁷ QS Questionnaire, Nick Osmond, 06.06.07.

⁹⁸ Sitzia, J, 2009, Comments on earlier draft of chapter, 20.08.09.

abandon the Market Book series.⁹⁹ Equally, by the mid-1990s authors were keen to see their books in bookshops, and most bookshops would not take Market Books because they were not perfect-bound, or they wanted a sales margin that QueenSpark could not afford to offer on Market Books.

The late 1990s saw rapid advances in technology, especially multimedia which presented both opportunities and challenges. The speed of change and the increasing technical skills it necessitated presented problems for a small organisation like QueenSpark. The new multimedia technology raised expectations of what could be achieved, and funders were keen that groups made use of it but did not always provide the resources or money needed to enable this.¹⁰⁰ In 1997 QueenSpark launched its first website, a low-key affair maintained by one volunteer, but it was the affiliation of the group Make Multimedia History (MMH) to QueenSpark in 1999 which brought QueenSpark into the multimedia era.¹⁰¹ MMH (which later became known as 'My Brighton and Hove') ran courses in making websites for local life history projects, and weekly drop-in sessions for people to practise their skills while working on specific local projects.¹⁰² The affiliation was mutually beneficial. QueenSpark provided a 'home' for MMH and the kudos that came with being associated with an established community group, while MMH redesigned the QueenSpark website as one of its projects and helped QueenSpark keep up with technological changes by running occasional courses and updating their computer systems. The website offered the opportunity to promote QueenSpark and its work, and the group was hopeful it would help with book marketing.¹⁰³

The technological changes that occurred throughout the 1990s enabled QueenSpark to produce more books than at any other time in its history. Through the Market Book series in particular the group was able to increase the range and diversity of the books published. Their lower production costs, and shorter print runs meant the group could be more adventurous in its choice of publication; if some books did not sell well, it was not such a financial burden on the group. However one consequence of the availability and ease of using DTP meant that many groups and organisations that may

⁹⁹ They did however keep the format for in-house projects such as poetry anthologies (MS minutes 14.10.97).

¹⁰⁰ See Hampson & Richardson, 2004, for a discussion on the impact of technology on independent publishers and their relationship with the Arts Council.

¹⁰¹ QS, MC minutes, 21.07.99.

¹⁰² See www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk for an overview of the history of the group.

¹⁰³ QS, MC minutes, 18.05.00.

have once approached QueenSpark to publish their work were now able to do it themselves. For example, Selma Montford from the Lewes Cohen Urban Studies Centre, with whom QueenSpark collaborated on four books, set up Brighton Books Publishing. In addition authors such as Sam Royce and Len Goldman, whose manuscripts were rejected by QueenSpark because of lack of funds and manpower, self-published their books with encouragement from QueenSpark.¹⁰⁴

Therefore, while new technology enabled QueenSpark to increase its number of publications and offer support to those it could not publish, it equally offered opportunities for other groups (and individuals) to publish. On the one hand this was a positive development in light of QueenSpark's aims of making writing and publishing accessible to all: publishing local life histories was no longer in the 'shadows'. At the same time QueenSpark had to justify both its continued funding from SE Arts and any new funding and show how what it was doing was unique. Consequently by the end of the 1990s QueenSpark had begun to reassess its work by building on its strengths at the same time as seeking new directions. This meant becoming more proactive in collaborations with local organisations such as Brighton Museum, who were developing more community-based projects,¹⁰⁵ and thinking more creatively about how to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Internet.

Making books: making history

To understand the way in which QueenSpark developed into a community history group it is necessary to consider the type of books made and the decisions that prompted these publications. As already noted, the decision to publish Albert Paul in 1974 marked an important step for QueenSpark into book publishing. Its success in the local area (1000 copies sold out in the first month) inspired others to write their autobiographies and bring them to QueenSpark for publication. As the group reflected, 'The ripples started by Sparchives and Albert Paul get wider and wider with each new book [...] It has been fascinating to experience how one book directly starts another author writing, authors who have never written anything of any length before.'¹⁰⁶ For example, after reading Daisy Noakes's *The Town Beehive* (1975), Marjorie Gardiner wrote about her life as a

¹⁰⁴ See *QS News* Spring 1999 for Goldman's account of self-publishing.

¹⁰⁵ See Sitzia, L., 2002, Oral history at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, *Oral History*, 30(2).

¹⁰⁶ QS, 1977, Progress Report.

shop girl to counter the idea that shop girls had a more glamorous life than those in domestic service, *The Other Side of the Counter* (1985).

The publishing of these local autobiographies connected with wider debates at the time around writing and publishing, and about the democratisation of history. For QueenSpark, the telling and sharing of personal histories was also seen as a way of bringing local people together, strengthening the community spirit.¹⁰⁷ Publishing individual autobiographies was considered a step towards a collective autobiography, 'A nobody's life which is everybody's life, a living identikit which can enable us to recognise each other and ourselves more clearly'.¹⁰⁸ The process of making the books was as important as the end product; the emphasis was on co-operative working and skills sharing. It was a way of working that demystified the process of publishing by enabling people to participate in the whole process. As the group stated, 'We do not believe in divisions of labour which suggest that only a few 'authors' can write, only a few 'publishers' can produce (and profit) and only a few shops can sell.'¹⁰⁹ This belief and the collaborative process, which Woodin describes as representing 'an opportunity to reconfigure human relations,' remained central and constant in QueenSpark's aims throughout its history.¹¹⁰ Indeed QueenSpark did not want 'static' books; it wanted people to connect with them, thus disseminating and using the books was of importance to the group. QueenSpark made several education packs to go with their publications, for example, *What! No Kings and Queens?* (1988), accompanied Doris Hall's *Growing up in Ditchling* (1985).

The first three books were all written autobiographies but the fourth book marked a new departure, in that QueenSpark worked with the Sussex Labour History Society, and the text was produced from taped interviews. This was the beginning of QueenSpark's use of oral history as a means to document people's lives. The single autobiography (either written or taped) remained the dominant form throughout the 1970s with the exception of Neil Griffiths's *Shops Book* (1978), which was about shopkeepers and street traders in East Brighton between 1900 and 1930 and was a mix of oral history, historical documents and editorial commentary.

¹⁰⁷ *QueenSpark*, 1983, No.31, p.1.

¹⁰⁸ *QueenSpark in Writing*, 1978, p.158.

¹⁰⁹ QS, WN, Press Release for Book 2 &3, March, 1976.

¹¹⁰ Woodin, T, 2007, 'Chuck out the teacher: radical pedagogy in the community', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(1) p.93.

Alongside the individual autobiographies, the availability of spudgets enabled individuals to instigate projects that they had a particular interest in, such as the *Shops Book*. As several key members were politically active and engaged intellectually in debates around the purpose of history, it was not surprising that there would be a desire to also produce books that were more overtly political and analytical in their content (but would still appeal to a local audience). Frances Murray and Ursula Howard instigated and were the team co-ordinators for a project which resulted in *Brighton on the Rocks* (1983). This book was intended to mark the start of a new more analytical style of QueenSpark book that would run alongside the existing series. It combined interviews, photographs and an extensive analysis to critique monetarism in relation to the local Brighton council with a core text written by Robin Murray.¹¹¹ However, despite its success (it was launched by Ken Livingstone at the Labour Party conference in 1983) there were no further books in this new series. The book was a huge undertaking for the group and many of those involved were beginning to withdraw from QueenSpark. The personal autobiography was still very popular both with readers and potential authors, and was an easier undertaking than a book such as *Brighton on the Rocks*. There were exceptions to the standard autobiography, for example *Who was Harry Cowley?* (1984) was based on interviews with those who had known Cowley, newspaper cuttings, family scrapbooks and photograph albums. Alf Johns' *Who Stood Idly By* (1984) was a collection of poems and cartoons with a political theme critical of the Thatcher government.

Male working-class autobiographies dominated the first ten years of publishing. Of the 15 books published up to 1984, only three were individual autobiographies by women and two of those were by Daisy Noakes. However the setting up of the women writers' group in 1984, initially jointly funded with the WEA as an adult education class, helped begin to redress this imbalance. The group reflected wider shifts in mainstream historical practice that sought to uncover women's histories. It was particularly crucial in creating a space for women to write and share their writing with each other, giving them the confidence to communicate their experiences and see themselves as writers. In their first four years QueenSpark published *Paper on the Wind* (1984), an anthology of writing, which included poems, short stories, and memories, as well as four individual autobiographies by women involved in this writing group.

¹¹¹ See Robinson, R, 1983, Book Review, *Urban Studies*, 20(4) for an extensive review of this book.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the publication of four books (known as the ‘Brighton books’) in collaboration with the Lewes Cohen Urban Studies Centre that focused on the history of Brighton’s urban life. The first, *Backyard Brighton* (1988) explored the impact of the Government Slum Clearance Programme of the 1930s on the residents of the Carlton Hill area. *Back Street Brighton* (1989) was a sequel to *Backyard Brighton* concentrating on clearances in the 1950s and 1960s. *Brighton Behind the Front* (1990) and *Blighty Brighton* (1991) showed the experiences of local people during the Second and First World Wars respectively. The books were a combination of photographs and personal reminiscences (both oral and written),¹¹² although *Blighty Brighton* was dominated by historical writing from the book editors, partly due to a lack of people still alive to recall the period.¹¹³ These four books were very successful; *Backyard Brighton* sold 1500 copies in the first five weeks and was included in the *Guardian* bestseller list.¹¹⁴ They also marked an important milestone in QueenSpark’s development, that of bringing together many different voices through oral history and written reminiscences to tell the history of an area or experience, for example wartime. This necessitated a shift in the idea of community as only relating to a geographically bound area to one of common interest or experience. Certainly through the 1970s and early 1980s the emphasis had been on working-class experience and community as defined by place. In the late 1980s and 1990s the emphasis shifted to include communities of interest.

The success of the Brighton books indicated a desire within the local community for collective histories, which provided a wider range (if not depth) of experiences than could be found in the single autobiographies. Funding had forced the group to gradually expand its interests beyond East Brighton and take on projects and manuscripts from the whole of Brighton and Hove. As a result the idea of building a sense of community in East Brighton through the histories of the local people there was no longer achievable. By contrast, the ‘Brighton’ books seemed to suggest that a sense of community could be ‘constructed’ through multiple stories put together in one publication. While contributors offered their own personal experience a collective narrative emerged from the publications as a whole. In a sense it was books such as *Backyard Brighton* that came to define community history.

¹¹² *Brighton Behind the Front* also included diaries, letters and a log book.

¹¹³ Woodin, 1992, p.68.

¹¹⁴ QS, Annual Report 1987-1988.

This construction of community was in itself problematic, as it was dependent partly on who came forward to share their experiences, and partly on the editors / book-makers and their selection and use of the material.¹¹⁵ There was therefore effectively a shift in authorship. By publishing multiple histories in one book there was sometimes a misunderstanding that the book presented the 'definitive' history (as if any one book could achieve this aim). However this is not to suggest that the group was unaware of these tensions: the hope was that by publishing the histories of people whose stories had not been told, it would begin the process of more local people sharing their histories:

We don't pretend that this is a comprehensive history of wartime Brighton. 'Brighton Behind the Front' is a starting point for new remembering and debate about the war and its effects upon people's lives. We hope that readers will become writers, and will send us their responses and corrections, as well as their own memories of the war.¹¹⁶

The Brighton books, and in particular, the Market Books, facilitated a new direction in QueenSpark's publishing activities. There were still personal life histories, such as Bert Hollick's *Pullman Attendant* (1991), but gradually new types of books began to appear. For example, there were books that evolved from special interest groups, such as the stroke books mentioned earlier. Leila Abrahams', *We're not all Rothschilds!* (1994), was a collection of oral histories from the local Jewish community. *Bad Dog Wally* (1993) was a cartoon book about the author Lyn Armstrong's dog. *Herstory: The Life of Phoebe Hessel* (1994) was a book for children based on the life of Phoebe Hessel, a 17th century Brighton legend who was believed to have spent part of her life dressed as a man. Alongside these Market Books, and inspired by the success of the Brighton books, QueenSpark published several larger project books. In particular *Daring Hearts* (1992) and *Catching Stories* (1996) were key in shaping QueenSpark's identity in the 1990s. Both were large-scale oral history projects. *Daring Hearts* was a collaborative project with Brighton Ourstory, a gay and lesbian oral history group, and represented the shift to uncover excluded groups' histories. *Catching Stories* explored the Brighton fishing community and was important because it was the first oral history project instigated and carried out entirely by QueenSpark.

While external funding enabled QueenSpark to extend its publishing activities

¹¹⁵ See Osmond, N, 1998, 'The Growth of a Community Oral History Archive', *Oral History* 26(1) and Sitzia, 1998.

¹¹⁶ Thomson, A, 1990, Introduction, *Brighton Behind the Front*, Brighton, QueenSpark Books.

beyond its East Brighton locality, there were many more manuscripts and potential projects than could be accommodated. Initially there was no formal written policy regarding what QueenSpark published, apart from the stated aim of publishing autobiographies of local working-class people. Decisions on what to publish were taken at general meetings after several members of the group had read the manuscript, and then book-making groups formed to work on the manuscript. It is difficult to surmise how these decisions were reached, although Stephen Yeo's comment gives some indication, 'Things get published for lots of reasons, including personal ones. There are obligations to people already in association with the group, there are texts which people not only like but are prepared to work on, and so on'.¹¹⁷ Limited resources meant decisions had to be made over what to publish. An important consideration was whether a story would add something new to the book series, and more crucially would sell, as well as whether there were people willing to work on the book. In 1986 (and again in 1997) QueenSpark suspended publishing any new manuscripts for the year because there were not enough volunteers able to work on the books.¹¹⁸

From 1984 onwards recommendations on what to publish were made by a Manuscripts Group which met monthly, was open to all, and reported to the general meetings. The formation of this group was significant as it gradually began to formalise the process of selecting and publishing manuscripts, putting in place procedures to deal effectively with incoming manuscripts as well as debating what a QueenSpark book was or should be.¹¹⁹ However the need for clear guidance on managing manuscripts and book making became increasingly evident as the number of books published increased significantly during the 1990s, as did the number of people involved in the Manuscripts Group. With the introduction of Market Books, the Manuscripts Group was given responsibility to take decisions on which manuscripts to publish as Market Books. In 1996 the group produced a four-page policy document which was the result of a process begun in 1994 to provide clear guidelines on book making and the selection of manuscripts.¹²⁰ The document was not intended to restrict creativity but to help QueenSpark manage its publishing activities more effectively, and to re-establish the

¹¹⁷ Yeo, 1981.

¹¹⁸ QS, QueenSpark Books Annual Report 1985-86 & minutes of MC meeting 23.04.97.

¹¹⁹ QS, WN 13.05.84.

¹²⁰ QS, MS minutes, 07.11.94.

boundaries between the paid worker's role and the role of the Manuscripts Group and its volunteers.¹²¹

The policy, ratified in 1996, provided guidance on processing manuscripts, on what information and logos needed to be on the cover (an in-house 'style' was being developed so that the books were easily recognisable as QueenSpark books; the Market Books had a specially designed cover to make them identifiable), and on the responsibilities of book making groups. In particular it restricted book-making groups to four members (one of whom had to have worked on a previous book and would in effect teach the others) plus author(s). DTP had reduced the number of people needed to work on a book, and with the growing number of manuscripts accepted for publication volunteers needed to be evenly distributed. The decision to limit the number of volunteers per book caused some tension - some manuscripts were more popular than others - but the understanding was that if the group chose to accept a manuscript for publication there had to be members willing to work on it.¹²² The group also developed a contract with authors to ensure there was no potential for misunderstanding especially with regard to payment (there was none) and copyright (which remained with the author). It also sought to clarify responsibilities and roles between QueenSpark and its authors.

By developing clear policies and reflecting on what it was publishing and how the books fitted together as a statement of uncovering hidden histories, the group hoped to move away from the idea of a stereotypical QueenSpark book. While QueenSpark wanted to help people find alternative ways to tell their life stories, the published books inadvertently provided a template for would-be authors. This was both in narrative structure (usually arranged chronologically) and accepted themes. For example, Sid Manville excluded details of his political life in his book *Everything Seems Smaller* (1989), because he felt it would reduce the possibility of being published.¹²³ Equally *Poverty, Hardship but Happiness* by its very title implied 'we were poor but happy'; a problem if this was not your experience but you felt this was what readers wanted. Indeed one member whose manuscript was rejected wrote,

I shall not be continuing with QS since I find it subscribes more to Arts Council values than to FWWCP's and the *Republic of Letters*. I see QS as

¹²¹ QS, MS minutes, 26.09.96.

¹²² QS, MS minutes, 07.11.94.

¹²³ Hayler & Thomson, 1995, p.53.

being concerned to promote “quaintly” diverting skeletal anecdotes which, after “treatment” tell “how it was”; with the inference that “it’s alright now” (isn’t it?).¹²⁴

This point of view reflects the debates on people’s history as outlined in chapter two. Nonetheless, books such as *Daring Hearts* did actively challenge ideas about what a QueenSpark book should be. Indeed there was opposition even within QueenSpark to this book.¹²⁵ *Catching Stories* allowed many different and conflicting histories to be shown so as to highlight the different ways in which people remember the same events. Whilst both books used photographs, these were kept to a minimum, partly due to cost, but mainly because it was the voices of the narrators that QueenSpark wanted to ‘direct’ the books. As we will see in the next chapter this offers a stark contrast to the books BHRU produced.¹²⁶

The dependence on both funding and volunteers meant that QueenSpark was often reactive rather than proactive with regard to its publishing activities. After the perceived failure of the Youth Culture project the group was reluctant to consider any large-scale oral history projects, even though this was becoming a popular format for HLF funding. Instead, as many key members began to leave in the late 1990s (for similar reasons to those in the 1980s), the group reverted back to its standard one-person autobiography whilst developing its creative writing activities. By 2000 the number of submitted manuscripts had decreased considerably, mainly because, as already noted, there were now many more opportunities for people to have their histories told. Equally SE Arts was beginning to undergo changes that would directly impact on QueenSpark, and so once again QueenSpark had to begin rethinking its role in the new millennium.¹²⁷

Conclusion

QueenSpark has had a complex and varied history. It started in very specific historical moment where debates about the nature and purpose of history and cultural democracy were central, and consolidated its activities around publishing the autobiographies of those whose histories had not been told before. The group sought not only to tell the histories of local people, but also aspired to do so by finding new ways of working

¹²⁴ QS, WN, Letter from Joe Loftus to QS, 20.06.84.

¹²⁵ QS, MS minutes 21.05.90.

¹²⁶ Of course the editorial voice ultimately triumphed through the selection of material. See Sitzia, 1998, for a discussion on the making and editing of *Catching Stories*.

¹²⁷ QS, MS minutes 17.01.00.

which were both inclusive and empowering to authors and bookmakers. For QueenSpark, process and participation were as important as the ‘product’. It therefore challenged preconceived ideas about whose history should be told, by whom and how that history should be presented. QueenSpark along with other similar groups helped bring people’s life history and oral history publications to the fore. Most importantly QueenSpark helped make ‘history’ the property of people rather than paid historians. Equally, for many people involvement with QueenSpark was about creating a sense of belonging and being part of and contributing to a wider community.

From an autonomous community action group in the 1970s QueenSpark has evolved into a publicly funded community publishing and writing group that has had to adapt to a rapidly changing environment to survive. Changes in funding and technology have both had a major impact on the way QueenSpark works, and increasingly sales viability and audience expectation have become key factors in determining what gets published. Yet change has also come from within the group and been dependent on the interests and motivations of key members at any particular time. The commitment of these key members has been crucial to the success and longevity of QueenSpark. However, whilst the aim of making history in the community and with the community has been constant throughout its history, in order to continue QueenSpark has had to balance idealism with pragmatism. QueenSpark has had to continually demonstrate the benefits and necessity of the work it does and its skills in undertaking such work in an environment that is radically different from the one in which it began. As this chapter has shown, a complex mix of internal and external factors has without doubt impacted on the type of histories that have been produced over the years.

Chapter Five: Bradford Heritage Recording Unit

Help us help you preserve your heritage.¹

Introduction

The Bradford Heritage Recording Unit (BHRU) was set up by Bradford Council's Libraries and Museums Division in September 1983, with funding from the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) through its Community Programme, a scheme devised to provide temporary employment for the long-term unemployed.² The initial aims of the project were to 'record the reminiscences and experiences of the people of Bradford during the 20th Century', concentrating in the first instance on the textile industry and European migration, and in doing so to create a 'people's' archive publicly available via the Bradford Central Library.³

Modern-day Bradford is a multicultural city that has been defined by the textile industry and successive arrivals of immigrants since the 1840s.⁴ In the 1981 census approximately one in seven people in Bradford lived in households where the head of the household was born outside Britain.⁵ The first arrivals in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were Irish labourers who came to work in the textile factories, along with European cloth merchants. After this initial influx there was a slowing down of immigration, though the First World War and inter-war years saw small numbers of Belgian refugees and Russian, Polish, German and Austrian Jews arrive. However, after the Second World War large numbers of immigrants arrived from central and eastern Europe, in particular the Ukraine and Poland. Many Ukrainians were political refugees from Displaced Persons camps in liberated Germany, whilst some came from a British prisoner-of-war camp in Italy. In addition Polish servicemen who had fought alongside the British Armed Services and did not want to return to a communist Poland were slowly demobilised through the Polish Resettlement Corps for gradual redeployment

¹ BHRU, 1984, publicity leaflet for textile industry project.

² After restructuring in the early 2000s Libraries and Museums became two separate departments: Museums, Galleries and Heritage, and Libraries, Archives and Information Service, reflecting shifting priorities and new interests.

³ BHRU, 1983a, 'Some good news for a change!' Open Letter.

⁴ BHRU stopped using the term immigrant in the late 1990s preferring to use 'of (e.g.) Asian descent', as it was felt inappropriate to use the term 'immigrant' to describe second and third generations who had been born and lived all their lives in Bradford. However for the purpose of clarity for this chapter I will use 'immigrant' as a blanket term.

⁵ BHRU, 1987, *Destination Bradford*, Bradford, BHRU.

into the workforce in England, most notably in agriculture, textiles and mining.⁶ Between 1946 and 1951 many immigrants also arrived as part of the European Volunteer Workers (EVW) scheme which recruited displaced persons for a variety of jobs in Britain, including the textile industry. Initial recruitment was of young single women, many Italian, who came to Bradford to work in the mills.⁷ The 1950s saw the arrival of migrants from the South Asian subcontinent (predominately Pakistan) and the West Indies, prompted by a period of labour shortage in Britain. By the 1970s a new wave of South Asians had arrived from East Africa, in particular Uganda, followed by Asians from Hong Kong and Vietnam in the 1980s.⁸ All these migrant groups have made important contributions to their adopted city yet as Rob Perks, the first BHRU co-ordinator argued, '[they] have suffered neglect from historians, the public and the local authority. It therefore seemed natural when the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit was set up [...] that as a community oral history project it should seek to examine the experiences and feelings of the immigrant community.'⁹ Put simply, BHRU sought to record the histories of the communities that made up the city of Bradford, which were defined in the main by ethnicity or class.

