

AN INTRODUCTION TO ORAL HISTORY IN YOUR SCHOOL  
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Oral history interviewing at St Martin's School, Salisbury  
(picture courtesy of Salisbury Newspapers)

[Listen to audio download clip 1](#)

**This is an introduction to bringing oral history into your school.** This guide builds on the successful oral history model that was developed between the Milford Street Bridge Project and St Martin's School, Salisbury. It has subsequently been delivered in St Mark's School, Salisbury and other Wiltshire schools too. The oral history feedback has been overwhelmingly positive from the children, staff and parents alike.

*'The cross curricular links and opportunities to produce work for a 'real life purpose' made this project a wonderful learning experience for our children.'* St Martin's School, Salisbury

*'Oral history work has provided our children with fantastic opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills in line with the requirements of the new curriculum.'* St Mark's School, Salisbury

This guide aims to assist you in planning your oral history project. It will help you to design your lesson plans so your children will develop a range of skills necessary to participate in a recorded group interview. It also includes the basics in archiving their recordings and sound editing. Sample audio clips and forms are provided as a resource for you.

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## 1. What Is Oral History?

Amongst many things oral history is:



Year 5, St Marks School, interviewing a former pupil to discover