The introduction of MSC funding, which required that projects had to benefit the local community as well as providing work experience, afforded new opportunities to engage in community history. Oral history projects were particularly good at providing work experience as employees could learn how to interview, transcribe, catalogue and edit material. There were however limitations as projects were only funded for one year, although there was the opportunity to reapply. The short-term nature of MSC funding, tied up as it was with government unemployment policies, affected the sustainability and security of BHRU. BHRU had the added complication, unlike QueenSpark and Living Archive, of being part of the local authority structure, which brought certain constraints and vulnerabilities. For example, at a time of immense sensitivity and anxiety over race relations in Bradford and the demise of the textile industry, BHRU

⁶ Perks, R, 1984c, A feeling of not belonging, *Oral History*, 12(2); Smith, G & Jackson, P, 1999, Narrating the Nation: Imagined Community of Ukrainians in Britain, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25(3); Smith, T & Winslow, M, 2000, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain*, Bradford, BHRU.

⁷ For further discussion on the EVW scheme see, Kay, D & Miles, R, 1988, 'Refugees or Migrant Workers? The Case of the European Volunteer Workers in Britain' *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1; Webster, W, 2000, 'Defining Boundaries: European Volunteer Worker Women in Britain and Narratives of Community', *Women's History Review*, 9(2).

⁸ Suggitt, M, 2005, Museums & Galleries Development Plan 2005-2010, www.bradfordmuseums.org/contact/documents/Development%20Plan.Doc viewed 29.03.08.

⁹ Perks, 1984c, p.64.

had to balance its aims as a historical archive to document people's experiences (whether good or bad) with the Council's needs to present a united multicultural city. How BHRU dealt with these contradictions is explored later in this chapter.

In its first year BHRU employed sixteen people and completed 200 taped interviews, supplemented with personal photographs, and documents.¹⁰ It was successful in securing MSC funding for a second year, and in 1985, in its third year BHRU received additional MSC funding to establish a team to develop a photographic archive to complement the oral history collection. The introduction of the photography section was a significant development for BHRU and was described at the time as a 'unique collaboration between oral historians and photographers.'¹¹ BHRU came to be regarded as not only as an example of a successful Community Programme, but also as a pioneer of local authority supported community history.¹² Certainly the combination of oral history and photography to document the migrant communities of Bradford was ground-breaking. However the discontinuation of the MSC scheme in 1988 was a considerable blow to BHRU. BHRU lost all but one employee, along with its premises, and was absorbed wholly into the museums' structure. Nevertheless, it continued to operate and looked to new ways of working, moving away from collecting oral histories and photographs for archival purposes, and becoming more project-focused through exhibitions and publications.

BHRU - unlike QueenSpark, which had an organic evolution from community action to community history, or Living Archive which had its roots in community development - began as a community history project with the specific aim of using oral history to create a people's archive. In this respect BHRU reflected, to a certain degree, a growing acceptance of the importance of community history within the debates on people's history, and in particular, the growing centrality of oral history as a means to record these histories. Certainly much of the literature and publicity that came from BHRU in its early years reflected the radical claim of oral history as *the* democratic form of history making as discussed in chapter two.¹³ For example, in 1986 Perks wrote, 'At its best oral history is the ultimate democratic and participatory form of

¹⁰ Current British News, 1984, *Oral History*, 12(2): p.14.

¹¹ Morris, R, 'Bradford's New Heritage', *British Journal of Photography*, 5 September 1986, p.1031.

¹² Perks, R, 1987a, Does BHRU have a future? The Case for Permanent Funding, document sent to advisory group.

¹³ In 1986 Perks became a committee member of the OHS and one of its journal editors, which undoubtedly had an impact on his approach to oral history.

community history – an entirely new discipline and an end in itself.’¹⁴ Whether this is the case is questionable. Certainly oral history is democratic and participatory in that, in theory, any one can tell their history. However in practice there are a myriad of reasons why some do and some do not, and beyond the interviews narrators do not necessarily participate or have any control over what then happens to their interviews in making history.

Both QueenSpark and Living Archive advocated democratic and participatory ways of working, but sought a variety of approaches, including oral history, to do so. This chapter explores what community history meant within BHRU, in particular in relation to participation and understandings of community. However, in order to understand how and why BHRU began and subsequently developed it is first necessary to consider the MSC scheme and its role in establishing BHRU in more detail.

The MSC Community Programme

As discussed in chapter three, the MSC, through its Community Programme (CP), played an important role in establishing many community history projects in Britain between 1982 and 1988.¹⁵ The aim of the CP was to provide temporary employment of up to one year for unemployed people over the age of 18 that was intended to improve their job prospects and be of benefit to the local community. While there had been several similar schemes leading up to the CP, which were designed to tackle the growing unemployment crisis, it was the scale of the CP scheme that contributed to its impact on community history.¹⁶ For example, the previous scheme - the Community Enterprise Programme (CEP) - provided 30,000 places nationally, whereas the CP expanded annually to reach 250,000 places by April 1986. The government increased funding in order to support the CP, but the main shift between the CEP and the CP was the move to offering a significant amount of part-time rather than full-time work. This

¹⁴ Perks, R, 1986, Everyone has a story to tell: Bradford Heritage Recording Unit and the value of oral history’, *The Bradford Antiquary*, 3(2): p.18.

¹⁵ The MSC administrated the CP on behalf of the Department of Employment and was responsible for running public employment and training services in the UK (excluding Northern Ireland). See Thomson, A & Rosenberg, H, 1987 (2nd Ed), *A User’s Guide to the Manpower Services Commission*, London, Kogan Press.

¹⁶ From 1975 there were several schemes set up to provide the long-term unemployed with temporary employment of benefit to the local community. The first was the Job Creation Programme (JCP), followed by the Special Temporary Employment Programme (STEP) which ran from 1978-1981. This was replaced by the Community Enterprise Programme (CEP) which ran for one year before being replaced by the CP in 1982. See ‘Employment and Training Programme for the Unemployed’, 1998: www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp98 viewed 16.11.07.

enabled more places to be available at no extra cost, and served another purpose of manipulating employment figures by increasing the number of people in 'work'. Wages were also kept as low as was possible (although there was a trade union agreed local rate for the job).¹⁷

Community Programmes tended to attract younger people: the eligibility criteria favoured those aged under 25 and much of the available work was part-time.¹⁸ The CP was required to benefit the local community and employ local people, and projects had to involve work that would not otherwise be done and which would not replace the work of volunteers. These broad criteria allowed a wide variety of projects, for example construction projects such as setting up (or refurbishing) community centres and projects that improved the environment such as renovating canals, restoring footpaths, and landscaping derelict areas. Likewise projects concerned with social and cultural work such as library and museum work, and archaeology were also included. The scheme enabled local authorities, the voluntary sector and local community groups in particular to undertake work they judged to be valuable but previously could not be financed due to continual cuts in public spending.

Every CP project needed an identified 'sponsor'. Any organisation or group of individuals could act as sponsors, but single individuals were not eligible. While there were incidences of groups forming to set up a project (such as Bristol People's Oral History Project instigated by Stephen Humphries),¹⁹ in reality voluntary organisations and local authorities sponsored most projects as they were able to provide the necessary structure, resources and premises.²⁰ Sponsors had to provide a detailed proposal for a project, describing aims, costings and a programme of work. Once a project was accepted, MSC paid the wages for each participant and made a minimal contribution to capital costs. Sponsoring organisations however received no payment for project management and were also expected to meet any additional costs. The sponsor was the legal employer of CP participants and was required to meet all such legal responsibilities. In this way the 'sponsor' arrangement ensured that schemes operated

¹⁷ Price, D, 2000, *Office of Hope: A History of the Employment Service*, London, PSI.

¹⁸ Thomson & Rosenberg, 1987.

¹⁹ Humphries, S, 1981, 'Local Sound Archives and the Manpower Services Commission Programme for the Unemployed', *Oral History*, 9(1). This was set up under the STEP scheme.

²⁰ In 1986 50% of projects were sponsored by voluntary organisations and 45% by local authorities. Thomson & Rosenberg, 1987.

within an appropriate legal framework and with the requisite organisational processes (e.g. payroll), and equally added a degree of respectability to a project.

Projects were funded for one year and there was no guarantee of funding renewal thereafter. Consequently the short-term nature of MSC funding impacted on the scope and scale of prospective projects. If funding was renewed project workers could not continue beyond the twelve months (although it was sometimes possible for ‘key workers’ – i.e. supervisors – to continue). This meant of course there was limited continuity; sponsors had to be flexible and adaptable at devising schemes which had clear achievable targets within the available timescale, but could be expanded if they were successful in renewing the scheme. If funding was renewed the scheme had to accommodate a changing workforce every year and sometimes a variation in the number of places available.²¹ In addition, because the long-term unemployed had to join a CP or lose their unemployment benefit there was a mix of people applying for schemes. Some applied for specific projects because they were of interest and would enable them to obtain relevant work experience, whilst others were effectively forced to join a scheme because it had places available.

Once a project was accepted advertisements for the positions available were posted in local job centres. Each scheme was allowed a certain percentage of supervisors (or co-ordinators) who received a slightly higher rate of pay, and this was often (although not always) a way of recruiting unemployed graduates and enabling them to acquire work experience.²²

Setting up BHRU through the MSC scheme

The CP offered libraries and museums the opportunity to set up projects that otherwise would not proceed. In 1983 Steve Kerry from Bradford Museums and Carol Greenwood from the Local Studies Department at Bradford Central Library jointly developed the idea of the BHRU. Both had an interest in oral history and community history and had undertaken their own individual oral history projects. More importantly, through their own work they were acutely aware of the lack of resources documenting the textile industry from the perspective of the people involved, and people’s experiences of migration to Bradford, and were keen to find ways to address this.²³ In addition, the

²¹ Jones, 1984, illustrates how the MSC funding limitations impacted on a project in Southampton.

²² These jobs were advertised in job centres and the *Executive Post*, Smith, 1984.

²³ Kerry was researching the Bradford Pals Battalions and Greenwood was interested in women’s history and the textile industry, BHRU, 1983a.

work that was being done by Williams and Linkman at Manchester Studies, as well as by members of the Oral History Society, and the oral history work that was coming out of Essex University (as highlighted in chapter three), also influenced the idea of setting up BHRU.²⁴ Consequently Greenwood and Kerry submitted a proposal to MSC to set up a CP sponsored by Bradford Metropolitan Council (Libraries and Museums Divisions) with the aim,

To create a permanent sound, visual and written archive of the experiences of Bradford's textile and immigrant communities to be made available via the libraries and museum service not only for research historians but to interested members of the public. It is a project new to Bradford and one which hopes to capture not merely memories and reflections but the contemporary attitudes of Bradford people of all ages, classes and races.²⁵

The conceptualisation of BHRU reflected a growing need to address concerns at the time around issues of race relations in Bradford. For example after a visit to Bradford in May 1983 the Commission for Racial Equality proposed to the council Education Directorate that an oral history project on immigration to Bradford be undertaken.²⁶

The decline of the textile industry, rising unemployment and increasing racist activity in the late 1970s and 1980s brought Bradford unwanted national publicity.²⁷ One consequence of the deepening anxiety over race relations was that Bradford Council followed the GLC and set up a Race Relations Unit. The council's new race relations plan 'declared that every section of the multiracial, multicultural city had an equal right to maintain its own identity, culture, language, religion and customs.'²⁸ This idea of multiculturalism, Malik argues, emerged not as a response to demands by local communities but was, 'imposed from the top, the product of government policies aimed at diffusing the anger created by racism,' which ultimately encouraged a politics of difference.²⁹

Coupled with the promotion of multiculturalism was the availability of state funding for 'ethnically disadvantaged communities' which Ramamurthy reflects led to groups and communities being forced to show their 'difference and distinctiveness' in

²⁴ BHRU, 1984a, An Introduction and Guide.

²⁵ BHRU, 1983b, Background and Aims.

²⁶ BHRU, 1984b, Report on the First Year.

²⁷ See for example, Russell, D, 2003, 'Selling Bradford: Tourism and Northern Image in the late Twentieth Century', *Contemporary British History*, 17(2).

²⁸ Malik, K, 2002, 'The Real Value of Diversity', *Connections*: www.kenanmalik.com/essays/diversity, viewed 24.09.09.

²⁹ Ibid.

order to compete against one another for limited funds.³⁰ So, for example whilst the Asian Youth Movement had been secular and organised across religious and ethnic divides, the result of this funding was that divisions began to occur, and there was a gradual breaking down of the movement as groups formed along religious and ethnic divides. Having an 'identity' became all-important and this encouraged exclusive 'fixed' communities where differences between communities were reinforced. This also brought to the fore a clash between race and class politics. At a time when the mills were closing down and trade unions were losing their power, traditional understandings of class identity were being eroded fuelled by an increasingly negative portrayal of the white working class.³¹

It is beyond the scope of this research to engage in a discussion on race and class politics, but it is critical to note that BHRU was formed within this highly charged and complicated context. The 1984 Honeyford affair, in which headteacher Ray Honeyford criticised multiculturalism, put race relations in Bradford in the national spotlight again, and heightened anxiety within the local authority, as did the 1989 Rushdie affair.³² It was against this backdrop that BHRU developed, and the impact of these tensions on its work, perhaps most notably with the publication of the 1988 calendar, is discussed later on.

Because CP funding was only awarded for a one-year period it was important to create projects that were self-contained with achievable goals but which could be developed further if future funding was secured. Developing an archive indicated a desire to ensure the project would have a permanency regardless of whether or not the scheme continued. While the intention was to establish a people's archive of all Bradford's diverse communities, in order to make the project manageable the focus of interviewing for the first year was the textile industry and European immigration.

The planning and paperwork to set up the BHRU took over six months and the scheme was formally accepted in September 1983, with a start date of 28th September 1983 and a budget of £83,096 (this included money from both MSC and the council) to employ sixteen people for one year.³³ Unlike many other local authorities, Bradford Council had an unemployment unit responsible for managing their many MSC funded

³⁰ Ramamurthy, A, 2006, 'The politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements', *Race & Class*, 48(2), p.57.

³¹ Woodin, 2005b.

³² Malik, K, 2009, 'The book burning that changed Britain forever', *The Sunday Times*, News Review, 01.02.09.

³³ BHRU, 1983b.

projects, which helped projects navigate their way through the MSC rules and regulations. It also meant that once a scheme was accepted there were already structures in place to support the running of BHRU, in particular with regard to payment of wages, national insurance and tax. In addition the Council also provided a large office in their printing unit (although BHRU had to pay rent) which included a soundproof room for on-site interviewing. The MSC paid staff salaries, but the Council topped up the supervisors' wages and contributed additional money to cover capital costs. Bradford Council therefore owned equipment purchased by BHRU. It is interesting to note an initial disagreement in respect to ownership of the material collected by BHRU: MSC attempted to claim Crown copyright, but BHRU had interviewees sign copyright to Bradford Council. This ensured the archive would belong to the local council and the material could be used for any future activities such as publications and exhibitions without seeking permission from the Crown.³⁴

The circumstances of BHRU's birth created other areas of tension and ultimately constraint. For example, a condition of MSC funding was that work undertaken in CP projects should be non-political and should not criticise the policies of the (Thatcher) government.³⁵ For BHRU a clause was included in its contract stipulating that it should not engage in political activity nor should collect any material related to political activities, or the impact of unemployment; (it appears that there may have been some vigilance on the part of the council which was under conservative control during this period).³⁶ This was problematic for BHRU. Its interviews with textile workers were recording a period of great change in Bradford that had serious implications for the many people who had been employed in the mills. BHRU ran into problems interviewing trade union activists in the textile industry who were critical of the government, and had to argue that what it was doing was legitimate historical research.³⁷ It was a time of pronounced political views, particularly during the 1984-85 miners strike, which BHRU was unable to openly document. Yet as Perks stated, 'we did some "secret" interviews which we buried in a general collection and never publicised, an example of the subversive tactics that we occasionally used to get around

³⁴ Crown Copyright applies to copyright material produced by employees of the Crown in the course of their work.

³⁵ Morris, 1986.

³⁶ Interview with Rob Perks, 18.12.07 & Perks, R, 1987a.

³⁷ Ibid.

MSC and Council guidelines.’³⁸ This highlights an inherent contradiction in attempting to create an archive of life histories of local people which must not include any politically contentious issues. It appears that those involved in BHRU had a keen desire to maintain the independence of the archive and its historical legitimacy,³⁹ but this tension between the Council and MSC’s needs and sensitivities and the aims of BHRU was a recurring theme. Certainly as a group that was part of a much larger organisation it did not have the autonomy that QueenSpark and Living Archive had and clearly this had implications on the type of material it was collecting.

Nonetheless the contacts and community links of Greenwood and Kerry appear to have been crucial in the success of establishing BHRU. For example Peter Hawkins at Radio Leeds provided BHRU with publicity and helped with sound editing and ran training courses for the workers. Ken Howarth from the North West Sound Archives provided training to ensure BHRU developed good working practices in interviewing and managing sound archives.⁴⁰ Whilst this period of training meant that interviewing could not start immediately, it was essential not only in bringing the team together but also in equipping them with the skills needed to make BHRU a success and to establish working practices.⁴¹

An advisory group of twenty (which included Greenwood and Kerry) was set up to provide advice and guidance to the project team and acted as a useful forum to discuss issues of race, politics and the role of women in relation to the interviewing and exhibitions.⁴² It was also intended to provide a degree of continuity for the project when MSC workers moved on, although the group itself did change as some left. The group consisted predominately of local and regional historians (based inside and outside universities) whose contacts and combined knowledge of the social and political history of Bradford were vital to the success of BHRU. BHRU had strong ‘academic’ links with Leeds University’s Adult Education Centre which was based in Bradford, most notably with Tony Jowitt, who headed the Centre and Jill Liddington, a feminist historian who also worked there.⁴³ They both had a theoretical and practical understanding of oral

³⁸ Perks, R, 2008, Comments on earlier draft of chapter of chapter, 30.07.08.

³⁹ Hyslop, D, 2008, Comments on earlier draft of chapter, 25.11.08.

⁴⁰ Perks Interview.

⁴¹ BHRU, 1984b

⁴² Interview with Tim Smith, 11.02.08.

⁴³ Liddington had previously worked at Manchester Studies as a supervisor on the Cotton Industry Records Team, was loosely involved in History Workshop and had been involved in the Oral History Society during the 1970s.

history and provided important support to BHRU.⁴⁴ The group also included some community ‘leaders’ such as Father Morone from the Mission for Italians, along with, initially, Tim Whitfield from the Bradford Community Relations Council who were important in providing links with key people within ‘the communities’. The idea of key people or leaders being representative of communities is a contentious one and not without its problems, and raises important concerns over who speaks *for* and *to* the community. However, often those in positions of responsibility, such as religious leaders or trade unionists (in work communities), come to be seen as spokespeople for that particular community and become the means of access into these communities in the first instance.⁴⁵

Amongst the sixteen posts created in the first year there was an overall project co-ordinator (full-time), two supervisors responsible for organising the interviewing (full-time), a team of six interviewers (part-time), five audio typists (four full-time and one part-time) and two clerical assistants (part-time).⁴⁶ The first post filled was that of co-ordinator. Given the short turnaround from the project being accepted to actually starting, it was essential that the co-ordinator be appointed and in post as quickly as possible. Keith Laybourn, a history lecturer at Huddersfield Polytechnic and member of the advisory group, suggested to student Rob Perks, who was finishing his PhD on Labour politics in Huddersfield, that he apply. Perks’ student funding had run out and he had been claiming benefit thereby making him eligible for the scheme. Perks states that he was ‘green and inexperienced’, and while he had become interested in oral history during his research he had no real experience of oral history or, crucially, of managing people.⁴⁷ Choosing a co-ordinator and supervisors who were able to motivate and direct the staff was central to the success (or failure) of BHRU, as neither Greenwood nor Kerry were there for the day-to-day running of BHRU. It was described as, ‘a task demanding great insight on the part of the selection panel and, at worst, a risky business.’⁴⁸ Fortunately for Greenwood and Kerry, Perks, along with the other key staff, proved to be effective appointments.

The two interviewing supervisors were Olive Howarth, with responsibility for the textile interviews, and Wolodymyr Demtschuk, who was of Ukrainian and Italian

⁴⁴ Perks interview.

⁴⁵ Yow, 2005, discusses the tensions in oral history of access to communities and selecting interviewees.

⁴⁶ BHRU, 1983b.

⁴⁷ Perks interview.

⁴⁸ BHRU, 1984b, p.3.

descent and led the European immigration interview team. The scope of these interviews was in fact largely determined by the origin of three of the workers - Italian, Yugoslav and Ukrainian - although interviews were also conducted with other East European notably Polish immigrants. Neither supervisor had any previous experience of supervising staff. Howarth however had attended Northern College (an adult education college supported by the National Union of Mineworkers) and was involved in History Workshop. She also had an extensive historical and political knowledge of Bradford that was particularly useful for BHRU. Howarth was older than many of the workers and Perks noted that, 'She brought an incredible maturity', and was very significant to BHRU, 'in all sorts of ways.'⁴⁹ Janet Godbold, who was employed as the senior audio-typist and had herself worked in the textiles industry, was central in making the administrative side of BHRU a success and training staff.

A lack of relevant work experience (or indeed any work experience) was common in many MSC schemes. A balance had to be struck between the needs of the BHRU to employ people who would contribute to the success of BHRU, and the needs of the local Job Centre to find placements for the long-term unemployed. As CP places were advertised there was also some degree of choice on the part of those seeking work in applying to projects that interested them. BHRU interviewed prospective employees and so had some control in employing those they thought would benefit and contribute to the scheme.⁵⁰ Certainly Perks sought people who could provide access into the various communities. For example, Donald Hyslop, a postgraduate student studying race relations and active in the Anti-Nazi League, was employed because of his links with and knowledge of the Asian Youth Movement in Bradford, which was crucial for interviews with second and third generation Asians.⁵¹

The BHRU staff demonstrated both educational and cultural diversity. Some had been unemployed for years due to health or addiction problems, some had been made redundant, others had not worked for some other reason such as bringing up children, others had simply not sought work, a few had been unable to find work since leaving school due to lack of experience, and finally there were also students 'signing on' whilst

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Smith interview.

⁵¹ Hyslop, 2008. See Ramamurthy, 2006 for a discussion on the Bradford Asian Youth Movement. Hyslop was an interviewer for 1986-1987, and went to head the Southampton Oral History Unit which had also begun as a MSC project, but continued post MSC as it was also absorbed into the museums service.

they finished off their postgraduate studies.⁵² As a result there was a wide range of experience and commitment that the co-ordinator and supervisors had to manage. In short, there was a significant challenge in trying to run a successful scheme that provided a valuable service for the libraries and museums division and that fulfilled MSC requirements. So whilst trying to ensure good practice in BHRU and providing training courses and support, the supervisors and co-ordinator were also, in some cases, training people to turn up for work. As Liddington remembers, 'I recall at one meeting Rob muttering that the problem was less the correct view of xxx, but getting employees out of bed in the morning.'⁵³

Whilst projects could reapply for another year's funding, the 12-month employee contracts presented a distinct challenge to facilitating continuity and building up expertise within BHRU. Individuals were trained and worked for the year and then left, taking their acquired skills with them. Sometimes during the course of the year workers left if they secured permanent work and were not replaced, which impacted on the efficiency of the project.⁵⁴ Not only did BHRU have to contend with a constantly changing workforce, they had to carry on with planned projects at the same time as thinking about the next funding application to MSC, and exploring alternative sources of funding (a position that QueenSpark and Living Archive increasingly found themselves in). As Perks wrote in April 1985, five months before the second year's funding ran out, 'Regrettably the dark cloud of funding once more looms on the horizon, and the long battle for our survival must shortly begin.'⁵⁵

After a successful first year, in September 1984 the BHRU received a further year's funding. However due to a reduced quota of places from the Bradford Unemployment Agency, BHRU's budget was more or less halved to £41,368. Consequently staff numbers were reduced, but one of the conditions of renewal was that BHRU trained from scratch two audio-typists.⁵⁶ Obviously for BHRU to grow and build on its work it was essential that some of the key workers (such as the co-ordinator and supervisors) were kept on. While MSC guidelines did not generally allow this, BHRU was able to negotiate with MSC and 'key worker' status was given to two workers to provide continuity – one supervisor for interviewing and outreach work, and

⁵² Smith interview.

⁵³ Email correspondence with Jill Liddington, 30.01.08.

⁵⁴ BHRU, 1984b.

⁵⁵ BHRU, 1985b, Co-ordinator's Report Jan-March.

⁵⁶ BHRU, 1984b.

one senior audio-typist. Olive Howarth and Janet Godbold thus became key workers and could continue in post for as long as MSC funding was secured. In addition Jeanette Meakin who had been an indexer in the first year was allowed to continue, as she was exempt from the eligibility conditions due to a physical disability.⁵⁷

The post of co-ordinator did not receive key worker status, however BHRU had secured external funding (for one year) from the Department of the Environment Urban Programme (to create opportunities for ethnic communities)⁵⁸ and Gulbenkian (to create outputs for schools) totalling £13,000 for this post. This funding brought the additional responsibilities to use the archive to produce publications, exhibitions and tape sets, and to explore ways in which BHRU could use its expertise to support and encourage local groups with their own community history projects.⁵⁹

Despite the reduced staff BHRU continued to be productive in its interviewing activities and, more importantly, it fulfilled the MSC criteria well in that many people found work once they had left, which no doubt was helpful when reapplying for funding. Indeed 75-80% went on to find paid employment or went back into education, in sharp contrast to the national average for MSC schemes of 28%.⁶⁰ Subsequently in October 1985 BHRU secured a further year's funding, and this third year marked a significant development for BHRU. Not only had quotas increased (due to a national expansion in MSC places), so BHRU were able to employ more staff, but BHRU applied for funding to develop a section devoted to photography and design. This section would continue collecting and retrieving photographs but more importantly would undertake contemporary documentary photographic projects. With a budget of £146,254, the number of staff increased to 30, and Tim Smith joined as photographic and technical supervisor with responsibility for three photographers, a designer and a technician.⁶¹

As the post of co-ordinator was no longer included in MSC funding, and the Department of the Environment / Gulbenkian funding had ceased, Bradford Council's Arts and Museums Division agreed to fund the post initially for six months while BHRU tried to secure further funding.⁶² Following considerable lobbying on the part of

⁵⁷ BHRU, 1985a, Report on the Second Year.

⁵⁸ Ahmad, W, 1994, 'Reviews Section', *Community Development Journal*, 29.

⁵⁹ BHRU, 1984b.

⁶⁰ Perks, 1987a, p.2.

⁶¹ BHRU, 1985a.

⁶² Ibid.

Kerry, in June 1986 the role of co-ordinator became a permanent post within the Museum's division under the title of Assistant Keeper History (BHRU).⁶³ Perks, now a Council officer, took over sponsorship responsibilities from Kerry, who gradually eased away from BHRU, with Greenwood still representing Libraries.⁶⁴

The creation of a museum post disrupted the equilibrium in 'ownership' between the museums' 'side' and libraries' 'side', causing some discontent.⁶⁵ A more tangible factor in this discontent however was an increasing call for BHRU to focus on outputs that would make the archive collection more accessible to local people, for example in the form of exhibitions. Certainly the museums division was keen to have more visible outputs, Kerry in particular needing to show outputs from the time spent setting up and supporting BHRU.⁶⁶ From a museum perspective, whilst it was beneficial to have oral history interviews relating to, for example, the textile industry, without good visuals it was difficult to put on any exhibitions.⁶⁷ Establishing a photographic section thus ensured that exhibitions became a central part of the work of BHRU, which in part reflected the museums' influence; this was not a factor for either QueenSpark or Living Archive, neither of whom developed photography as a central part of their work.

Becoming a photographic and oral history archive

Whilst part of the original remit for BHRU was to build up a photographic archive alongside the oral history, it was fairly rudimentary. BHRU copied original photographs (by photographing them) and these copies then were archived. Original photographs predominately were provided by interviewees. In 1985, Tim Smith, a documentary photographer whose interest was people's daily lives, had recently left Newport College and was interested in photographing ethnic communities in Britain.⁶⁸ He approached Bradford Council and was put in touch with BHRU. Smith describes it as 'a fortuitous moment' for both himself and BHRU, because in the early 1980s 'no one was documenting the history of these communities using oral history and photography.'⁶⁹ Smith initially worked with BHRU in a freelance capacity, supported by a grant from

⁶³ BHRU, 1987b, Co-ordinator's Retrospective Report 1986/87.

⁶⁴ Each year the application to the MSC had to identify the BHRU sponsor.

⁶⁵ Perks interview.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Smith interview.

⁶⁸ The School of Documentary Photography at Newport was famous for the courses it ran with tutors such as David Hurn and Daniel Meadows, photographers who were interested in the social role of photography.

⁶⁹ Smith Interview.

Yorkshire Arts; subsequently the costs of a new post were included within the application for MSC funding for the third year, and in due course Smith was appointed to this post.⁷⁰

Up to this point BHRU had been collecting personal photographs from interviewees and after two years had 1500 catalogued in the archive.⁷¹ The aim of the photography section was to continue copying and documenting photographs, but also to start taking contemporary photographs of Bradford. This was a period of change in the town. As the mills were closing, BHRU was conducting interviews with former textile workers, and now with photography was able to visually capture the final days of the textile industry in Bradford. This growing archive of contemporary photographs helped interpret and complement the oral history interviews.⁷² This new section also brought an expertise in design awareness that enhanced the quality and ‘professionalism’ of exhibitions and publications, and a photographic studio and darkroom were built in the offices to facilitate the work.⁷³

Whilst the oral history side of BHRU provided opportunities for people to gain experience in oral history techniques as well as archiving, the photographic section offered the chance for young photographers to gain valuable work experience. As Smith stated at the time, ‘There is very little money available for funding this type of photography and we’re glad of the chance to be able to do it. Even though we’ve only been taken on for a year, that’s still not bad considering that most commissions only last for about two months.’⁷⁴ Local and national media coverage highlighted the work of BHRU and an indication of its success was that Smith remembers people phoning from around the country wanting to work for BHRU. Some actually moved to Bradford to sign on for unemployment benefit in the hope of getting a place, such as Paul Robinson who moved from Nottingham.⁷⁵

The photographers spent two days a week undertaking tasks such as copying donated photographs and then had the opportunity to spend one day on their own individual documentary project, sometimes leading to ‘mini’ exhibitions at the Bradford Industrial Museum (BIM), a former textile mill. Robinson for example pursued a

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Current British News, 1985, *Oral History*, 13(2): p.13.

⁷² BHRU, 1987a.

⁷³ Perks interview.

⁷⁴ Smith quoted in, Morris, 1986, p.1030.

⁷⁵ Smith interview.

project on allotments, and Susan Hackett (who had also been at Newport) undertook a project on mothers and daughters. Smith played a central role in mentoring and training his team, and this 'one day' was an opportunity for the team to develop their own area of interest in social documentary photography.⁷⁶ Smith skilfully combined the needs of BHRU with gaining invaluable work experience for himself and his photographers.

Some of these mini exhibitions were purely photographic, whilst others included oral history extracts. These extracts were either selected from the archive to accompany the photographs, or an interviewer and photographer worked together on the project. In some instances the photographer conducted their own interviews, as was the case for Robinson for his project on Afro-Caribbean churches. Less confident members of the team were given projects to work on such as the one documenting St Luke's Hospital. The photographers took contemporary photographs of the hospital, as well as retrieving old photographs and interviewers recorded the reminiscences of people associated with the hospital.⁷⁷ Smith himself began work photographing the Asian community, an interest that continued throughout his work at BHRU as many of the later exhibitions and publications in the 1990s testify, and which are considered later.

BHRU was successful in renewing its MSC funding for both its fourth and fifth years (86-87 and 87-88) with worker numbers staying fairly stable between 26 and 30.⁷⁸ Smith obtained key worker status and there was continuity through the core team of Perks, Howarth, Smith and Godbold. Nevertheless the reliance on MSC for the majority of its funding left BHRU in a vulnerable position, as was the case with QueenSpark and SE Arts. The core team, along with Kerry and Greenwood, was essential to the continued success and sustainability of BHRU. The continuity they brought and their commitment to BHRU was vital in enabling the continued development of BHRU. This is not to suggest that there were not tensions at times and differing ideas about what outputs BHRU should be aiming for. For example Smith as a photographer was very keen on exhibitions as a way of showcasing the work of BHRU to a large audience whereas Howarth was interested in more intimate exchanges through talks and educational outreach work.⁷⁹ However whilst a principal purpose of BHRU was to

⁷⁶ Perks, 2008.

⁷⁷ 'Hospital's pictures of good health', *Telegraph & Argus*, 06.04.87, p.10.

⁷⁸ Fluctuating numbers were due to employees leaving mid-way through a scheme and not always being replaced.

⁷⁹ Smith interview.

provide temporary work experience, the core group demonstrated a commitment equal to that of the core groups within QueenSpark and Living Archive.

And then there was one: the end of MSC funding

From the beginning of its fifth year it was clear that BHRU would be unlikely to receive funding for a sixth year and if it did it would be under very different conditions.

Sweeping changes to the employment service were announced following the re-election of the Thatcher government in 1987, resulting in the creation of a new agency – the Training Agency - that would be under the direct control of the Department of Employment.⁸⁰ The CP was to be overhauled and replaced with a new training programme to start in September 1988.

Just as funding for QueenSpark and Living Archive was dependent on a wider social and political context, so too was funding for BHRU. Within MSC schemes there had always been insecurity around whether projects would continue to receive funding. Attempts by BHRU to secure more permanent funding from other sources had not been successful, bar the creation of a museum post for the role of co-ordinator. However from October 1987 BHRU knew that its existence was significantly under threat. How the new scheme would be implemented was unclear, but in December 1987 Perks postponed the advisory group meetings due to uncertainty over future funding.⁸¹

In January 1988 Perks resigned from BHRU for both personal and professional reasons. The post was advertised openly and Smith was appointed to it in April 1988. After months of national uncertainty over the proposed changes, it was announced that from autumn 1988 the MSC scheme would be replaced with Employment Training (ET), an adult training scheme very different to the CP. There would no longer be funding for supervisors, and employees would not be paid a wage but would receive unemployment benefit plus £10 per week for full-time work. Whilst CP wages were not high, they were wages and people were ‘doing’ a job, that most, within the confines of the CP, had had some degree of choice over. The emphasis now would be on formal training for employment rather than work for community benefit. The new scheme had severe penalties for anyone who would not take a place, and the training nature removed the commitment that people might feel in working for a group such as BHRU. In addition, employers would have no control over who they took on and there would be

⁸⁰ Price, 2000.

⁸¹ Perks, R, 1987c, Letter to advisory group.

significantly fewer places available for schemes such as BHRU.⁸² No one was entirely sure how this new scheme would work; however it was clear that with no supervisors, reducing funding and only Smith to run BHRU, attempting to support an ET scheme would be unfeasible.⁸³

As noted in chapter three, the new scheme had a huge impact on the many MSC community history projects around the country, and most folded. For BHRU, although there was one permanent post within the museum hierarchy, all the other staff, and their accumulated expertise, was lost. The libraries and museums division had no funding available for any of the supervisory posts, and in October 1988, after five successful years, the BHRU found itself with a staff of one and a budget of £500. Smith describes the first six months as ‘crisis management’ and ‘depressing’.⁸⁴ The lobbying of various council departments proved fruitless as these were themselves struggling with shrinking budgets and, whilst voicing support for BHRU and expressing sadness at its situation, local councillors did not or could not help in securing funding.⁸⁵

BHRU was one of many MSC schemes in Bradford to lose its funding. Yet whilst this loss of funding was a specific issue for BHRU, at a similar time both QueenSpark and Living Archive were going through periods of destabilisation and reassessment. QueenSpark was adjusting to the loss of many of its founder activists and rethinking its direction and purpose. Likewise Living Archive had reached a crossroads in terms of its purpose and activities. However, whilst both groups were able to work through these difficulties and move into a new productive period in the 1990s, the removal of MSC funding marked the end of the BHRU as it was – with a large workforce, a strong advisory group, and a large degree of autonomy from the libraries and museums services. BHRU was required to move into smaller premises, at Bradford Industrial Museum (BIM), which made it far less accessible to the public. This move, along with the sole worker being an employee of the museums, meant that BHRU became completely part of the museum structure and so became increasingly affected by museum policies, priorities and budget restrictions. Smith, as the sole employee, was managed and accountable to the head of the BIM.

Although the museums and libraries division had in the first instance sponsored BHRU this did not indicate a broad interest in oral history throughout the museums.

⁸² Kirrane, 1989.

⁸³ Johnson, A, 1988, ‘A Penny for your Thoughts’, *History Today*, August.

⁸⁴ Smith interview.

⁸⁵ *Telegraph & Argus*, 29.08.88, p.28.

Certainly in the 1980s and 1990s oral history and working with communities had yet to make any real inroads in the way museums worked, and within the BIM it was not considered a priority.⁸⁶ While still supporting BHRU, Kerry had become involved in another project - 'Horses at Work' - which required large amounts of expenditure.⁸⁷ Shire working horses were brought to the museum as a permanent attraction to increase visitor numbers. Whilst Smith felt, in retrospect, this was at the expense of the BHRU and other initiatives, it did reflect a growing concern in museums of finding 'attractions' that would increase visitor numbers and justify public spending on museums.⁸⁸ In reality, BHRU was a small cog in a much larger wheel that was struggling with decreasing budgets.

For Smith, identifying supportive individuals within the museum structure was essential as BHRU was still something of an anomaly within the BIM. Yet being slightly 'outside' in some ways worked to BHRU's advantage and for a long time Smith was able to set his own agenda and priorities, within reason. However, in 1991 Smith joined a photographic news agency and approached the head of the museum service to propose that his BHRU role become part-time and the museum employ an oral historian for the remainder. This arrangement was agreed informally, but as Smith says, '[I] must have been naïve, went down to two days a week and they never filled the other half of my job'.⁸⁹

To keep BHRU going Smith sought ways to build on its strengths by using the existing archive for more project-led work, in particular exhibitions and publications. As he stated, 'I just thought there's all this stuff there and if I don't use it who is? There's no point creating more archive, haven't got the resources.'⁹⁰ There was no real possibility of taking on volunteers as for most of the two days per week Smith was occupied with general administrative duties and so there was limited time to support and train volunteers. Project work had to be funded by raising money from both within and outside the council. This money was used to extend Smith's working week and / or to

⁸⁶ For discussions on oral history and museums see Davies, S, 1994, 'Falling on Deaf Ears? Oral History and Strategy in Museums', *Oral History*, 22(2); Day, A, 1999, 'Listening Galleries: Putting Oral History on Display', *Oral History*, 27(1); Davies, S & Paine, C, 2004, 'Talking about Museums: The Insiders Voice', *Oral History*, 32(2). For an informative consideration of museums and their communities see Karp, I, Kreamer, M.C & Lavine, S.D (eds.), 1992, *Museums and Communities: The politics of public culture*, Washington, Smithsonian.

⁸⁷ See www.bradfordmuseum.org.uk/industrialmuseum.

⁸⁸ Moore, K, 1997, *Museums and Popular Culture*, London, Leicester University Press.

⁸⁹ Smith interview.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

buy in outside help. Within the museums' structure there was an exhibition budget and crucially a supportive exhibitions officer, and Smith was able to take advantage of this to produce several exhibitions. By hiring out the exhibitions to other museums and galleries he was able to generate money for BHRU. For example, the Mirpur exhibition, which was launched in 1997, was most successful, touring 20 museums and generating approximately £20,000 for BHRU. For this project Smith, as photographer and researcher, and Irna Imran, a freelance oral historian, travelled to Mirpur - where many of the Pakistani immigrants had originally come from - to undertake an oral history and photography project.⁹¹ This was to complement the material already collected in Bradford, and resulted both in the exhibition and in an accompanying publication, *Home from Home* (1997).

Building on the reputation of BHRU and the contacts that had been made over the years, Smith also pursued collaborative projects with organisations such as Yorkshire Arts Circus, British Library Sound Archive (through Perks) and the University of Sheffield's Migration and Ethnicity Research Centre (MERC).⁹² These partnerships were important in raising the national profile of BHRU and enabling it to showcase the archive collection, making it accessible to a wider public, as well as providing crucial funds and opportunities to publish. These collaborations also led to a gradual shift, in some of the work, from a focus on communities in Bradford to a broader national and indeed international scope for the work. For example, the partnership with MERC resulted in the original interviews with the Ukraine community in Bradford being complemented by new interviews and photographs taken of Ukrainian people throughout Britain and the newly independent Ukraine (post 1991), made public in both an exhibition and publication, *Ukraine's Forbidden History* (1998).

The emphasis on project-led work meant that there were some limited 'targeted' interviews and photographs collected for specific exhibitions or publications, but there were no longer the resources available to conduct in-depth interviews accompanied by transcripts to add to the archive. Throughout the years Smith lobbied on and off for an oral historian to be employed alongside him. In 1998 after two very productive years which saw several projects come to fruition, Smith lobbied again for an oral historian for BHRU, as well as additional resources to purchase new equipment,

⁹¹ Irna Imran (nee Qureshi) was a radio journalist interested in oral history whom Smith had met when he began photographing the Asian community. She worked with him on several projects interviewing Asian women.

⁹² BHRU, Smith, T, 1998, Bradford Heritage Recording Unit – The Future, open letter.

Over the past few years we have made good use of our existing material for projects, but I fear we are now reaching a stage where the archive will stagnate. We need to expand the collections of oral history and photographs by collecting new material. This will enable us to continue delivering the service in terms of projects, as well as producing a well-documented archive of broad range and depth for the future. We need to clear the backlog of cataloguing work and to explore ways of presenting our collections using new technology, such as CD-ROM and the Internet.⁹³

However, once again no funding was forthcoming and no move into using new technology was possible.⁹⁴ Whilst the digitalisation of collections and use of the Internet within museums was growing considerably in the late 1990s this was not the case in Bradford due to a lack of resources.⁹⁵ Smith continued as the sole BHRU worker; in a sense he became the guardian of BHRU, the one person who knew what was in the archive and made the decisions about how to use it. However it appears this influence was balanced by working in partnership with others which facilitated a continued dialogue about process and purpose of community history and an on-going exchange of ideas.

Using the collections to make histories - at the expense of continuing to build the archive - was the only viable way to keep the BHRU going. Yet the 'products' generated from the archive, even before the end of MSC funding, really made the archive collection accessible to local communities. These outputs were dependent on the collection and therefore it is necessary to consider how the BHRU built up what became regarded as a nationally important collection.

An archive of the people

As previously noted the remit for BHRU was to create a sound, visual and written archive that would be available to local people via the Central Library and would document the life histories of those whose histories had not been told before. The textile industry and migration to Bradford were the two key areas of enquiry. The collecting was not just concerned with building an archive of the past: BHRU was also keen to

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ In 2006 the Bradford Libraries, Archives and Information Service produced a digitally remastered CD of 'Destination Bradford', a collection of oral history interviews from the 1980s. Current British Work, *Oral History*, 34(1): p.6.

⁹⁵ Suggitt, 2005. Digitalisation began in 2003 and Smith was seen as having the necessary skills to do this and he digitised over 1,000 photographs from the BHRU archive to be available via the Internet as a pilot scheme.

record contemporary attitudes, and include the experiences and reflections of young people, such as those working in the textile industry at the time of interviewing, as well as the children and grandchildren of immigrants.

For the first three years, until the creation of a dedicated photography section, oral history dominated the collection. The interviewing team tape-recorded people's reminiscences and audio typists prepared verbatim transcripts of the interviews, which were then catalogued and indexed by the clerical assistants. In reality not all the interviews were fully transcribed due to financial and time constraints. In June 1984 one third of the 200 interviews had been fully transcribed, with detailed abstracts completed for the rest.⁹⁶ By the end of the second year the archive held around 1500 hours of interviews 'establishing the BHRU amongst the "top ten" sound collections in the country.'⁹⁷ At the time MSC funding ceased the archive held over 800 interviews, 36,500 contemporary photographs of Bradford and 25,000 archive photographs that had been collected, which included the Belle Vue Studio collection.⁹⁸ BHRU obtained this collection of around 15,000 glass negatives dating from the 1950s to the 1970s in 1986 from Tony Walker's Belle Vue Studio in Manningham Lane. The studio was in an area that saw large-scale Asian immigration from the 1950s onwards and it became the place to go for portraits of their new lives to send back home. The Belle Vue collection was an important acquisition that documented the aspirations of a community which had come to Bradford in search of a better life.⁹⁹

Potential interviewees were sought via the local press, radio and BHRU publicity leaflets and flyers, as well as through personal contacts and church and community leaders. While there was no problem encouraging potential interviewees to come forward for the textile project, and interviewing for this project ran for several years, it was not so easy with the immigrant communities particularly in the early days when BHRU had yet to establish itself. One of the main obstacles was suspicion of BHRU and its motives. For the East European communities, the experience of being interviewed by British Intelligence at the end of the Second World War had left a lasting fear of authority. The BHRU, although an MSC scheme, was also part of the local authority. Consequently any letters had to incorporate both the MSC logo as well

⁹⁶ BHRU, 1984b.

⁹⁷ BHRU, 1985.

⁹⁸ Perks, 1987b.

⁹⁹ See Smith, T, 1994, 'The Belle Vue Studio' in BHRU, *Here to Stay*, Bradford, BHRU; and Khan, N, Portraits from a Promised Land, *Independent Magazine*, 01.09.90.

as that of the Council, and as Perks comments, ‘We had at all times to reassure interviewees that just because we had some connection with the Council we were not interrogating them.’¹⁰⁰ This reflected the specificity of BHRU in Bradford, which was in contrast to both QueenSpark and Living Archive.

Potential interviewees were often surprised at the sudden interest in their lives after having lived in the city for so long, or were worried about what would happen to the collected material. BHRU reassured potential interviewees that their aim was to give communities the chance to make their own history and show the local population their community’s contribution to the city and their cultural heritage. BHRU’s academic framework and connections with community leaders, academics, the libraries and museums were important in establishing its credentials with those it sought to interview.¹⁰¹ In the early days, making contact with community groups and organisations, giving talks on its work, and getting publicity through local newspapers were important in demonstrating the integrity of BHRU.

BHRU made little headway in interviewing the West Indian community because of concerns and opposition to what was perceived as the appropriation of Black history by the white establishment. This concern impacted on the activities of both FWWCP and OHS, as highlighted in chapter two, and fed into ongoing debates about whose history should be told and by whom.¹⁰² However BHRU sponsored a local group Checkpoint to set up ‘Black Heritage’ as an MSC scheme in 1986.¹⁰³ This reflected BHRU’s interest in enabling and supporting others, and was similar to Living Archive’s approach to facilitating others in doing similar work. BHRU did successfully engage the Ukrainian, Italian, Yugoslav and Polish communities, and in 1985 began to include Bradford’s Asian communities. The interview programme also expanded to include quarrying, the Irish community and First World War veterans, at the same time as continuing with the textiles interviews which formed a large part of the overall collection.¹⁰⁴

The BHRU was keen to have interviewers from the migrant communities as they had insider knowledge of their communities and could ‘bridge the gap’ between BHRU

¹⁰⁰ Perks, 1984c, p.65.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² See Conference Report, 1979, ‘Oral History and Black History’, *Oral History*, 8(1); Woodin, 2005b & Perks, R, 1987d, Immigration to Bradford: The Oral Testimony, *Immigrants & Minorities*, 6(3).

¹⁰³ BHRU, 1986a, Co-ordinator’s Report November 1985/March.

¹⁰⁴ Current British News, 1985, *Oral History*, 13(2): p.13.

and these communities. Perks asserted that people would often feel reassured and a sense of ownership because ‘one of their own’ was working at BHRU.¹⁰⁵ However this did not necessarily mean access was unproblematic; one person did not represent a whole community. Indeed, as discussed in chapter two, communities are not homogenous or static entities. BHRU rapidly discovered that they needed to research each community beforehand, in particular to check on ‘rivalries, splinter groups and religious and political splits.’¹⁰⁶ For example, Demtschuk, the East European interview supervisor, was second generation Ukrainian and a member of the leadership of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB). In 1949 there had been a split in the AUGB resulting in the formation of the separate Federation of Ukrainians in Great Britain.¹⁰⁷ Demtschuk’s identification with the AUGB was problematic in interviewing non-AUGB Ukrainians and highlighted the need for the BHRU to assert its impartiality, and also take care in matching up interviewers with interviewees. Indeed sometimes it was more beneficial to have people not from the proposed community doing the interviewing.¹⁰⁸ So, while employing workers from specific communities was beneficial in many ways, BHRU also had to be aware of possible tensions and ensure that the BHRU was perceived as an independent, open group. Equally BHRU had to ensure it was not just interviewing the more dominant members of the community but also reaching the less visible members (a tension evident within much oral history work). This was sometimes problematic as all interviewing was conducted in English and this could exclude some first-generation immigrants. Whilst publicity material was often translated into the relevant language, lack of funding and resources meant it was not possible to interview in native languages and have these translated (the MSC insisted on material being accessible to the wider community).¹⁰⁹

The interview method itself followed a life history approach with specific subject areas covered. For example the textiles interviews key themes were street games, education, housing conditions, starting work, mill conditions, wages, trade

¹⁰⁵ Perks interview.

¹⁰⁶ Perks, 1984c, p.65.

¹⁰⁷ Smith & Jackson, 1999.

¹⁰⁸ Perks, 1984, see also Yow, 2005 for a discussion on insider/outsider tensions in interviewing.

Kyriacou discusses a similar tension in the work of (now defunct) Ethnic Communities Oral History Project (ECOHP) in Kyriacou, S, 1995, ‘Oral History and Bi-lingual Publishing’ in Mace, (ed.).

¹⁰⁹ Kyriacou of ECOHP was critical of this approach. However it is difficult to see how BHRU could have built up a substantial archive with the constraints placed on it if it had interviewed in native languages. ECOHP was publication focused and had a remit and the resources to produce bi-lingual publications. Kyriacou, 1993.

unions, politics, leisure, religion and war. Themes for the European immigrants interviews were early life, wartime experience, arrival in Britain, early experiences in Bradford, working and living conditions, building the community, and issues of identity, attitudes to assimilation, culture, language and the future.¹¹⁰ Copies of the interviews were made on to cassette tapes and were available to the public for listening both at BHRU and the Central Library, along with a growing collection of related photos and documents. Thematic catalogues (e.g. Textile Industry) listed all interviewees by number with their date of birth and gender and very brief details of key themes. All interviewees were anonymous, a decision taken at the beginning when it was felt that people were more likely to agree to be interviewed (and be more open) if they were assured of anonymity. For example, the complexities of the Ukrainian experience during the Second World War, and fears of being identified by Soviet Intelligence (this was, of course, before the collapse of communism) meant it would have been impossible to interview some Ukrainians without assurances of anonymity. Indeed at the same time as these interviews began the House of Commons All-Party War Crimes Group began investigating Ukrainian former members of the Waffen-SS, which meant many Ukrainians did not want to have their stories recorded for fear of repercussions.¹¹¹ In fact at one point the War Crimes Group contacted BHRU wanting details of those they had interviewed; BHRU refused, arguing the interviews were all anonymous and part of a much larger collection that the group was welcome to go through if it wanted, which the group declined.¹¹² BHRU was concerned with the historical authenticity of the archive but there was always an anxiety as to whether interviews would be removed or if it would be prevented from undertaking interviews that might in any way be seen as contentious, highlighting the political context in which it worked. Fundamentally this raised a serious issue about the historical legitimacy of the archive when it was funded from public money through a local authority.

The photographic collection was also catalogued. It comprised the contemporary photographs as well as interviewees' photographs (which were predominately from the textiles and health interviews, as many European immigrants had no photographs pre World War Two), and acquired collections such as the Belle Vue Studio collection. Of course, unlike the interviews the photographs were (or could be) identifiable, but people

¹¹⁰ Current British News, 1984, *Oral History*, 12(2): p.14; also 1984a.

¹¹¹ Smith & Jackson discuss in depth the Ukrainians in Bradford with reference to the BHRU recordings.

¹¹² Smith interview.

gave their permission for them to be included in the archive. The blanket anonymity for interviews was arguably useful in helping create a more open and honest account where delicate issues such as racism and sexual harassment in the mills could be discussed. However, this mismatch of anonymous interviews and identifiable photographs was problematic when using the archive to produce exhibitions and publications. This is further considered in the next section of this chapter.

BHRU made efforts to keep the master copies of the interviews in a low humidity temperature-controlled environment, the correct conditions to preserve the recordings. However when BHRU moved into the BIM no such provision was made and sadly many are now subject to ‘sticky shed syndrome’, and are unplayable.¹¹³ This deterioration of the tapes raises a serious ethical question about creating a people’s archive (or any archive) without the resources or facilities in place to ensure its long-term safe keeping. Moreover while the archive material was physically accessible to the public, in practice the sheer size of the collection made it difficult for the general public to access in an easy and meaningful way. As Smith recounts,

What people really wanted were the best bits, distillation, they didn’t want to have to sit there for weeks and weeks reading and listening to transcripts and tapes, [...] they’ve got to be committed researchers.¹¹⁴

Using the archive to make history

The creation of the archive was the initial focus of BHRU but towards the end of the first year it was apparent that BHRU needed to have some tangible ‘products’ other than the archive itself to demonstrate their value to MSC and illustrate that BHRU was of community benefit.

Throughout the first year, as the collection was growing, Perks and Howarth began to give talks on BHRU and its work, as well on oral history generally. However it was the exhibition *Bradford Voices*, held in August 1984 in Bradford’s Arndale shopping centre, which highlighted the importance of presenting the collection to the community.¹¹⁵ Photographs and interview extracts were used to explore the life and leisure of the textiles and immigrant communities. The exhibition ran for a week and

¹¹³ Tapes that are stored in places that have any significant humidity gradually develop a ‘stickiness’ that renders them unplayable. There are ways to rectify this that involve baking the tapes but this requires resources.

¹¹⁴ Smith interview.

¹¹⁵ BHRU, 1984a.

was considered a success with thousands of people attending.¹¹⁶ Perks remembers, ‘It felt revolutionary at the time. It felt quite radical. It also felt we were really involved with the community [...] because we were where people were. We weren’t up in the museum.’¹¹⁷ Its success demonstrated to Perks the importance of disseminating the material in accessible and engaging ways.¹¹⁸ Equally, for QueenSpark and Living Archive disseminating material and being ‘where the people were’ was fundamental to their aims, in part because for these groups their activities were about creating a sense of community for all involved; community as mutuality, not as service which characterised BHRU. Embedded as it was in a local authority structure BHRU came to community history in a very different way to the other examples, though from a museum perspective what BHRU was doing at the time was very different to standard museum practice.¹¹⁹

From the second year onwards BHRU more explicitly had a dual purpose of developing the archive as well as using the archive to make histories. Building on its growing expertise, BHRU also became active in providing advice and support through talks and training courses to groups wanting to undertake community history projects, and linking up and sharing experiences with other community history MSC sponsored schemes in the region.¹²⁰

There were tensions within BHRU about the shift to ‘products’. Smith remembers debates about the purpose of the archive and responsibilities to those who had contributed their stories and photographs.¹²¹ These concerns connected with debates within FWWCP at the time around exploiting people’s histories, which were to become important considerations particularly in oral history practice, and certainly within QueenSpark its participatory way of working was an attempt to mitigate these concerns. The archive was seen as a valuable historical record of people’s experiences of migration, and life and work in Bradford, and the process of recording peoples’ life stories was viewed as a positive, empowering act that validated the histories of those

¹¹⁶ *Telegraph & Argus*, 10.08.84.

¹¹⁷ Perks interview.

¹¹⁸ *Telegraph & Argus*, 7.08.84; & *Bradford Star*, 09.08.84.

¹¹⁹ Moore, 1997.

¹²⁰ There was briefly a magazine *On and Off the Record* during 1985-86 which detailed news of projects and events in the Yorkshire region. This folded due to distribution and production difficulties. By 1986 OHS was changing to accommodate the growing number of community oral history projects countrywide and began including a section in its journal on news of these projects.

¹²¹ Smith interview.

whose histories had not been told before. This was a sentiment expressed in much of the BHRU literature at the time, for example,

BHRU, by giving ordinary people an opportunity to express on tape their own history in their own words, has sought to redress the balance, away from 'great events and great people', towards an acceptance that everyone has a story to tell.¹²²

In many ways this comment reflected where oral history practice and theory was in 1986. Certainly there has been a significant shift since then which recognises that oral history is not an unmediated and unproblematic empowering process. Its very nature can be dependent on the relationship between interviewer and interviewee.¹²³

Whilst the archive was publicly available, primarily it was the 'products' that used the archive material that actually drew people into the histories and affirmed their place in the historical record. It was the products which gave something more tangible back as well as alerting people to the richness of the archive. There appears a contradiction in building a people's archive if it is not used in ways that are relevant to people's lives, or shows contributors and their families why their history matters. Having products such as exhibitions not only raised the profile of BHRU but also enabled BHRU to demonstrate to local people the importance of what it was doing and encourage them to get involved. By using the archive material to make community histories BHRU became the editor and producer in the selection and presentation of the oral history and photographs, a point which will be considered later.

Following the Arndale exhibition in 1984, in response to requests from teachers for edited highlights from interviews the BHRU produced a cassette tape *Bradford Voices* that contained a selection of extracts from the collection.¹²⁴ This cassette was the first of a series of themed tapes of interview extracts which were available for purchase. The growing collection of cassettes became known as the Bradford Oral History Series and included topics such as Textile workers, Childhood experiences of immigration, School life 1900-1945, Bradford Pals in the First World War, and Life in back-to-back houses.¹²⁵ These tapes formed part of BHRU's outreach work and were intended as a resource for teachers. Such outreach initiatives with schools and the elderly were a key

¹²² Perks, 1986, p.18.

¹²³ See, for example, Sitzia, 1999. Also Part 2 in Perks, R & Thomson, A, (eds.), 2006, *The Oral History Reader* (2nd ed.), London, Routledge.

¹²⁴ Current British News, 1985, *Oral History*, 13(2): p.13.

¹²⁵ Current British News, 1991, *Oral History*, 19(2): p.12.

aspect of BHRU's work during the MSC years. In 1985 BHRU produced *Not like it is Today*, a reminiscence pack based on domestic life and produced with local residential care, social services and hospital staff. The pack consisted of a 20-minute cassette of songs, poems and memories as well as 15 slides.¹²⁶ It was inspired by *Recall*, a reminiscence initiative from Help the Aged (national) Education Department (by a team which included Joanna Bornat), which had developed innovative packs of photographs and tapes to use in work with older people.¹²⁷

Exhibitions played an important role in the work of BHRU and the funding available through the museum service's exhibition budget was vital in sustaining its work in the post-MSC period. It is ironic therefore that in the early years BHRU struggled to secure exhibition space in Bradford's museums. However at this time the use of oral history material in museums was still in its infancy. The technical difficulties of including sound in a museum space inhibited its use in museums, as did the traditional view that the function of a museum was to collect and interpret artefacts.¹²⁸ In addition, there was not the emphasis within museum 'culture' on actively engaging with local communities that began to develop in the 1990s.¹²⁹ So while BHRU wanted to exhibit its work in Cartwright Hall, the art gallery located in the heart of the Asian community, its temporary exhibitions were restricted to the BIM, where the BHRU themes and material fitted with the museum's social history focus.

BHRU's second major exhibition, *Destination Bradford*, was held in the BIM over a two-month period in autumn 1985. With photographs, music, and interview extracts the exhibition documented the experiences and cultural backgrounds of the different communities that had migrated to Bradford. In an attempt to actively involve the participating communities events were held throughout the exhibition in which groups were able to present their traditional costumes, music and crafts.¹³⁰ This was followed in 1986 with *Mill to Microchip: Bradford in the making* which documented social and industrial change in Bradford and was accompanied by BHRU's first short book based on a selection of photographs and interview extracts used in the exhibition.

Many of the temporary exhibitions also toured to local community centres and

¹²⁶ Current British News, 1985, *Oral History*, 13(2): p.13.

¹²⁷ See Thompson, 2000, p.186.

¹²⁸ Perks, R, 1987e, 'Oral History in Museums of Industry and Technology', *Science & Industry Curators Group*, 1.

¹²⁹ Davies, 1994.

¹³⁰ BHRU, 1985.

schools and in the 1990s several toured to other museums and galleries nationally. In 1987 BHRU secured a small permanent display area in the BIM to show selections of its work, often the mini photographic exhibitions. These mini-exhibitions displayed individual photographers' projects and some also incorporated oral history. Examples included *The Open Book: Afro Caribbean Christianity in Bradford* (1987) which focused on a church with the aim of dispelling myths around Afro-Caribbean Christianity, and *New Roads to an Old Town: Life in the Leeds Road Area* (1987) which recorded change in an area where traditional industries were disappearing.¹³¹ Mini-exhibitions in the following year, 1988, included *Allotments*, *Legrams Mill*, *A Day in the Life of a Fireman*, and *The Following Steps: Mothers and Daughters*, the latter on the theme of women of different ethnic origins, accompanied by extracts from interviews with the women.¹³²

This growing emphasis on photographic exhibitions in some instances led to short interviews being conducted in order to provide oral history material to supplement particular visual images. This practice highlighted the tension of the product directing the collecting of material, rather than the archive collection determining the final product. In other words rather than the interviewee guiding the interview, the interviewer had to guide the interviewee to generate material on a certain subject. However these interviews enabled people to give meaning to events, to provide context for the photographs, and move away from the notion of the photographer as the 'expert' taking photographs that they deemed relevant and important.¹³³

The exhibitions and publications were intended to move away from a nostalgic view of the past. At a time when there was concern over racial relations BHRU was keen to reflect parallel experiences between different groups, as well as showing the reality of their experiences, and in doing so challenge racial stereotypes.¹³⁴ However there was, at times, a tension between the BHRU and the museums over the content of the exhibitions. Put simply, BHRU wanted to be able acknowledge difficult histories that emerged through interviewing, whereas the priority for the museums service was to celebrate Bradford's multiculturalism avoiding any contentious issues, an approach

¹³¹ Current British News, 1987, *Oral History*, 15(1): p.6.

¹³² BHRU, 1988, Publicity Poster.

¹³³ Smith, quoted in Morris, 1986, p.1030.

¹³⁴ Perks, R, 1987, Preface, *Destination Bradford*, Bradford, BHRU, p.6.

which came to be referred to as the 'saris, samosas and steel band syndrome'.¹³⁵ As Smith reflected,

How can you do a history of Asians coming to work in textile mills without mentioning how awful the jobs were, or racism? Not that we wanted to highlight these things but they're part of the story. What I used to get sick of was Lord Mayors turning up to our exhibitions talking about the happy multicultural city we are all proud to live in, and you'd think, 'Oh God here we go again'. Yes there are things to celebrate but there're also quite difficult things to confront.¹³⁶

In many ways this comment goes to the heart of debates about community history that were raised in chapter two. Specifically whether its purpose is to be celebratory or analytical and challenging, and whether it is possible to celebrate a community's history at the same time as acknowledging and reflecting on difficulties. In the BHRU context this was complicated by the underlying tensions over race but it also raised questions about the role of museums in community history.

The tension over race came to a head with the publication by BHRU of the multicultural calendar for 1988, which was met with some disdain in the local press. Supported by the Race Relations Advisory Group, Bradford Interfaith Centre and the CRE the calendar was intended to present 'a positive view of Bradford's many communities.'¹³⁷ However, the photograph used to represent the (white) 'English host community' caused outrage in some quarters.¹³⁸ The image for each month illustrated a festival or celebration from each community, except for the image depicting an 'English' Christmas, which showed a family watching a soap opera on television surrounded by beer cans. It is a depressing image and in marked contrast to the other photographs and in many ways it is not surprising that it cause upset. As Beecham wrote, 'My opinion for what it's worth - and I'm not particularly religious - is that it's sad to see what could have been a coup for the recording unit cause pain and offence to people whom Christmas is a meaningful religious celebration.'¹³⁹ The reasons for selecting this image are unclear but the furore that surrounded its publication highlighted divisions between the communities and reflected the contentious nature of community. This was a very real concern in Bradford, where there was always an

¹³⁵ Donald, J & Rattansi, A (eds.), 1993, *Race, Culture and Difference*, London, Sage.

¹³⁶ Smith interview.

¹³⁷ Perks, 1987a, p.3.

¹³⁸ Dineen, B, 1988, 'An insult to Christians', *Yorkshire Post*, 18.01.88.

¹³⁹ Beecham, S, 1987, 'Anger over 'Dirty Den' calendar', *Bradford Star*, 03.12.87, p.15.

anxiety about producing anything that would be perceived as controversial, portraying the city in any negative way. Certainly neither QueenSpark or Living Archive had to deal with this tension, people may not have always liked or had interest in their 'products'; but the groups did not have to navigate their way through such a highly politically and racially charged environment. Whilst both Brighton and Milton Keynes were made up of many overlapping, fluid communities, Bradford was a city of distinct ethnic communities which through racial tensions were becoming more fixed.

BHRU also produced books. These books were arranged thematically, usually with a preface that described the purpose and work of BHRU, an introduction that provided a historical context followed by the photographs and interview extracts with no running commentary from the editors. The absence of any overt editorial voice was intended to allow individual voices 'to speak for themselves: it is their narrative'.¹⁴⁰ Yet as was the case in QueenSpark's collective oral histories, by selecting and arranging the material to tell a story the editors were not neutral agents but active participants. There may be no obvious editorial voice but one is present through the selection and juxtaposition of the material.¹⁴¹ In fact it was rarely 'their narrative': the individuals did not chose the extracts or decide the 'story' that would be told. This highlights a key tension in community oral history where claims of narrators 'speaking for themselves' are not actually true.

Accompanying photographs are dominant throughout the books, in some instances overshadowing the oral testimony. The photographs are evocative of another life and serve to draw the reader into the oral histories either as an observer or a participant in the remembering. As all interviews were anonymous no names were included in the publications. For the first few books there were identifiers after each interview extract, usually gender and date of birth as in *Textile Voices: A Century of Mill Life* (1989).¹⁴² In *Destination Bradford; a century of immigration* (1987) ethnic origin and whether they were first, second or third generation, were also used to identify interviewees. The lack of names serves as a barrier and prevents the reader actively engaging with individuals' personal histories, as they are not able to identify the narrators. The thematic approach removes some of this tension as the reader is not

¹⁴⁰ Perks, R, 1989 in Howarth, O (ed.), *Textile Voices*, Bradford, BHRU, p.8.

¹⁴¹ Sitzia, 1998.

¹⁴² This was reissued in 2006, assembled and updated by Tim Smith (in a freelance capacity) with new extracts drawn from more recent interviews along with additional photographs to illustrate the subsequent decline of the textile industry.

necessarily following one person's story. However the inclusion of identifiable photographs (in all the books and exhibitions) complicates the process of navigating through the stories. Despite a small disclaimer in the books that the extracts are complementary to the photographs and not necessarily the words of the people in the photographs, it is difficult not to make that connection.

Post-MSA there were considerably fewer exhibitions and publications, and exhibitions were sometimes reworked and updated. *Here to Stay: Bradford's South Asian Communities* (1994) was a substantial publication which included an extensive introduction that challenged perceived ideas about the Asian community in Bradford, in particular the notion of 'one' community. Donald Hyslop, former BHRU interviewer, returned to carry out further interviews and work on the book with Smith and Irna Imran. The preface states, 'This book is not intended to be a definitive history of names, facts and dates, but a collage of attitudes, feelings, emotions and beliefs [...] We hope that the book adds to that by articulating the variety and richness of individual experience.'¹⁴³ Yet there are no identifying features at all for the interview extracts. The reader has no idea where the narrator originated from, whether the narrator is male or female, their occupation, if they are first or second or third generation. For a book that aims to dispel the notion of Bradford Asians as a single homogenous group, this approach does not work. Kyriacou also expresses concern over the anonymity of the narrators, arguing,

It states elsewhere in the book that the interviews are anonymous at the request of the interviewees. Firstly I find it very difficult to believe that everyone wanted to remain anonymous and secondly, pseudonyms would have been useful.¹⁴⁴

This was of course a very different approach to QueenSpark and Living Archive where recognition of narrators / authors was an important part of the process and helped create a sense of ownership in the respective project. For BHRU the political and racial tensions (and divisions even within communities) at the time meant it would have been very difficult to get people to speak if they knew they would be identified. Also the work BHRU was undertaking was at the time pioneering and an unknown quantity for many that were interviewed.

¹⁴³ Smith, T, 1994, Preface, in BHRU, *Here to Stay*, Bradford, City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, p.7.

¹⁴⁴ Kyriacou, S, 1993, *Oral History*, 23(1), p.98.

In the late 1990s, the original archive material began to be re-used and re-worked for new projects. BHRU collaborated on two publications with MERC, which saw a shift in the local focus of BHRU's work. The first publication, *Ukraine's Forbidden History* (1998), on which the British Library through Perks also collaborated, built on interviews conducted by BHRU in the 1980s. In 1991 Perks travelled to the Ukraine to interview people post-independence accompanied by Smith, as photographer and Demtschuk as translator. In 1995 MERC appointed Graham Smith as a researcher to conduct further interviews with Ukrainians in Bradford and around Britain, building on BHRU's earlier interviews. Perks, Tim Smith and Graham Smith worked together to edit the material for publication. *Ukraine's Forbidden History* was a significant departure for BHRU as the focus was no longer Bradford but included experiences of Ukrainians around Britain as well as those still in Ukraine. Aside from the shift in geographical focus the structure of the book was different. Whilst still thematic, each chapter was introduced by the editors. This framing of the (anonymous) extracts was necessary given the complexity of the history and political situation but also reflected an approach that combined a 'popular' history accessible to all with a more 'academic' framework to place in context the extracts and photographs.

BHRU collaborated again with MERC to produce what would be its last book, *Keeping the Faith: The Polish Community in Britain* (2000), which was similar in approach to the Ukrainian book, and which won the Raymond Williams Community Publishing Prize in 2001. Reviewing the book Lunn wrote,

What has been brought together in this publication is a highly impressive piece of academic scholarship which is also accessible for a general public. [...] what is most impressive is the subtle way in which context and evaluation are encompassed with the interviewing and the use of other sources.¹⁴⁵

As both books were produced with MERC, not surprisingly they bring together the popular and the academic. However looking across all the books from the first in 1986 one can see a growing maturity in BHRU's approach.¹⁴⁶ Of the three groups BHRU most consciously tried to balance the needs of popular and academic history. In part this was because of its archival impetus and the involvement, certainly in its MSC days, of

¹⁴⁵ Lunn, K, 2001, Reviews, *Oral History*, 29(2), p.110.

¹⁴⁶ See for example the review of *Textile Voices* by Cooper, M, 1990, *Oral History* 18(2) which comments on the hasty production in contrast to Lunn's review.

historians. Historians were also involved in QueenSpark but their involvement was as community activists who at the time, ten years before BHRU formed, were engaged in debates about the breaking down of knowledge barriers and the rejection of 'experts'.

Conclusion

BHRU brought together oral history and photography to tell the history of the communities of Bradford. Its origins as a MSC project added levels of complexity that were absent in QueenSpark and Living Archive and defined the nature of the group. As part of the museum structure and by extension the local authority it was constrained by shifting political agendas, priorities and Council protocols. For example when Smith gave an interview to the local paper about the loss of MSC funding and lack of support from the Council he was reprimanded by his manager.¹⁴⁷ Likewise there were constraints on what it could and could not document, and the group tried to find ways to keep the historical legitimacy of the archive.

Overshadowing all BHRU activities was the issue of race politics. Interviews of former textile workers actually formed the largest collection in the archive and included all communities. However, documenting the migrant communities of Bradford, whilst intended as a positive acknowledgement of their contribution to Bradford, also inadvertently fed into a growing debate on multiculturalism as was exemplified with the publication of the calendar in 1988.

BHRU approached community history in a different way to QueenSpark and Living Archive; whilst it emphasised participation and involvement and working with communities, it did not do so in the same way as the other two (although they too began to change over time in this respect). This was community as service, which was determined by its inception as an MSC project. Yet the commitment of the core group, and then Smith post-MSU was, I would argue, no different to that of those in both QueenSpark and Living Archive.

Fundamentally BHRU highlights the difficulties of trying to do community history in a highly-charged political environment, to contend with different interest groups, and to produce something that gives voice to all views. These factors also impacted on the other two groups but to lesser degrees. BHRU also raises questions about the purpose of community history and whether its aim is in fact to support

¹⁴⁷ Smith interview; and *Telegraph & Argus* 29.8.88.

community cohesion - a goal that was increasingly to feature in HLF - or to promote historical accuracy, which could potentially destabilise communities. I would argue that ultimately community history is about producing histories that both affirm and challenge, which on the whole BHRU did. This was at least in part possible because narrators remained anonymous. BHRU also demonstrates the fact that community history 'products' are by or about people from that community (however defined), who continue being members of that community after the history is 'made', and this ultimately impacts on the types of history that are produced. This does not make them any less valuable, but they need to be understood within this framework.

Chapter Six: Living Archive¹

‘Everybody has a story to tell, but how do you make those stories heard?’²

Introduction

Based in Milton Keynes, Living Archive began in 1984 as a documentary arts project that ‘sought to explore and promote the artistic expression of documentary primary source material,’³ with people’s memories at the heart of the work. It brought together two distinct and complementary areas of activity being undertaken in Milton Keynes at the time. One was the work of People’s Press, a community-publishing group started in 1974 by Roger Kitchen and inspired by the work of Centerprise. The other was the work led by Roy Nevitt, director of drama at Stantonbury Campus, a large comprehensive school, where with colleagues and the local community he researched, wrote, produced and staged community documentary plays as well as producing documentary-based school materials.⁴

Both QueenSpark and BHRU developed in ways that reflected their specific locations in Brighton and Bradford respectively, as well as the particular interests of those involved in the groups. This was also evident in Living Archive. The environment in which it formed had a significant influence on the way it grew and the trajectory it followed, as did the interests of Kitchen and Nevitt. Milton Keynes was the last and largest post-war new town to be built. As with other new towns there was an understanding of the importance of encouraging a sense of community and belonging in order to facilitate people settling into their new environments. However, Milton Keynes would not be populated solely by newcomers; there were already small villages and towns in the designated new town area and these residents saw their way of life changing rapidly as increasing numbers of newcomers arrived. This tension was the initial impetus for the work of People’s Press: a desire to preserve the histories of those already living in the area, but also to give the newcomers an awareness of coming to a place with a history and a future they could be part of:

¹ It was originally called Living Archive Project, dropping ‘Project’ in 2000 when Living Archive became made up of 2 parts: Living Archive Project and Living Archive Training. For the purpose of clarity I will use Living Archive throughout.

² Interview with Roger Kitchen, 06.08.08.

³ Living Archive Project, 1989, *Dig where you stand: a book of ideas*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, p.1.

⁴ Ibid.

The invasion of newcomers and new buildings has left many of the older inhabitants of the area a little breathless and flattened, feeling that the new development pays scant regard for their views and is robbing them of many of the benefits of a previously quiet and settled rural existence. In this sort of setting the need to collect and publish the memories of the area's elderly residents seems more urgent and necessary than it does in other more stable areas, for within a few years the majority of Milton Keynes population will be strangers to the area, and probably inquisitive as to what went on before they came.⁵

Several teachers from the newly opened Stantonbury Campus, the first of the secondary schools in Milton Keynes, were involved in People's Press, which was an informal group with Kitchen playing a key role. It was through the group that Nevitt made contact with Kitchen whilst researching for the first locally inspired documentary play, *All Change!* Stantonbury Campus had an ethos to develop and support community links and as a new school in a new town staff were highly motivated and ambitious.⁶ Nevitt was interested in the documentary plays of Peter Cheeseman, which used only primary source material for the text, and he saw the potential of using this form to achieve the educational and community theatre objectives of the school. Mark Wheeler, a former colleague explained,

Roy's philosophy to put "bums on seats" was to serve up plays telling stories from the local community. "Dig where you stand" was/is his motto. Milton Keynes, in the late seventies/early eighties, was a particularly interesting city to test out this ideology. Uniquely it had no shared history amongst its various communities. Few of those who lived there had done so for much longer than a few months/years. Roy rose to this challenge and developed productions, which, in my view, helped this infant city to gain a sense of "self". They were also incredibly successful at drawing interest from the local community and beyond.⁷

Wheeler's comments reflect a widely held view that new towns were blank canvases with no past. Finnegan's *Tales of the City* demonstrates the multiplicity of stories told about Milton Keynes, ranging from academic studies of new towns to the planners' stories and those of the residents.⁸ The specificity of Milton Keynes as a post-

⁵ People's Press of Milton Keynes, 1978 in FWWCP, *Writing*.

⁶ Moon, B, 'Stantonbury Campus, Milton Keynes', 1983 in Moon, B, (ed.) *In Comprehensive Schools: Challenge and Change*, Windsor, NFER-NELSON.

⁷ Wheeler, M, 2005, Dig Where You Stand, www.amdram.co.uk viewed 15.09.08.

⁸ Finnegan, R, 1998, *Tales of the City*, Cambridge University Press.

war new town added an extra narrative, that of a soulless place with no history.⁹ The ‘concrete cows’ were a recurring theme in these narratives of Milton Keynes, often used disparagingly to criticise the city.¹⁰ One of the aims of Living Archive was to counter these perceptions and to show the richness of Milton Keynes’s history, as publicity from 1994 illustrates:

So you thought

Milton Keynes

was just

concrete cows

in a

concrete jungle?

New towns have an unjustified reputation for being soulless, cultureless concrete jungles. The Living Archive Project in Milton Keynes is actively dispelling this myth.¹¹

This dual purpose was at the heart of the work of People’s Press: documenting the history of the area before the new town development at the same time as creating a sense of community, identity and ownership for the newcomers. Likewise the aim to bring together newcomers and old time residents and to encourage community spirit and pride in the new town was central to the community theatre work at Stantonbury. Living Archive brought these strands together using a pioneering documentary arts approach in which life history, arts, education and community development combined to shape a distinctive approach to community history. A commitment to community development was central to its work and through plays, books, exhibitions, music, films, websites and other forms of multimedia Living Archive sought to involve communities in making their own history, using primary source material such as letters, diaries, photographs, newspapers but especially people’s own stories. It was also active in developing training and support for other individuals and groups wanting to do similar work both locally and nationally.

Each of the case studies in this thesis has at its core a mission to create a sense of community, which generates internal tensions. The precise nature of these tensions is however different for each group. Living Archive as the ‘product’ of a new town with its emphasis on ‘creating’ community and ‘celebrating’ the history of its residents

⁹ Glancey, J, 2006, ‘Brave New World’, *Guardian*, G2, 06.11.06, p.10.

¹⁰ These were 6 sculptures given to the town by the then artist in residence Liz Leyh in 1978.

¹¹ Living Archive (hereafter LA), Publicity Leaflet, 1994.

provides an opportunity to explore understandings of community history from this perspective and thereby to examine similarities and differences between the three groups. In order to investigate Living Archive and the way it developed, it is necessary first to provide a brief overview of the development of Milton Keynes and the importance of community development in this process.

Milton Keynes: the creation of a new town

The development of new towns in England has been well documented, as has the history of Milton Keynes.¹² The need to provide better living conditions for the residents of certain inner cities (particularly London) following World War Two led to the New Towns Act of 1946 and the eventual development of eleven new towns around the country.¹³ A new town was intended to provide not just better housing, but a better way of life for its new residents away from high-density inner city housing with poor facilities and lack of green space. It was envisaged that these towns would provide employment so that the majority of people would live and work in the towns, which would engender a sense of belonging and commitment to the success of the new town. Aldridge states that, 'British new towns are famous throughout the world as an ambitious government initiative. They are among the earliest examples of comprehensive urban planning and have a reputation as social experiments.'¹⁴ Indeed early proposals demonstrate a desire to ensure that the new towns would be places where, 'all classes of community can meet freely together on equal terms and enjoy common cultural and recreational facilities.'¹⁵ Fostering a sense of community and belonging was recognised as an important factor in enabling new towns to succeed. The underlying belief was that community was a positive and desirable entity and should be encouraged in order to support the assimilation of people into a new town. Frederic Osborn, the second chairman of the Town and Country Planning Association was however more sceptical.¹⁶ He argued this mixing only occurred in the early days of

¹² For example, Aldridge, M, 1979, *The British New Towns: A Programme without Policy*, London, Routledge; Ward, C, 1993, *New Town, Home Town, The Lessons of Experience*, London, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation; Bendixson, T & Platt, J, 1992, *Milton Keynes: Image and Reality*, Cambridge, Granta; Clapson, M, 2004, *A Social History of Milton Keynes*, London, Routledge, and Finnegan, 1998.

¹³ Aldridge, 1979.

¹⁴ Aldridge, 1979, p.1.

¹⁵ Silkin quoted in Glancey, 2006, p.10.

¹⁶ The TACP was initially set up as the Garden Cities Association in 1899 by Ebenezer Howard to promote the development of garden cities – the forerunners of new towns, www.tcpa.org.uk viewed 20.09.08.

development stating that, 'Community life in a new town is of the interest-group pattern, not neighbourhood pattern [...] People gravitate towards others of like social class and interest.'¹⁷ Indeed this comment reflects Kelly's claim, as discussed in chapter two that community cannot be imposed or defined simply by locality; people have to actively participate and acknowledge membership of the community.

The success of the new towns in creating better environments and breaking down class barriers is certainly a subject of academic debate.¹⁸ However, most important to this case study is the recognition that creating a sense of belonging through developing communities was *seen* as a way of bringing people together in a new town. This belief underpinned the work of Living Archive.

Milton Keynes was the last and the largest of the new towns to be built. In January 1967 a formal new town designation order was made on an area in north Buckinghamshire to accommodate London's overspill. In March 1967 the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) was set up to oversee the development and planning of this new city (as it was termed, but never officially designated). The area was mainly agricultural land but included thirteen villages (one of which lent its name to the new town) and three towns: Stony Stratford, an old coaching town; Wolverton, one of the first railway towns; and Bletchley, which had developed along the railway and main road.¹⁹ Central Milton Keynes (CMK) was constructed between the three towns. It was not intended to be a traditional town centre but rather a business and shopping district that would not detract from other areas. Despite the intention, residents in the existing towns felt their identity was being subsumed into this new city and their countryside disappearing under concrete, which highlighted an inherent tension in building a 'new' town that incorporated already established villages and towns.²⁰ This underlying tension between old and new residents was a key factor in the forming of People's Press, which is discussed later.

¹⁷ Quoted in Ward, 1993, p.19.

¹⁸ See for example, Homer, A, 2000, 'Creating New Communities: The role of the Neighbourhood unit in post-war British planning', *Contemporary British History*, 14(1).

¹⁹ Bletchley's population had increased by 20,000 after the Town Development Act of 1952, which saw it accommodate overspill from several London boroughs.

²⁰ Finnegan, 1998, and www.mkcdc.org.uk viewed 19.09.08.

At the time of the designation order there was approximately 60,000 people living in the area and it was envisaged that the new town would eventually accommodate 250,000 people.²¹ Understandably planners played a significant role in the design and development of the new towns. Those involved with Milton Keynes were influenced by the garden city movement and aimed to create a town that had plenty of green space and low-density housing dispersed throughout the area; in essence, an environment more suburban than urban.²² However, all plans had to be approved by the government and were subject to social and economic forces that could not always be predicted.²³ Milton Keynes was no exception. Milton Keynes was conceived under Harold Wilson's Labour Government and was planned in detail when Edward Heath's Conservative Government took power in 1970. CMK was constructed during James Callaghan's Labour Government and the shopping centre in CMK opened in 1979 when Margaret Thatcher became prime minister, bringing in a Conservative Government for the next 15 years.²⁴ These changes inevitably impacted on the way Milton Keynes grew, with each government having different priorities, agendas and financial constraints and with the Thatcher Government a significant shift from public control to extensive privatisation. The MKDC was wound up in 1992 and its responsibilities were devolved to other agencies, for example the Commission for New Towns (CNT, which later became English Partnerships) that took over the property (and land) of the MKDC.²⁵

The importance of public participation in establishing the new town, which was central in Milton Keynes, did not really enter new town consciousness until the 1970s and reflected a shift in attitudes from a top-down approach to a more inclusive bottom-up approach.²⁶ Much of the language used in the planning of Milton Keynes evoked the concept of community and participation as essential to the town's social development: through participation in local activities a sense of belonging would develop and communities would begin to form. As Aldridge remarked,

²¹ In 1981 the population had doubled to 124,300 and in 2001 it was 212,710 from www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/statistics viewed 20.09.08.

²² Clapson, 2004.

²³ See for example, Edwards, M, 2001, 'City Design: What went wrong at Milton Keynes', *Journal of Urban Design*, 6(1).

²⁴ Hill, M (ed.), 2007, *The Story of the Original CMK*, Milton Keynes, Living Archive.

²⁵ www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/Si1992/uksi_19920525_en_1 viewed 20.09.08.

²⁶ Ward, 1993.

The expanding field of social development is also part of the pursuit of the complete community. A new town's community development activities are engaged at the inter-organisation, inter-group and inter-personal levels to hasten the emergence of social relationships, which are assumed to be normal manifestations of community life.²⁷

Milton Keynes benefited from the growing emphasis placed on social development.²⁸ Social development was about putting the needs of the people first and finding ways of making the transition to living in a new town as easy as possible. MKDC had a budget to employ community development officers, together with arrivals officers who provided a much-needed introduction to the town and crucially someone to talk to and seek advice from in a new environment where people arriving knew no one. The plan was that each new neighbourhood of 3000 people would have a MKDC community worker and arrivals officer based in a community house which would serve as a meeting place, advice centre and temporary office.²⁹

The first people arrived in 1972, mostly from several major cities, with better housing as the primary attraction.³⁰ Some also came because their firms relocated and a large number came to work for the MKDC. Two particular developments in Milton Keynes's history were significant to Living Archive. The first was the establishment in 1969 of The Open University (OU), a distance learning university which was to have its administrative base in Milton Keynes.³¹ The OU has an open entry policy encouraging inclusive higher education as well as being at the forefront of communication technology, due in part to the nature of delivering distance learning courses. The second was the setting up of Stantonbury Campus, which opened in 1974. The school had an inclusive education policy and a key aim was to foster good school / community relations. There was a strong emphasis on arts and the school had its own theatre, which staged the community plays by Living Archive.³²

Milton Keynes was an ideal place for those with ideas and enthusiasm to have a certain degree of freedom to create the environment they wanted. The emphasis on social development and developing community/ies was in contrast to Brighton

²⁷ Aldridge, 1979, p.113.

²⁸ Clapson, M, in Percy, M (ed.), 1996, 'The Best Laid Plans', *Town and Country Planning*, 65(3).

²⁹ See Kitchen, R, 1975, 'More than a meet and greet job at Milton Keynes', *Community Care*, 26 February, for a full account of how this worked in practice, and the difference between the roles of the arrivals officer and community workers, and the more formal social services.

³⁰ Kitchen, R, 1974, 'Moving to Milton Keynes', *New Society*, 22 August.

³¹ www.open.ac.uk (viewed 20.09.08).

³² Moon, 1983.

Council's concerns when QueenSpark formed. Equally, whilst Bradford Council was keen to acknowledge and support its diverse communities it was still a top-down approach which did not necessarily encourage active participation in addressing the needs of the communities as determined by the communities themselves.

Community development and the arts

The growing field of social development - and more specifically community development - was central to the work of Living Archive; yet just as the term 'community' has multiple meanings so 'community development' also is open to different interpretations. For the purpose of clarity Meade and Shaw provide a general view that community development, 'is concerned with the relationship between government and its citizens, charged variously with the responsibility for extending, strengthening or cultivating democracy.'³³ 'Government' in this sense means those in local or national government, or other such authorities. Community development work is often targeted at those communities seen to be disadvantaged, for example due to economic circumstances, ethnicity, or geographical location. This process is usually (although not always) facilitated by a 'professional' - a paid community development worker whose role is to work with the communities. The emphasis is on working *with* people, taking a bottom-up approach by addressing the issues and needs of the community, rather than those issues that an outside agency wants to deal with.³⁴ Whilst this is the ideal, community development work is often tailored to meet government priorities because of funding conditions; equally, community development workers are often employed by local authorities that have their own agenda and financial drivers. Leaving aside the complexity and tensions within community development work, not least in terms of who is defining 'the community' and how, in general community development is about active participation where people are encouraged to decide the priorities for their community and work together to achieve these.

Reflecting on his time as a community worker, Kitchen claimed that it was easy to bring people together in association when there were problems that needed to be dealt with, but interest waned once these were solved.³⁵ Equally, Donnison has argued that community workers and organisers have made assumptions that 'people want to spend

³³ Meade, R & Shaw, M, 2007, Community development and the Arts: reviving the democratic imagination, *Community Development Journal*, 42(4), p.413.

³⁴ Community Development Exchange, www.cdx.org.uk viewed 20.09.08.

³⁵ Kitchen, R, 2007, 'Making places work for people', www.scambs.gov.uk viewed 12.11.07.

their time making friends with neighbours, rather than because they have shared interests.’³⁶ Subsequently they are disappointed when these communities - based on living proximity - do not necessarily reflect their desired notion of a community. Once again this takes us back to the complexity of community as discussed in chapter two. Within these discussions on community development, community is invoked as a positive, desirable and self-explanatory goal; the challenge though is how to bring people together to ‘make’ a community. Consequently while there are many different approaches to community development, the one that is most relevant to this case study is that which uses the arts (in its broadest sense) as a means to empower people through participation.

In a study of the social impact of participation in the arts, Matarasso suggests that, ‘[arts participation] represents a flexible, responsive and cost-effective element of a community development strategy’.³⁷ The study illustrates involvement in a local arts project as a way of becoming involved in community activities and meeting people, and crucially as a framework to develop and encourage local identity and a sense of belonging. More recently Hewitt has argued that ‘being involved with the arts can have a lasting and transforming effect on many aspects of people’s lives. This is true not just for individuals but also for neighbourhoods, communities, regions and entire generations, whose sense of identity and purpose can be changed through art.’³⁸ The MKDC regarded arts based projects as having the potential to fulfil many of these aims.

The People’s Press of Milton Keynes

In 1971 Roger Kitchen came to Milton Keynes as a community worker on the first MKDC built estate. He was provided with accommodation in nearby Wolverton where he became aware of the resentment many residents felt about the new city. Through friendships made during his time spent in Brighton studying Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex, Kitchen visited Centerprise and met with Ken Worpole.³⁹ Seeing what Centerprise was doing in publishing books by and for local people inspired Kitchen to think about the possibilities of doing something similar in Wolverton.

³⁶ Donnison, D quoted in Ward, 1993, p.61.

³⁷ Matarasso, F, 1997, *Use or Ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts*, London, Comedia, p.vi.

³⁸ Hewitt, P, 2002, *Ambitions for the Arts* 2003-2006,

www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/documents/publications viewed 15.10.08.

³⁹ Coincidentally Kitchen’s wife Jill had been at the University of Brighton (then Brighton Polytechnic) with Worpole undertaking teacher training.

I'd never published a book before. I'm not a historian but for me the connection was made. I could see that by publishing books you're saying this person's life is worth something. And here we were in a new town, if I could do this in Wolverton and get people's stories and sort of celebrate their stories, one, I think that could do something for the pride of people in Wolverton, but also for the people who were coming here 20, 30, 40 years time, [who would ask] 'what was here before we came?' We would have captured it.⁴⁰

Having been inspired to record the life story of a local person through interviewing, Kitchen used a Centerprise book, *Years of Change: Autobiography of a Hackney Shoemaker* by Arthur Newton (1974), as a model to work towards and to generate interview questions. He also studied local history books to inform an interview agenda. Kitchen then contacted the editor of the Wolverton Express for possible interviewees. His interviews with Bill Elliott resulted in *Piano and Herrings: The Autobiography of a Wolverton Railway Worker* (1975) which Kitchen describes as, 'completely identical [in layout] to the ones from Hackney, apart from one [chapter] called My Sporting Life.'⁴¹

Around this time Kitchen changed jobs from community worker to education and youth liaison worker. Through this new job he had contact with teachers at Stantonbury Campus, most notably Rib Davis with whom he formally set up People's Press of Milton Keynes along with Bud Abbott from the Milton Keynes College of Education. It was a co-operative group with no formal membership, although in reality Kitchen was the leader. The group was fluid, meeting if and when there was an idea for a book. Despite the informality the group had the foresight to adopt the Centerprise constitution in order to be registered as a charity. The main aim was to encourage and publish the work of local people and, like QueenSpark, authors received no payment, although they retained copyright, and any profit went back to finance further publications.

This desire to document the stories of local residents was not part of Kitchen's role as a community worker, but a voluntary undertaking as it was for others involved in People's Press (and QueenSpark). The pioneer spirit that appeared to prevail in Milton Keynes meant that the MKDC was often supportive of work that encouraged community engagement, as Kitchen reflected,

⁴⁰ Kitchen interview.

⁴¹ Ibid.

One of the great things about Milton Keynes in those early days was that there was a spirit within the Corporation. We were all young. You had people who were designing the shopping buildings, they were in their very early 30s, it was an incredible thing, and you were conscious that you were in on something where you could actually shape it. The Corporation was brilliant about supporting people with get up and go.⁴²

Equally working for the MKDC ensured that Kitchen was well placed to access resources and support. For example, for *Piano and Herrings*, Peter Waterman, the social development manager, and John Platt, another MKDC manager and with an interest in local history, provided funding to enable Kitchen to use MKDC's printing unit and graphic designer who designed and typeset the book. 1000 copies of the book were printed and sold out within six weeks.⁴³ Kitchen remembers, 'Of course it was big news, there weren't these kind of local history books around. It was a double page spread in the Wolverton Express!'⁴⁴ This kind of response was not usual in the 1970s as QueenSpark also discovered when its first few books were published. However People's Press were working in a very different environment, with a small population. When publishing its second book in 1976, *Stantonbury Album*, a book of photographs and memories, inspired by the success of the first book People's Press printed 2000 copies. However, the area in which the book was based, New Bradwell, had only 1000 houses, and People's Press struggled to sell the print run. This experience highlighted the localised appeal of the books at this point.

People's Press publications were generated both from people connected with the group and from those who came to know of its work and submitted manuscripts. *Stantonbury Album* was compiled by an MKDC colleague of Kitchen's, Dick Hunter. Davis and Abbott, who were interested in literature, put an appeal in the local paper for poems with the idea of compiling a people's poetry book, which resulted in *People's Poems Volume 1* (1976) and *Write Here* (1980). Most of the books were autobiographies based on recorded interviews, although there were a few written autobiographies such as Greta Barker's *Buckinghamshire Born* (1980) and *Pioneer Tales* (1985) a photography book with short interview extracts from a variety of local people, edited by Jane Turner and Bob Jardine.

⁴² Kitchen interview.

⁴³ A further 1000 were printed in 1976.

⁴⁴ Kitchen Interview.

Although People's Press appeared in the first FWWCP anthology *Writing* (1978) it never became a member. Kitchen stated People's Press had no interest in joining FWWCP as it did not identify with the emphasis among FWWCP groups on working-class writing and breaking down barriers in publishing.⁴⁵ The focus was nevertheless on 'ordinary' people and the language used echoed that of QueenSpark and other groups as evident in the foreword to *People's Poems*: 'Ordinary people write poems. They may do it quietly, even bashfully, but they do it and often they do it very well. The poetry of ordinary people deserves to be read.'⁴⁶ Publishing local stories for posterity, celebrating the lives of people in the area, and building community spirit in a new town was People's Press *raison d'être*. There was no concern with the debates that QueenSpark were engaged with about the historical merits of the publications. Equally there was not the same sense of being in opposition to the establishment that permeated many FWWCP groups, and the angst over how to organise and accept funding that was so evident in QueenSpark in the early years. People's Press was far more pragmatic about what it was doing and accepted whatever funding it could obtain in order to publish its books, an approach that BHRU adopted post-MSC. For example *People's Poems* received funding from Boots the Chemist (Bletchley branch), Milton Keynes College of Education Rag Committee (through Abbott) and East Midlands Arts Association.

The material that was used for two People's Press publications - Hawtin Mundy's *No Heroes, No Cowards* (1981) and Albert French's *Your Loving Brother Albert*, (1983) - is the most significant in relation to the development of Living Archive as it provided the link between Kitchen and Nevitt. Although the process of them coming together is not quite as linear and clear cut as this account perhaps suggests, for the purpose of clarity the next section demonstrates how Kitchen and Nevitt were simultaneously working with similar goals albeit in different media.

From books to plays

In 1975, whilst undertaking voluntary house clearances Kitchen discovered a box that contained letters from a Wolverton boy Albert French to his sister, sent throughout his training and time in the trenches in World War One. Kitchen had the letters typed up with the idea of putting them together for publication. The book took some time to

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ People's Press, 1976, *People's Poems Vol 1*, Milton Keynes, People's Press, p.1

come to fruition and in the meantime Kitchen made a documentary based on the letters for Community Radio Milton Keynes, *Brother Bertie Went Away*. Kitchen interviewed French's two surviving brothers, and extracts were used in the documentary. A revised version of the documentary, *He Shouldn't Have Been There Should He?*, was later broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 1980 as part of the Remembrance Day commemorations.⁴⁷

Around the same time Nevitt, as director of drama at Stantonbury, was setting up a community drama group and youth theatre, as well as acting as advisor to MKDC on the development of theatre and drama in Milton Keynes. Nevitt was particularly influenced by the work of Peter Cheeseman and Joan Littlewood and the idea of producing documentary plays using only primary source material and incorporating the musical traditions inspired by Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl.⁴⁸ This was only one, although important, strand of his work but it was the one that brought Kitchen and Nevitt together and laid the foundation for Living Archive.⁴⁹

The first play Nevitt produced was based on the Burston Strike School, an alternative school set up in Burston, Norfolk, from 1914-1939 in protest at the sacking of two teachers at the village school.⁵⁰ The success of the play in bringing a wide range of people together to work on it, and its positive reception, led the MKDC to offer Nevitt funding to produce a play based on the local area. Nevitt employed a researcher, Margaret Broadhurst, to gather primary material 'from every imaginable source', which included French's letters.⁵¹ The Stantonbury Campus Drama Group (SCDG), which was to form the core of the community plays and included teachers and students from the school as well as members of the community, worked through the material, supported by a series of workshops led by Cheeseman, MacColl and Seeger. The result was a musical documentary play about the coming of the railways to Wolverton, *All Change!* (1976), with Davis as musical director.⁵²

Following the success of *All Change!*, in 1980 Stantonbury hosted a national conference on documentary arts techniques and practices entitled 'Theatre of Fact'. At

⁴⁷ see www.mkheritage.co.uk/la for an overview of Albert French and the projects his letters inspired.

⁴⁸ Nevitt, R, 1986, *Community Spirit, Drama*, 162. For an insight into Cheeseman's work see Cheeseman, P, 1971, 'From a Community-theatre in the round', *Theatre Quarterly* 1.

⁴⁹ Roy & Maggie Nevitt, 2009, Comments on earlier draft, 20.01.09.

⁵⁰ Nevitt, 1986.

⁵¹ Roy & Maggie Nevitt, 2009. Davis worked with Nevitt, and Nevitt had two poems published in *People's Poems*, so although Nevitt and Kitchen had not met they had several connections.

⁵² The script of the play, along with notes and photographs from the production was published by *People's Press* in 1979, *All Change: the story of early Wolverton*. See Noticeboard, 1979, *HWJ*, 7, p.232.

the conference Nevitt used French's letters to explore ways of turning primary source material into drama. As Kitchen remembers, 'To see and hear those words, those letters I knew so well coming back to you [...] it was quite an extraordinary experience for me. The power of it!'⁵³ The letters were subsequently reworked into a play, *Your Loving Brother Albert*, which was preceded by music hall songs and performed for ten nights.

By now, the early 1980s, Kitchen had left MKDC and was the co-director of Inter-Action, a Milton Keynes community arts project, having found community work increasingly limited:

What I'd begun to see in the creative projects was it's all ages, it's not competitive, it's normally about having a good time, celebrating. From my point of view, [it fulfils] my fundamental aim about trying to build communities and increase pride and bring people together.⁵⁴

Similarly, the community theatre that Nevitt envisaged was one whose members mostly were not professionals, but who had interests and talents that were uncovered and expressed through their involvement. As he stated, 'There is a spirit in community theatre at its best, which can connect history with now; distant places with here; life with art; old people with young people and communities with each other.'⁵⁵ Although coming from different disciplines both Kitchen and Nevitt were expressing similar interests and desires and began to collaborate. Kitchen undertook the research and Nevitt directed the plays, and both worked on the script.

The first collaboration was *Days of Pride*, 1981, based on material Kitchen had been given by Hawtin Mundy, an old soldier from New Bradwell, who had tape-recorded his reminiscences of being a prisoner during World War One. Mundy was the main character of the play, which told the story of the First World War as it affected the lives of those from Wolverton and New Bradwell.⁵⁶ Extensive research was undertaken, including looking at army records, newspaper accounts, and school records, as well as interviews with local residents. The level of research for the plays was impressive. However the individual narratives had to be placed in a wider context for the plays to work for an audience, in a way that was not always necessary with publications, which

⁵³ Kitchen interview.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Nevitt, 1986, p.13.

⁵⁶ To coincide with the play, People's Press published Mundy's story as *No Heroes, No Cowards*. Kitchen also used the source material to produce five half-hour radio documentaries for Community Radio Milton Keynes. see www.mkheritage.co.uk/1a/daysofpride.

clearly demonstrated how the form, in this case theatre, determined the content. Yet, whilst the impetus for Kitchen and Nevitt was to use people's memories for documentary arts projects with the explicit aim of bringing people together, there was a recognition of the historical importance of the material collected. For example, as Nevitt remarked, 'The history we get taught is partial. The Living Archive discovers new perspectives on past events by listening to people who were there, and scrutinising the neglected evidence that lies in attics and forgotten places'.⁵⁷ This sentiment would not be out of place in any debate on the merits of people's history and the different sources used, as discussed in chapter two.

Two more plays followed in 1982 (*The Jovial Priest*) and 1983 (*Sheltered Lives*), and the success of these encouraged Kitchen and Nevitt to set up an organisation dedicated to documentary arts, bringing together Kitchen's work with People's Press and radio, and Nevitt's documentary theatre work at Stantonbury. Whilst many others were involved in the plays, most notably Davis, Kitchen and Nevitt appear to have been the key protagonists. Indeed a headline from Milton Keynes Gazette in 1983 reads, 'Another winner from the drama duo?' followed by a piece about their planned production *Sheltered Lives* (about World War Two) sandwiched between two photographs of Kitchen and Nevitt.⁵⁸ Milton Keynes Documentary Arts Trust was the result, although the name was changed to the more user-friendly, Living Archive Project, and the phrase 'dig where you stand' was adopted as its motto:

It epitomises what it's all about. If you dig where you stand for the stories, you don't need to seek out the famous media personalities and so on. Dig where you stand because in your community there are all kinds of talents that can interpret that material and share it with the community in a creative way.⁵⁹

This belief in the expertise inherent within the local community and the desire to draw it out for the benefit of the community was central to the work of Living Archive, as was the importance of sharing skills between those involved in projects, which also underpinned the work of QueenSpark. Whilst it was called Living Archive, it was not an archive in a traditional sense. Unlike BHRU there was not the same emphasis, initially, on developing an archive for historical purposes. Collecting for the future was

⁵⁷ Nevitt, 1986, p.8.

⁵⁸ www.discovermiltonkeynes.co.uk/bigplayers/nevitt viewed 03.12.08.

⁵⁹ Kitchen interview.

not the primary aim; the focus was on the outcome, and collection was determined by the projects undertaken (as became the case post-MSU for BHRU). This approach made the 'archive' (i.e. the material they collected) 'alive' for people, and in that sense Living Archive was an apt name for the group. However there was an awareness of the historical value of the material. As the collection grew, both from material collected for projects and increasingly donations from the public, cataloguing the material to make it accessible to the community became an important part of its work.⁶⁰ By 1997 developing the archive for public use became a key aim.⁶¹

From Days of Pride to The Mysteries

Living Archive was established in January 1984 as an educational charity with two main goals: to develop documentary arts work in Milton Keynes and to encourage and support those wanting to do similar work elsewhere. Its stated aim was,

To explore and extend the methods by which the essences of a community's life can be collected, preserved and transformed into a variety of art forms that celebrate the life of that community for the enjoyment of all. [Equally] to build bridges between the professional arts and education, schools and community, old people, and young people, the past and the present, through the medium of the documentary arts'.⁶²

Nevitt and Kitchen became volunteer co-directors, they secured a £20,000 grant from Gulbenkian, which enabled them to appoint Maggie Nevitt as a part-time development officer, and an office was provided at Stantonbury.⁶³ The SCDG transferred its assets to Living Archive. Whilst producing documentary plays was a major reason for forming Living Archive, it was not the sole reason, and the dominance of documentary plays was to become a tension later on, a point to which I will return. People's Press explored the possibility of handing over its name and assets to a local writing group, Speakeasy however in the end it was officially dissolved and its assets were absorbed into Living Archive.

As a charity Living Archive had a board of trustees who provided guidance and support, and there were strong educational links as many were connected with Stantonbury or the OU. For example, trustees in the first few years included Rib Davis,

⁶⁰ *Living Archive Newsletter*, June 1992. In 2006 LA received HLF funding to digitise its collections for public use.

⁶¹ LA Annual Report 1996-1997.

⁶² Quoted in Shaw, P, 1990, *A Report on Living Archive Project*, p.3.

⁶³ Nevitt continued as Director of Drama at Stantonbury and Kitchen remained with Inter-Action.

Peter Cheeseman, Bob Moon (a teacher at Stantonbury who became professor of education at OU), Paul Clark (songwriter and original member of Living Archive Band, then Dean of Science at OU before becoming a Pro-Vice Chancellor), Lee Shostak (director of planning at MKDC), Marion Hill (a teacher at Stantonbury), Joan Christoudolou (OU tutor), Cynthia Cooksey (head of education at English Heritage and wife of Geoff Cooksey, head of Stantonbury), Michael Davis (co-director of Stantonbury), Sheila Lindsay (teacher at Stantonbury), Brian Stone (Reader of Literature at OU), Eric Thompson (faculty officer in science and engineering at University of London), John Wilkins (co-director of Stantonbury), and Philip Donnellan (a BBC filmmaker connected with Cheeseman).⁶⁴ Whilst this was an impressive line-up they were all friends or connected in one way or another, which in retrospect Kitchen felt was not such a good idea, 'Perhaps they should have been a bit more critical of what we were up to.'⁶⁵ This comment reflected difficulties that emerged towards the end of the 1980s, which are considered later and that echoed the difficulties that occurred within QueenSpark and BHRU during the same period.

The Living Archive trustees worked differently to the BHRU advisory group which was more formal in its approach, not least because of sensitivities over race issues and because BHRU was answerable to Bradford Council. In a period of heightened political and racial tensions the advisory group was crucial in helping BHRU navigate its way through these complexities. Meanwhile QueenSpark in the 1980s, with its focus on finding alternative ways of working and rejection of 'experts', had no advisory group as this would have been contrary to its underlying ethos.

The output of Living Archive was predominately plays in the first few years with on average one play staged per year. Each play would run for 10 nights with a maximum audience of 3000.⁶⁶ As soon as one play finished, work would begin on the next. Often the process of research for one play would highlight areas of possible interest for another. For example, during the research for *Days of Pride*, a recurring story in many interviews concerned a priest in New Bradwell who in 1906 told his new congregation that there was a mistake in the marriage register and consequently 400 local couples were not legally married. It was a major event and perfect material for a

⁶⁴ There was no information detailing the first board of trustees and subsequent changes, only a list of those who had served between 1984-1990. Shaw, 1990.

⁶⁵ Kitchen interview.

⁶⁶ Before the forming of Living Archive plays did not always run for 10 nights, as Stantonbury did not have the resources.

play – *The Jovial Priest* (1982).⁶⁷ Likewise Nellie Smith, an interviewee who appeared as a character in both *Days of Pride* and *The Jovial Priest*, and also contributed to *Stantonbury Album*, kept a diary from 1901-1920, which she left to Living Archive when she died. The diary and other material were used to produce *Nellie*, which was shown alongside *Your Loving Brother Albert* in 1984. These two plays contrasted French, who went to war and never returned, with his contemporary Smith, who lived in Wolverton until she was nearly 100 years old.⁶⁸

The development of a play from idea to theatre production took approximately a year. Once the subject had been decided Kitchen and other volunteers would spend approximately three months interviewing and collecting documentary evidence. Then a draft script would be put together using the collected material. As Nevitt commented, '[the material] was subjected to a rigorous process of selection, juxtaposition and interconnection with songs and music which would sustain a dramatic narrative and enthrall an audience.'⁶⁹ This draft was then left for three months over summer before emerging at an open reading followed by rehearsals, which would result in revisions and redrafting. There were no auditions and everyone who showed an interest was given a role:⁷⁰

It was very egalitarian. You had to have lots of crowd scenes. The biggest one we ever did had 96 in the cast plus backstage etc. Seeing friends in a play would inspire other members of the community to give it a go. [...] It was like three generations of people. People were getting to know one another. People who'd lived here for years who were part of the old residents, and of course the newcomers were coming in. They were fantastic experiences [but] they were absolutely exhausting.⁷¹

The songwriters were given material to write songs for specific scenes. While Nevitt and Kitchen aimed to use only the words from the primary sources, the songwriters had more licence with the material, but still had to keep to the spirit of the words. The songwriters / singers were a fluid group of local musicians who had been involved with SCDG. In the early 1990s they consolidated as the Living Archive Band, the musical wing of Living Archive.⁷²

⁶⁷ J.B Priestley based his play, *When we are married*, on this event.

⁶⁸ Nevitt, 1986.

⁶⁹ Roy & Maggie Nevitt, 2009, p.4.

⁷⁰ Joy Parker provides an account of being involved in a production as a volunteer, see *Living Archive Newsletter*, June 1999, p.4-5.

⁷¹ Kitchen interview.

⁷² See www.livingarchiveband.co.uk.

Despite an adherence to the actual words spoken by interviewees or written in the source material, it is important to remember that the material was selected to engage an audience, as was the case with the oral history books and exhibitions of QueenSpark and BHRU. Indeed this engagement had to be immediate for the play to work, and the music and songs were important in pulling together the narrative, which the documentary dialogue sometimes restricted. In addition, as a community play it was probable that many in the audience had lived through the events being portrayed or indeed appeared as characters in the play, and so it was important the plays affirmed their stories. As Nevitt commented,

Any kind of play must entertain; must be a work of art; must have essential dramatic form. [...] It is our experience that however much a play has compressed time, concentrated events and been selective with its source material in the interests of representing reality in an art form, the subjects of the play in the audience, nonetheless, affirm its authenticity; 'This is how it was', they say.⁷³

For Living Archive these plays represented 'historic continuities and human experiences', and aimed to show the richness of the 'historical roots and local lives within the variegated and unique areas that continue[d] within Milton Keynes.'⁷⁴ As in QueenSpark, contributors were not anonymous. Given the very public nature of the plays, and being a new town, it would have been impossible to undertake these projects with any degree of anonymity. Moreover, within a community development framework, Living Archive was concerned with celebrating and acknowledging the lives of local people. Archibald's comments regarding the importance of using history to build community reflects the importance Living Archive placed on people's histories:

Narratives explain the present as a product of the past, implicitly evaluate the past and the present, and by extension anticipate life in the future. Lack of a shared story not only isolates us from each other in the present but also severs us from the past and future.⁷⁵

Local people were involved as volunteers not only in the acting but also in the designing of sets, lighting, costumes, and other associated activities. Given the sheer scale and cost of these productions, and the fact that paid support was limited to one part-time

⁷³ Nevitt, 1986, p.11.

⁷⁴ Finnegan, 1998, p.49.

⁷⁵ Archibald, R.R, 1999, *A Place to Remember: Using History to build Community*, Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, p.93.

worker, it is perhaps not surprising that community plays dominated the work of Living Archive. The amount of work that went into producing one play left little capacity for other activities. Yet what is striking is the amount of energy and passion that people had to make these plays successful. While the emphasis was on community engagement and bringing people together, those central to Living Archive were also making Milton Keynes their home and therefore striving to create communities they wanted to be part of. As Kitchen commented,

It's a very exciting thing to be a pioneer in a new town. It's potentially a place of tremendous opportunity if you are interested in doing something. It's a blank canvas. [...] We've had this unique opportunity to be involved in creating a brand new city – we've been able to write our own history in a way that few others ever get the chance to.⁷⁶

One important offshoot of Living Archive was 'Theatre of Fact' a professional Theatre in Education group set up by Nevitt in 1984. Professional actors would use material, especially that of French and Mundy, in schools to help children connect with the histories of local people and the wider contexts of their life stories.⁷⁷ Theatre of Fact became autonomous from Living Archive in 1986, for the simple reason that two separate groups could attract more funding than one, a pragmatic decision which was typical of Living Archive's approach to funding.⁷⁸

During this period Living Archive also produced several cassette tapes of music and songs from its plays, including 'Wolverton Pride', a compilation of songs from different plays.⁷⁹ Aside from the plays and associated material, Living Archive undertook two Mass Observation inspired projects.⁸⁰ In the first, 'A Day in the Life of Milton Keynes', on 18th May 1984 people were encouraged via posters, leaflets and word of mouth to keep a personal diary of the day to send to Living Archive for an exhibition. The second project was for election day on June 11th 1987.⁸¹ However one of the most important pieces of work to come out during this period was the publication *Dig Where You Stand: A book of ideas* (1989) which consolidated Living Archive's

⁷⁶ Kitchen, 2007.

⁷⁷ Nevitt, 1986 provides examples of how this worked in the classroom. Funding came from the Gulbenkian Foundation.

⁷⁸ Roy & Maggie Nevitt, 2009. Kitchen and Maggie and Roy Nevitt remained as directors.

⁷⁹ *Living Archive Newsletter*, October 1992.

⁸⁰ Kitchen as a Sussex University social anthropologist graduate was aware of Mass Observation.

⁸¹ 100 people kept a diary for the election day. This was repeated in 1992.

work, its commitment to education, and its desire to share its way of working with other individuals and groups.

Dig Where You Stand was developed as part of a £78,000 project funded by Gulbenkian which approached Living Archive to devise and administer a documentary arts initiative in schools around the country. The aim was to encourage schools to engage with their communities through documentary arts projects over a year. In total sixty schools participated (although two did not complete) and £40,000 was shared between them to support their research which was to result in a 'product' for their community such as a play, exhibition or similar event.⁸² The funding enabled Living Archive to employ a full-time project co-ordinator. At this point Living Archive had two part time workers – Maggie Nevitt and Sue Quinn. Quinn had joined in 1986 on an MSC scheme and then continued as a member of staff for eighteen years. Funding was now coming from various sources such as the Arts Council, MKDC, Buckinghamshire Arts Association and East Midlands Arts, as well as from local companies. In 1989, whilst QueenSpark was dependent on SE Arts and BHRU was struggling post-MSC to get any funding at all, Living Archive demonstrated pragmatism in its approach but it also had opportunities that were not available to the other two (a point to which I will return). For example, as a new town, businesses were keen to get established and advertising in a programme that would be seen by possibly 3000 people was a good way to raise profile; it was mutually beneficial. Nevertheless this Gulbenkian award was a major coup for Living Archive, it was recognition of how positively its work was viewed outside Milton Keynes, and would lay the foundations for its future direction and development.

Dig Where You Stand used examples from its various projects to illustrate the variety of creative ways in which primary source material could be used. The book included a five-step guide for embarking on a documentary arts project, which had become (and remained) the template for all Living Archive work. This five-step guide begins with the inspiration or starting point for the project (for example, French's letters). Step two is research and interviewing – collecting the material. The third step is reviewing the material, making it accessible and usable (in other words making copies of any documents, transcribing interviews etc) to be worked upon. Step four is working the material into a desired form (book, play, exhibition etc); and the final stage is giving

⁸² For an account of the project see, Croall, J, 1992, *Dig for History – active learning across the curriculum*, Devon, Southgate Publishers.

it back to the community. Developing this template not only enabled Living Archive to be responsive to requests from others wanting to undertake similar projects, but more importantly it demonstrated a clear framework for working which was valuable not only in planning projects but also as a tangible asset when applying for funding.

Despite the principle that Living Archive would produce documentary plays based on local events, after seeing *The Mysteries*, a series of three connected plays performed at the National Theatre in London in 1985, Nevitt was inspired to stage a version in Milton Keynes as a Living Archive production in 1988-89.⁸³ The Milton Keynes Christian Council had approached Living Archive about the possibility of the group undertaking a documentary play to celebrate the ‘ecumenical spirit which had brought together many of the local churches in the new city,’ and Nevitt thought staging *The Mysteries* might fulfil this request.⁸⁴ These three plays were followed by two plays based on Flora Thompson’s *Lark Rise* and *Candleford* (based on Juniper Hill, fifteen miles from Milton Keynes) in 1990 and 1991. While these were still community plays - local people were involved - the genesis of the material was different and there was no longer the focus on local people’s histories. Kitchen, who had been involved with *The Mysteries* reflected, ‘To be honest, although this was all part of Living Archive [...] to me it was not quite what we should have been doing.’⁸⁵ Certainly Davis suggested that Nevitt had increasingly more influence on the direction Living Archive took and the boundaries between Nevitt’s work at Stantonbury and that of Living Archive began to blur. This became a point of conflict within the group and raised issues of ownership of Living Archive.⁸⁶ These tensions over ownership were also evident in QueenSpark, as discussed in my personal reflection in chapter one. However these were far less apparent in BHRU, which as an MSC scheme was not a voluntary run organisation and which had clearly defined roles and structures in place. When the MSC scheme ceased, ownership of BHRU effectively transferred to one person, Smith, albeit within the museum structure.

The shift to plays such as *The Mysteries* and the completion of ‘Dig Where You Stand’ left Living Archive at a crossroads. The plays were a large drain on resources, particularly volunteers, and increasingly young professional theatre practitioners were

⁸³ *The Mysteries* is three plays - The nativity, the passion and the resurrection, which tell the story of the bible from creation to last judgement.

⁸⁴ Roy & Maggie Nevitt, 2009, p.4.

⁸⁵ Kitchen interview.

⁸⁶ Davis, R, 2009, comments on earlier draft of chapter, 08.02.09.

employed to work on the productions alongside the volunteers. There were two reasons for this. One was to ease the reliance (and avoid ‘burn-out’) on volunteers, especially those involved in design, such as making costumes, which was a major undertaking. The second was to bring in professionals so that students and other local people involved in the productions could learn relevant skills working alongside them. Whilst increasing the skills base of local volunteers was seen as important, and as demonstrated in QueenSpark some paid work was needed to free up volunteers’ time for other activities, the entanglement of Nevitt’s professional job with Living Archive brought to the fore the question of the group’s purpose.

These tensions prompted a review of Living Archive in 1990 by Phyllida Shaw, an arts policy and management consultant, to reassess the group’s aims and objectives. Imminent changes within funding organisations also contributed to the need for review. For example, Milton Keynes Borough Council (MKBC) was reviewing its support of the arts, and Buckinghamshire Arts Association was to cease to exist from 1991, when Milton Keynes and environs would be served by Southern Arts. Likewise Stantonbury had opted for grant-maintained status and so would be supported by the then Department of Education and Science rather than the county council, which would indirectly impact on Living Archive.

Shaw observed that the profile of Living Archive was indistinguishable from Theatre of Fact, SCDG and Inter-Action, and that many people perceived the plays as Stantonbury productions, and that funders were unclear as to the distinct nature of Living Archive. The multiple roles of Kitchen and Nevitt in their professional and voluntary work added to this confusion and its location at Stantonbury did not help distinguish Living Archive from the other groups.⁸⁷ She stated, ‘If Living Archive is to thrive as a recognisable entity, it needs to establish an identity of its own, in which the content and the purpose of the work are as well known as the names associated with it.’⁸⁸ However, Shaw noticed a reluctance to raise the public profile for fear of not being able to meet demands for its services, which seemed likely to increase following completion of ‘Dig Where You Stand’, coupled with the knowledge that Living Archive needed to promote itself in order to attract funding (a tension that was also evident to a

⁸⁷ Nevitt was a director of Living Archive, Theatre of Fact, SCDG, Chairman of Inter-Action trustees and director of drama at Stantonbury, whilst Kitchen was a director of Living Archive, Theatre of Fact, Chair of MK Arts Association and director of Inter-Action. Maggie Nevitt was paid worker of Living Archive but also a director of Theatre of Fact and a paid consultant to the MK Foundation.

⁸⁸ Shaw, 1990, p.5.

lesser extent in QueenSpark in the mid 1990s). What was clear was that like other small groups the focus was on the short-term; constraints on time, budgets, and skills meant there was no 'space' to think long-term, which in turn led to a lack of clarity over its direction. Consequently Living Archive focused on plays which Shaw reflected were, 'powerful vehicles for community participation and a central part of the Project's work, [but] the manner of their organisation is now drawing disproportionately on the project's resources and thereby restricting its long-term development.'⁸⁹ In addition, Shaw questioned why, given its original aims, Living Archive had begun undertaking plays such as *The Mysteries*. She argued that the aim of using the life of the community, both past and present, as inspiration for the creative work was what made Living Archive unique and should be its key selling point to potential funders.

In conclusion Shaw recommended that Living Archive move from Stantonbury to assert its independence, and that long term success would require the group to be clear about its aims and to have a clearly defined organisational structure in order to attract further funding and develop its training programme. This important report forced the group to rethink its aims and direction. The Trustees supported the findings and the recommendation that Living Archive redefine its vision, keeping the past and present of the place as the inspiration for the creative activities but extending beyond plays and books to include other art forms.⁹⁰ It was decided that there should be a full-time general manager to facilitate the development of Living Archive, and Kitchen was appointed to the post in 1992. Maggie Nevitt became responsible for developing an archive of the collected material and setting up the Living Archive Press, while Nevitt stayed at Stantonbury as theatre director and became the artistic director for Living Archive.⁹¹

In 1993 Living Archive took up residence in the old Wolverton railway works bathhouse, which had been converted into a community centre for local residents, housing such as Age Concern and Wolverton Arts Club.⁹² Being situated in a community centre enabled Living Archive to develop links with community groups away from Stantonbury; for example in 1996 it ran a weekly reminiscence writing

⁸⁹ Shaw, 1990, p.3.

⁹⁰ Kitchen interview.

⁹¹ In 1993 LA had a worker on an Employment Action placement to help catalogue the collection of interviews and photographs.

⁹² The centre was provided as 'planning gain' as the result of a Tesco development and was leased to the MKBC who sublet it to the Old Bath House Community Centre Ltd, of which Living Archive was a member. Kitchen, 2009, comments on earlier draft of chapter, 18.02.09.

course with Age Concern, funded by Milton Keynes Community Trust (MKCT). As a centre for several groups it was in a stronger position to attract funding for shared resources. For example, in 1996 the Old Bath House (as it is called) secured a grant of £59,500 from the Foundation for Sports and the Arts for dark room equipment, new computers and software, and other equipment.⁹³ The move provided Living Archive with an office, meeting room, dark room, recording room and art room, premises accessible to the community, who were encouraged to visit and participate in its activities, but most importantly with an identity of its own.

This move and the broadening scope of activities away from documentary plays gradually loosened the ties between Nevitt and Living Archive; for Nevitt, documentary drama was Living Archive's *raison d'être*.⁹⁴ By 1993 both Roy and Maggie Nevitt had resigned from the group and Davis became the artistic director.⁹⁵

A new direction

Living Archive undertook a wide range of projects post 1992 and the following sections provide some examples in order to give a sense of the type of community histories being produced.

Documentary plays were still an important part of Living Archive's work; for example, *Worker by Name*, a play set in the inter-war years in Stony Stratford and focusing on the life of one man, Tom Worker, was produced in 1992 with Davis writing and directing.⁹⁶ This production saw a shift back to more voluntary involvement, with volunteers as performers and helping with costumes, lighting, set-building etc. This shift reduced costs but was not intended as a lowering of standards in the productions; it was a conscious return to the idea of drawing out the expertise within the community, a sentiment that had been key to earlier work.⁹⁷ Indeed Alison Chitty, a professional stage designer who had been a consultant for *All Change!* provided free consultancy for *Worker by Name*. Living Archive did not develop its own drama group and continued to

⁹³ *Living Archive Newsletter*, April 1996.

⁹⁴ Roy Nevitt, as the Chair of a Theatre Development Company, campaigned for many years for a theatre at the centre of Milton Keynes. The Milton Keynes Theatre and Gallery opened in 1999 with Nevitt as vice-chair until 2002 when he became chair until 2008.

⁹⁵ *Living Archive Newsletter*, April 1993. Maggie Nevitt became Stantonbury Campus Theatre administrator.

⁹⁶ Some of the material collected for *Worker by Name* about Stony Stratford was used to produce *A Lifetime Away* (1994), a book of reminiscences and photographs of childhood during the inter-war years.

⁹⁷ Davis, R, 1992, *Living Archive Newsletter*, June.

work closely with SCDG, staging a play approximately every two to three years, occasionally reviving some of the old plays.⁹⁸

In line with its redefined vision Living Archive sought new projects to develop the ideas it promoted in 'Dig Where You Stand', as well as consolidating its training programme. One of the first projects carried out during 1993–94 was in fact originally proposed by the Nevitts. 'The Fabric of Milton Keynes' was a textile 'map' in which five professional artists worked with eleven local different groups, including a prison group to create pieces which, 'reflected the places, feelings and characters that made their place special to them', culminating in an exhibition.⁹⁹ Funding came from at least nine different sources, including the OU and Wolverton Science and Arts Institute Trust. The wide range of funders was in contrast to the limited funding both QueenSpark and BHRU (post MSC) received. One reason for this was that neither had full-time workers able to devote time to pursue funding to this extent. Another was that the strong educational foundation of Living Archive and its charity status made it eligible for many schemes not open to QueenSpark and BHRU, as did its status as a new town project (for example CNT funding). Living Archive was also open to schemes that would facilitate its growth and make it work effectively. For example, the director of the local branch of Investors in Industry helped prepare a prospectus, gave advice on getting sponsorship from local businesses, and provided a small grant of £300.¹⁰⁰ This prospectus was designed as a publicity document for potential funders.¹⁰¹ Likewise, as part of the Business in the Arts initiative, a local design and public relations company, Bentley Woolston, provided advice on publicity, as well as sponsoring a performance of *Worker By Name*. Living Archive approached companies for support either financial or help in kind, which was particularly helpful when needing match funding for large funding applications. All these connections and support contributed to Living Archive's development and helped strengthen its working practices and networks connecting with the wider community, in itself making it more attractive to potential funders.

Core funding continued from Southern Arts and MKBC, which mainly covered staff costs, administration and rent. Fundraising was undertaken to run projects, and

⁹⁸ 1994 saw the production of *The Rockets*, a play about a local band in the 1950s, and a revival of *Days of Pride*. In 1997, *Bigger, Brighter, Better: a story of Bletchley's post war Pioneers* was performed.

⁹⁹ *Living Archive Newsletter*, September 1993.

¹⁰⁰ *Living Archive Newsletter*, June 1992.

¹⁰¹ LA, minutes from finance sub-committee, 24.09.94.

project workers were employed on short-term contracts if applications were successful. Given the number of projects and activities, a considerable amount of Kitchen's time was taken up networking, building up partnerships and securing funding. Devising innovative projects that kept to Living Archive's principles was key. For example, aware of the 50th anniversary in 1996 of the New Towns Act, it approached the CNT in 1994 with the idea of running a documentary arts scheme in new towns around the country (not dissimilar in format to 'Dig Where You Stand'):

The Living Archive is in many ways the legacy of MKDC and the new towns movement. It has responded to the challenge posed by the huge changes that the development of Milton Keynes has brought. [...] People are not apathetic. They are waiting to be asked to get involved in something creative and worthwhile. With an infusion of professional guidance the highest artistic standards can be achieved. Documentary arts projects provide the perfect focus and means for people of all ages and backgrounds to come together to be sociable and learn skills.¹⁰²

This approach proved successful and in 1995 CNT commissioned Living Archive to devise and administer an awards scheme, 'New Towns Act', funding local groups to research the history of their new town since designation and then to use the findings to create for example a book, play or exhibition. Successful groups received between £100 and £1000 toward the costs of their project.¹⁰³ With an overall budget of £22,000, Living Archive supported 34 groups, including schools. A video and photographic exhibition of all the projects was presented in London in 1996.¹⁰⁴

As with 'Dig where You Stand' once Living Archive received the funding there was a role reversal and it, not the funding body, decided who should receive support. This placed Living Archive in a very different position to QueenSpark and BHRU, in that it was effectively making judgements on groups applying for funding and deciding which ones merited an award. In this way it endorsed a particular type of community history, characterised by celebration, pride in one's community, and empowering participants through learning new skills. However Living Archive also encouraged groups to present the history in different ways and to use a variety of sources. In this respect Living Archive reflected its own particular historical specificity. For example, QueenSpark formed at a time when publishing books in the community was a radical

¹⁰² LA, 1994, Proposal to the CNT.

¹⁰³ *Living Archive Newsletter*, June 1995.

¹⁰⁴ *Living Archive Newsletter*, July 1996.

endeavour, and BHRU, formed as it was by the libraries and museums service, was directed towards archiving and exhibitions which later extended into publications. In contrast Living Archive reflected the interests notably of Kitchen and Nevitt that were framed in a community development / education context and which embraced many forms other than books and plays.

The ability to see its work as relevant to other organisations and translate this into workable proposals was a key strength of Living Archive. It struck a delicate balance between staying true to its aims and obtaining funding, without compromising its values to fit the funders' agendas. As Kitchen stated,

You've got to live in the real world in this kind of thing, [...] you can't live in an ivory tower, you can't afford to. You've got to be innovative, and increasingly you've got to listen to people, you've got to get out there, you've got to be responsive to what people are saying. [You've] got to start with a project and to be true to aims and objectives, not just chase the dollar. Don't say 'oh there's a pot of money out there, how can we twist, adapt to get that money.' One of my mantras is, money is never a problem because there are funders out there, and that's all their job is to fund people, and they want something that is exciting, interesting, well-managed, well-administered.¹⁰⁵

Whilst a considerable amount of time was devoted to securing project funding, it is striking that with a clear structure, the continual presence of a dynamic full-time general manager and other key staff such as Davis, Zena Flinn (who became the administrator in 1994) and Quinn as project manager, Living Archive was extremely productive. It was not encumbered by on going tensions over volunteer and paid worker status as was QueenSpark. Forging positive partnerships with organisations such as the OU and developing an outward-looking approach that was responsive to new ideas were important factors in enabling Living Archive to develop and grow. In addition, being part of Milton Keynes Heritage Association (MKHA), formed in 1994 by several local heritage groups and museums to encourage communication and co-operation between the various organisations, was also important in developing strong links and partnerships which were increasingly desirable to funders. For example in 2000 MKHA, headed by Milton Keynes Museum, secured a £40,500 grant from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport Museums and Galleries Commission IT Challenge Fund, which was set up to support innovative approaches to the digitisation of museum

¹⁰⁵ Kitchen interview.

archives. The bid, written by Kitchen, was based on the successful model of 'IT for a Purpose' training that had been developed by Living Archive over a number of years, and is discussed later.¹⁰⁶ It was intended that the project, 'The Jewels of Milton Keynes', would produce a website guide, by volunteers trained at Living Archive, to the collections held by the then eighteen members of MKHA.¹⁰⁷ Living Archive received money to run the training and also contributed to the site by producing 'The Letters of Albert French'.¹⁰⁸ Involvement with other organisations in this way ensured a good local profile as well as keeping Living Archive up to date with local developments, ensuring it was well placed to offer its expertise for various projects.

These partnerships were not always unproblematic. *Listen to me* (2001), a publication that resulted from an oral history project begun in 1999 with people with early onset dementia to document their life stories and the impact of the illness on themselves and their families, raised important concerns in relation to multi-agency work. The project, a collaboration with the Alzheimer's Society and the MKBC Early Onset Dementia Project Worker, but managed by Living Archive, appears to have been successful until consent was sought to publish the stories. Each contributor, supported by their family, was asked to sign a form agreeing to the publication of their story. One contributor, Hyacinth, having no immediate family asked the manager of her day care centre to help her; however a problem arose when Hyacinth's social worker became involved and decided Hyacinth was unable to make an informed choice and was potentially being exploited. There followed a lengthy process in which Living Archive, supported by the Alzheimer's Society and Hyacinth herself, challenged various Council departments, with the Council eventually re-evaluating its policies in relation to capacity and autonomy of people with mental health problems. This finally led to the inclusion of Hyacinth's story in *Listen to me*.¹⁰⁹ This experience raised weighty issues of ownership and consent, and highlighted the potential difficulties that can arise when different groups / agencies with their differing agendas and professional models attempt to work together, perhaps particularly when a local authority is involved. Certainly, as demonstrated in the previous case study, BHRU struggled in its relationship with Bradford Council.

¹⁰⁶ Kitchen, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ *Living Archive Newsletter*, Spring 2000.

¹⁰⁸ See www.mkheritage.co.uk/jmknews.html viewed 20.12.08.

¹⁰⁹ Menuge, N, Quinn, S & Westell, S, 2002, 'Listen to Me! A Question of Ownership', *Oral History*, 30(2).

Given the scale and sophistication of Living Archive's output in the 1990s it is easy to forget that it started as a voluntary-run group, in many ways similar to QueenSpark with its part-time paid workers in the 1990s. Living Archive transformed significantly once Kitchen became the general manager and there were more staff to manage its activities and support volunteers. There was no formal membership such as QueenSpark developed but volunteers played an important role in Living Archive, not only in the plays, but also helping in the office, working on the archive, as well as being involved in various projects.

In 1993 Living Archive became a company limited by guarantee, as QueenSpark had in 1989. This gave it a legal identity and protected workers and trustees from any potential liabilities related to the activities. While the Living Archive Board of Trustees had originally met every quarter, becoming a company meant there were directors (up to six) whom it was intended would take an active role in fundraising, and the remaining trustees formed an advisory group that met twice a year. A finance sub-committee was set up and an artistic sub-committee, the latter bringing input from trustees / directors in the consideration and planning of new projects, seen as a positive move to better facilitate the work of Living Archive.¹¹⁰ As directors left, new members with specific skills were actively sought. Ruth Finnegan, Bletchley resident and professor of anthropology at the OU (and), committee member of the Oral History Society, and a Mass Observation trustee, joined the advisory group, providing an important link to the OHS. In 1993 Kitchen and Living Archive became the OHS regional network contact for Buckinghamshire in recognition of the oral history work Living Archive was undertaking and its extensive links with groups in the area.¹¹¹

While Living Archive plays generally portrayed local events, one play in particular had a national appeal. *Hawtin's Tale*, a one-man show based on Mundy's stories devised and performed throughout 1992 by Brad Bradstock and aimed at school children, was expanded into a full-length production, *I'll tell you what happened* (the title of Mundy's second book, and first publication of Living Archive in 1993). The play was staged locally but also appeared at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1993.¹¹² The focus on one individual's experience of a national event made the story relevant to others outside Milton Keynes. It demonstrated how community could relate both to

¹¹⁰ Email correspondence with Kitchen, 12.11.08.

¹¹¹ Kitchen remained as the contact when he left LA in 2002.

¹¹² Relich, M, 1993 quoted in *Living Archive Newsletter*, September 1993.

locality, (as in a local man's story), and to a community of experience (in this case experience of war).

In 1993 BBC Three Counties Radio aired the stories of Mundy, as recorded by Bradstock, in a series of eight broadcasts ending on Armistice Day with Mundy's reflections of the awfulness of war. *I'll Tell You what Happened* received a SONY radio bronze award in the 'best dramatisation' category, an important acknowledgement of the power of Mundy's story (and Bradstock's skill in transforming it for radio) and validation of the work of Living Archive.¹¹³ This was one of several awards Living Archive received. For example, in 1994 it gained the Arts Council/British Gas Working for Cities Community Arts award, a cash prize of £5000, awarded for, 'a programme of arts activities open to all sections of the community offering opportunities to watch, take part, create and enjoy'.¹¹⁴ Kitchen commented,

In community arts circles this award is seen as the Oscar of all awards. It was an honour not just for the LA project but for the talents and creativity of the people of Milton Keynes. Perhaps this has done something to dispel the image of new towns as culture-less concrete jungles.¹¹⁵

These awards clearly were important; they helped raise the profile of Living Archive and demonstrated that its products were of high quality and well received. Being able to cite these accolades was important in a competitive funding environment; likewise, being able to quantify audience figures and demonstrate public involvement in its activities helped provide evidence of success.¹¹⁶ Importantly, Living Archive could also attract funding by presenting its community development credentials, a powerful lever which simply was not available to QueenSpark and BHRU. For example, when faced with possible funding cuts from the MKBC it argued that its funding should be seen as an investment: 'It is too easy to dismiss the arts as unproductive when, in fact, they attract investment and create jobs and contribute to the overall quality of life in Milton Keynes – one of the main things that attracts new investors to the city.'¹¹⁷

¹¹³ In 1993 Ian Pearce, a producer at Three Counties radio, put together a Christmas Special that used Mundy's own voice alongside Bradstock's portrayal.

¹¹⁴ LA, General Managers Report, 1994.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ For example in 1994, Living Archive estimated that 1135 people had actively participated in projects and workshops, 208260 had visited exhibitions and performances. 1600 listened to the broadcast of *The Rockets* on BBC Three Counties Radio, and 1200 books had been sold. General Managers Report, 1994.

¹¹⁷ *Living Archive Newsletter*, January, 1994.

Embracing the digital age

Unlike QueenSpark and BHRU, Living Archive adapted quickly to new technology, using it creatively to further its aims. Consequently it was well placed to respond to a funding environment that increasingly supported bids that made use of new technologies. In 1994 arts funding in MKBC was being cut and Living Archive was keen to demonstrate it was more than just an arts organisation, that its work had relevance to other aspects of MKBC's agenda. At the time through MKBC there was money available from the European Social Fund and the Council for IT work, particularly for projects involving unemployed adults. Living Archive devised a media and IT skills course based on its documentary arts approach in which learners would use the history of their community, or their own (or family's) life stories as the basis for learning IT skills. This was referred to as 'IT with a Purpose'. Tutors experienced in photography, video, sound recording and computing worked alongside the students. The first course ran for 16 weeks with 15 trainees. The course was run yearly and starting in 1995 a qualification was attached, an NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) Level 2 in Using Information Technology. This shifted the balance towards a slightly more IT focused course but helped secure future funding (from a variety of different sources). By 1999 the course had developed to incorporate web training and some courses from the late 1990s onwards were run specifically for women returners to work, for which there was specific funding.¹¹⁸

The media and IT skills courses laid the foundation for Living Archive to form a collaboration with the OU Knowledge Media Institute to apply for funding to run a computer training course through community history projects to improve parents' computer skills and understanding of how ICT is used in learning. The application was successful, a grant of £700,000 over three years being awarded by the Millennium Commission to set up and run CLUTCH - Computer Literacy Understanding Through Local History - in Milton Keynes beginning in 1999, with a plan to work with 100 parents each year.¹¹⁹ Groups of five or six parents - a 'CLUTCH Club' - worked

¹¹⁸ Examples of students' work from a variety of the web-based courses can be viewed at www.mywebpage.org.uk, www.mymemories.org.uk, www.myparentandchildproject.org.uk.

¹¹⁹ The Millennium Commission was set up in 1993 by the National Lottery Act as one of several bodies that distributed proceeds from the National Lottery. Its aim was to fund community projects to celebrate the millennium. It was wound up on 30th November 2006 although it stopped receiving lottery money in 2001. www.millennium.gov.uk. See also LA Annual Report 1998-1999.

together in their children's schools. Each group was provided with equipment, training in both ICT skills as well as in research and oral history techniques, and on-going support to research and produce a website to share with the local community.¹²⁰ The parents decided on the subject of their research, many choosing to research the history of their village or locality before the building of Milton Keynes. Other projects included the history of Milton Keynes Shopping Centre and the history of Bletchley Maternity Unit. In total 315 parents and 60 primary schools in Milton Keynes were involved resulting in 60 websites.¹²¹

These IT projects not only enabled participants to learn new skills; actively engaging with community history in this way brought people together to learn about their communities whether they were old-time residents or newcomers, and crucially the project outputs were shared with the community. Furthermore, the Internet enabled these small projects to be brought together for a wider audience. The five-step approach pioneered by Living Archive is evident in these projects and illustrated the value of the framework in the successful delivery of projects; though without the technical support from the OU Living Archive could not have undertaken the CLUTCH project.

Living Archive was not just about remembering the past pre-Milton Keynes; it was also about documenting the present, in particular the experiences of those who moved to Milton Keynes in order to include them in the history of the place. This was also an important aspect of BHRU. Indeed some projects were specifically focused on those who moved to the new town, such as the exhibition in 1995 'When I Arrived in Milton Keynes'.¹²² Living Archive was also interested in the experiences of young people in Milton Keynes, and in 1998 it set up a Young People's Film Workshop, led by local filmmaker Faye Gilbert and supported by the Milton Keynes Community Trust Arts Fund. In its first year 60 people were involved in making three films about their lives in Milton Keynes.¹²³ This was another example of Living Archive seeing an opportunity to bring its expertise together with technology to create projects that would be attractive to funders, as well as supporting a young filmmaker who wanted to share her skills and involve young people.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ *Living Archive Newsletter*, June 1999.

¹²¹ See <http://clutch.open.ac.uk> to view the results of this project.

¹²² *Living Archive Newsletter*, February 1995.

¹²³ LA Annual Report, 1998-99.

¹²⁴ Film making with young people became an important part of its work post 2000. See www.livingarchive.org.uk/docs/filmproductions for an overview of this work.

‘IT with a Purpose’ was yet another example of funding opportunities determining the direction of community history groups, also evident in QueenSpark and BHRU. Living Archive had no plans to undertake IT projects but financial concerns led Kitchen to create this course to generate income. This move would appear to contradict Kitchen’s earlier comment about not chasing funding. Certainly this decision was not unanimous: Davis felt this training began to detract from other areas of Living Archive’s work.¹²⁵ However the move into IT training initiatives proved another turning point for Living Archive and demonstrated that the dependency on funding could overshadow other decisions.

Restructuring, refocusing and redefining

In 1998 two developments occurred: MKBC was about to undergo a restructuring of its departments and funding arrangements, and Southern Arts had reviewed its core grants and had decided to gradually withdraw its funding of Living Archive over a three year period beginning in 1998.¹²⁶ A review undertaken by MKBC in connection with its restructuring recommended that Living Archive needed to further define the different strands of its work, ‘clearly distinguishing its documentary from its historical practice’, and to refocus on its community and archival roles. It was advised to develop more partnership projects, to continue exploring ways of using new technologies, and to develop its training beyond Milton Keynes.¹²⁷

Living Archive commissioned a consultant, Jac Wilkinson, to help the group reassess its direction and future plans. A three-year plan was developed and there was an explicit redefinition of Living Archive from a documentary arts organisation to a ‘creative, cultural and community development agency’ which it claimed more accurately reflected its distinctive combination of arts, history, economic and community development.¹²⁸ The core aims remained the same; however these were now framed in a language shaped by a new political context which began when New Labour came to power in 1997, with ‘a rhetoric of renewed interest in ideas of mutuality, society and communal problems.’¹²⁹ For example the new plan emphasised its ambition

¹²⁵ Davis, 2009. Davis left as artistic director in 1995.

¹²⁶ The Arts Council and regional Arts Boards were undergoing a major reorganisation and a change in the way organisations received funding.

¹²⁷ LA Three Year Plan, 1998 – 2001.

¹²⁸ *Living Archive Newsletter*, August 1998.

¹²⁹ Hewison, R & Holden J, 2006, *Experience and Experiment*, London, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, p.33.

to help people ‘to share a strong sense of community and pride through collecting and celebrating their lives and the history of their place in high quality artistic and creative activities.’¹³⁰

The loss of core funding from Southern Arts was described at the time as a ‘liberating experience’, as Living Archive would no longer be perceived simply as a community arts organisation.¹³¹ This feeling of liberation might have been prompted, to an extent, by the relatively strong financial position of Living Archive at the time. MKBC continued to contribute £20,000 annually, funding also was being received for the CLUTCH project, and a grant of £71,600 had been secured from HLF to run a three year oral history project, ‘The People’s History of Milton Keynes’, from 2000.

However in reality Living Archive was entering a new phase of funding, in which core funding was replaced by time-limited project funding in an increasingly competitive funding environment. The decision to develop its training and consultancy work was driven by a need to generate income. Beginning with local IT courses and training days in reminiscence and oral history, Living Archive gradually began offering training and consultancy to groups around the country to prepare and support them to undertake documentary arts projects in their own communities. In 2000 this activity became formalised as Living Archive Training (LAT), a training subsidiary of Living Archive. These training and consultancy activities generated income but their importance in regards to community history is that they exported the Living Archive approach to other groups. As Kitchen declared:

We want to demystify, to enable and give confidence to people in other communities. We seek to build the capacity of people to emulate our type of work and develop independently *from* us, not dependently *on* us.¹³²

Conclusion

Living Archive provided a particular model of community history that was strongly focused on community cohesion, inclusion and celebration. This approach by its very nature lacked critical analysis, the aim being to illuminate experience rather than explain it. It left no space for differing histories. Living Archive did not concern itself with an historical paradigm: it did not engage in debates on people’s history (as outlined in chapter two), and paid little attention to criticisms of its approach in this regard. For

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ LA Annual Report, 1998-1999.

¹³² LA Annual Report, 1999-2000.

example, in response to comments that its digital stories were not ‘oral history’, Kitchen stated, ‘I’m not interested in labelling it [Living Archive work], I’m interested in people’s voices being heard and people listening to them.’¹³³

So, Living Archive did not set out to challenge ideas about whose history should be told and how, perhaps in part because its founding members were not academically trained historians as was the case with QueenSpark and BHRU. In many ways this allowed the group to develop far more organically, unencumbered by the class and race politics that permeated QueenSpark and BHRU. Its opportunistic approach to funding was made possible by being located in a new town and having opportunities that were unavailable to the other two groups, and this enabled it to diversify beyond plays and publications.

Living Archive had an explicit mandate to use history to ‘build’ community and in doing so it did indeed challenge ideas about whose history could be told, by whom and crucially how. Yet whilst it began as a group making history *by* and *for* the community, over time, as it consolidated itself into a ‘professional’ agency, it evolved into a group that makes history *with* and *for* the community/ies, rather like QueenSpark.

In many ways it could be argued that Living Archive has been the most successful of the groups studied in this thesis. This is certainly true in terms of volume of activities, financial turnover, and number of people involved in one capacity or another. Yet I would argue that all the groups were successful within their individual terms of reference. The histories were made on the basis of the resources available at any one time. Overall it is very difficult to compare the relative success of the three groups. Any quantitative measure used - for example amount of funding or volume of products - is crude and not particularly meaningful. Nevertheless, Living Archive stands out in that it used lots of different media and therefore reached many different types of audiences. By developing its five-step guide it was able to apply it in a variety of contexts which made it attractive to a wide range of funders. QueenSpark, to a much lesser extent, with its writing activities could also adapt and access different funding sources. However, with a focus solely on oral history and photography, and being part of the museum service, BHRU struggled far more, particularly once MSC funding ceased. Ultimately I would argue that one of Living Archive’s key strengths lay in the skills of Kitchen, and his ability to continually devise ways to secure funding.

¹³³ Kitchen interview.

Conclusion

In the history of each group is a small rebellion against prevailing controls, an awakening that is at once political and personal.¹

Community history as a practice varies widely and has developed and changed over the course of its own history, a history that has been more complex and ambiguous than previous interpretations would suggest. By interrogating meanings and understandings of community history I have sought a more nuanced examination of the subject that recognises its multifaceted nature and demonstrates that these understandings are historically contingent. This process of unpicking understandings of community history and its practice is important because it assists in evaluating how and for what purpose these histories were made.

As demonstrated in chapter two, for many commentators community history is simply the history of a community (however defined) as presented by a professional or amateur historian, categorisations in themselves both problematic and complex. With the growing interest in people's history and cultural democracy in the 1970s, community history came to be seen by some as a process that involved people in uncovering and documenting their own histories - a radical and democratic approach to people's history. This approach brought three key issues to the fore. The first concerned who or what history was about and highlighted the need for different methods and sources; the second was concerned with who the historians were; and the third with the extent to which the histories produced were analytical or celebratory and descriptive. Inherent within the third issue was the assumption that in history making 'critical' was 'good' and 'celebratory' was 'bad', as it implied a lack of analysis and historical conceptualisation. This raised a further concern over intellectual authority and validation; in other words, who was passing judgement on these histories and on what authority.

Having established that community history is not a homogeneous practice, within this study I have been concerned with investigating community history as practised by groups committed to democratic history making. The issues raised above emerged from debates that occurred at specific historic moments. Through an analysis of the development of History Workshop, Federation of Worker Writers and

¹ Worpole in *Writing*, 1978, p.244.

Community Publishers and the Oral History Society, I have sought to situate these debates, and consider the influence of these movements on community history practice.

All three movements were committed to challenging ideas about the nature and production of historical knowledge, and to breaking down barriers between the professional and the amateur, but the three demonstrated quite different approaches to doing so. History Workshop was broadly concerned with the politics of history and breaking down knowledge barriers, and reflected intellectual shifts occurring at the time. Most importantly it brought together a wide range of people and inspired them to think differently about the purpose and practice of history. FWWCP was concerned with challenging dominant ideas of who could be a writer and publisher, blurring the boundaries between literature and history, and public and private memories. Central to its aim was a commitment to cultural democracy, in which control of the production and distribution of these histories remained with the groups, thus making writing and publishing accessible to all. OHS focused solely on the practice of oral history, which it argued was a democratic, participatory and accessible form of history making. Despite a commitment to democratic history making within the three movements, in my analysis it became clear that there was an inherent tension in popular and academic understandings, and practice, of community history. This tension drew attention to the overriding question of intellectual authority, and raised questions about how the theory of democratising history can work in practice.

My investigation of History Workshop, FWWCP and OHS provided a contextual framework for the three case studies of QueenSpark, Bradford Heritage Recording Unit and Living Archive. As was noted in the introduction to this thesis, the histories produced by these groups have been the subject of criticism and debate over the years. Yet little attention has been paid to the ways in which these histories were produced and the factors that impacted on their production. This thesis has pieced together the histories of these three groups, and part of its original contribution is in presenting these histories for the first time. In doing so I have demonstrated that to critique the histories the groups produced solely on the basis of content ignores the contradictory factors at play in making these histories public in the first place.

Of the three groups, only BHRU started with the explicit aim to undertake community history, which was expressed as the histories of the communities that made up Bradford. This was not intended as a solely academic approach but one that worked with the communities to tell their histories, initially to create an archive accessible to all

and in so doing engender a sense of belonging to the wider Bradford community. The other two groups came to community history from different but not unconnected directions. QueenSpark developed out of community action and consolidated its activities primarily through the publishing of individual autobiographies. Likewise Living Archive had its roots in community development. Both saw people's history as a way to build community and create a sense of belonging. All three groups had different aims and objectives, but sought ways to actively engage people in history and encourage participation using a variety of sources and methods to bring people together as part of a community. The groups aimed to demystify the process of history-making and in doing so demonstrated that the boundaries between the 'professional' and 'amateur' 'historian' were fluid and overlapping.

In a sense the 'products' from the groups both reflected and invented communities, but I would argue the underlying message was 'your history matters' and the histories enabled people to see themselves and understand themselves as a community (however this might manifest itself, for example, by neighbourhood, work, ethnicity or sexuality). This was not just about creating community through the histories told; for those involved, certainly in QueenSpark and Living Archive, it was also about belonging and being part of a wider community.

QueenSpark and Living Archive both began as voluntary endeavours but gradually changed as initial successes raised expectations within the groups, which in turn led them to seek funding to achieve new ambitions. By contrast BHRU started as a funded group, however once MSC funding was removed it was a continual struggle to keep going. Certainly the entanglement with museum and council policies and priorities added an extra layer of complexity that neither QueenSpark nor Living Archive had to contend with. All three, although BHRU to a lesser extent, went through cyclic periods of great productivity followed by periods of destabilisation, during which it was the commitment of key individuals that prevented the groups from folding.

These case studies cannot be viewed as isolated institutional histories. I have charted the developments of the three groups in order to draw out common themes applicable to understandings of the practice of community history. Certainly the case studies show categorically that the histories each produced cannot be viewed in isolation. The groups demonstrate that the intersection of historical moment, regional locality and personal motivation and opportunism shaped and directed these histories, together with a myriad of factors such as technological change, funding, organisational

strategies, and audience expectation. Whilst all these factors have impacted on the groups to varying degrees over the years, funding undoubtedly was a primary influence in all three. The introduction of HLF has dramatically changed the landscape of community history, and the shift from core to project funding fundamentally changed the nature of the groups. The ability to write lucid and highly detailed funding proposals almost became an end in itself, and the need to obtain funding arguably detracted from the ‘real’ work of the groups.²

Community history in the new millennium

In 2001 QueenSpark went through another crisis period as key active members moved on and it found itself in a similar position to Living Archive in 1998. SE Arts was reviewing its core-funded groups with the intention of gradually withdrawing funding over a three-year period. Consequently QueenSpark underwent a review supported by the Arts Council, to enable the group to develop a three-year strategic plan to move QueenSpark forward into new areas. QueenSpark had continually evolved since 1972, but whilst it had always strove to be inclusive and democratic, and engender a strong sense of ownership within its members, this was now seen as a weakness which was preventing it advance and be more ‘professional’ in delivering ‘services’ to its ‘clients’. Consequently the membership scheme was allowed to lapse in 2004 and ‘skilled’ volunteers were effectively ‘recruited’ for jobs when needed, with paid freelancers running projects under the guidance of the newly appointed director.³ This restructure also saw the end of the Manuscripts Group; partly because there was no longer the same need for it as there had been in the 1980s and 1990s, but more importantly QueenSpark could not run its publishing activities in the same way once it moved from core to project funding. These changes were representative of the funding environment QueenSpark now found itself in, but also in part reflected the interests and ambitions of the key people that filled the void in the early 2000s.

For BHRU the new millennium marked the beginning of the end. Smith had always had a degree of autonomy to develop projects and keep any money generated in BHRU’s budget to instigate further projects. However this changed in 2002, with the appointment of Mark Suggitt the new head of Bradford Museums, Galleries and Heritage when any surplus at the end of the financial year had to be used to offset

² Holden, 2004, p.14.

³ QS, Draft Business Plan, 02.02.04.

overspend in other departments. This effectively meant Smith could not commit to projects that would take longer than a year to complete, and partly contributed to his decision to finally leave in 2005. The museum service underwent a major restructuring and BHRU did not feature prominently, with Smith's post remaining dormant. With the departure of Smith, BHRU ceased to be a working entity. Whilst Smith has continued to work with the BHRU material and develop exhibitions as a freelancer, without staff dedicated to actively maintain and promote the archive collection there is a danger it will become a forgotten resource and no longer the people's archive it aspired to be.

Living Archive began its new phase in 1998 when Southern Arts withdrew core funding, however unlike QueenSpark it still continued to receive annual funding from MKBC which provided some stability and support. In 2003 Kitchen left Living Archive to go freelance, having become increasingly fed up with the demands of applying for funding, and wanting to return to actually making histories.⁴ He has remained on the board of Living Archive and has been contracted to work on several projects as an interviewer and editor. However, the departure of Kitchen as director led to the near collapse of Living Archive as his replacement and a new project manager were unable to secure the financial support Living Archive needed, and left shortly after taking up the posts. Kitchen returned briefly as part-time manager to help provide stability, but Living Archive never quite recovered from this set-back, which in part was also indicative of the more precarious funding environment in which it now found itself. Without regular funding from Southern Arts any time 'taken out' from applying for funding, as occurred when Kitchen left, was potentially debilitating for the group. This experience also highlighted the importance of the commitment of key individuals in ensuring the continuity of the groups.

As with QueenSpark, Living Archive is now competing against countless other organisations and groups - many now forming solely to undertake one-off projects - for limited funds for short-term projects and constantly having to devise new schemes to ensure its survival. Partnerships have become increasingly desirable to maximise fundability. Organisations such as museums, which would not usually have been in competition with groups such as QueenSpark pre-HLF, often now have their own community history officers and a remit to reach out to new audiences and offer exhibits

⁴ Kitchen interview.

that reflect the communities they serve. In this respect it is ironic that BHRU did not benefit from this shift.

Both Living Archive and QueenSpark have sought to redefine themselves in order to appeal to a variety of funders. Both have adopted a strikingly similar language with the use of phrases such as ‘cultural and community development’, ‘artistic merit’, ‘brand’ and ‘corporate identity’ reflecting the ever shifting language of funders. Living Archive had a particularly wide remit and used this to apply to a diverse range of funding sources. Likewise, QueenSpark had previously concentrated on its book publishing, but increasingly its creative writing activities have been developed and expanded to increase funding opportunities.

The environment in which QueenSpark and Living Archive now find themselves has changed radically from when they started. Funding criteria are now tied up with the social and economic agendas of New Labour in a much more directed, and arguably more restrictive way than was evident through the Thatcher years. Certainly whilst HLF is active in holding workshops for potential applicants, and supporting them through the process of applying, there is a danger that community history could become institutionalised, reflecting only the needs and priorities of HLF.

At the same time, technological advances have had a major impact on the ways these histories can be presented and have opened up opportunities for people beyond involvement in groups such as QueenSpark. The emergence of the community archives movement, where groups usually use websites to document their history, sees a return to a grassroots activity unhindered by the demands of funding bodies, where the sites are owned and generated from within the communities and anyone can participate. For example, My Brighton and Hove which developed from the Make Multimedia History group that had affiliated to QueenSpark in 1999, enables a voluntary participation no longer possible in QueenSpark.

When QueenSpark, BHRU and Living Archive began, their practices and approaches were seen as radical and challenging but over time they have become commonplace. The dominance of community history within the HLF remit suggests that it has become an accepted practice, as does the emergence of community history officers in museums and local authorities. These groups (along with other similar ones) have made a significant contribution to changing attitudes to who ‘makes’ history and whose stories get told, and defining new ways in which histories are made. Likewise

they have highlighted the innate difficulties in democratising historical practice and balancing the needs of very diverse constituencies.

The practice of community history has necessitated a compromise between ideals, enthusiasms and practicalities for these groups, clearly demonstrating that history is written / made on the basis of the resources available. Moreover, as Woodin reflected with respect to FWWCP publications, 'Most community publications are by people who still live within their communities and do not want to be overly critical of them or of themselves.'⁵ This invariably impacts on what can and cannot be made public as was evident in BHRU. However, this should not be viewed as a weakness of community history but as another factor that both complicates and challenges the practice of community history.

QueenSpark, BHRU and Living Archive have all in their own ways questioned and challenged the subject matter of history and the way that history is presented. In doing so they have demonstrated that the histories need to be understood within the context in which they were produced and their intended purpose. This purpose has not always been about creating 'historical' documents, but about enriching people's lives and enabling people to express themselves. Fundamentally these groups have questioned the purpose of history, ownership of the past, and the relevance of history in people's lives, and have sought ways to make history that engages people in their own history. This may not be history as it is understood within the academy, but as Yeo asserted, history is different from different viewpoints. Community history represents another form of historical knowledge outside the academy, which should not be viewed in contest with academic understandings but as complementary to these understandings. Community history can add to our knowledge of the past and encourage an active engagement with the past when, as demonstrated through the case studies, it is understood within the context of its production.

⁵ Woodin, 1992, p.69.

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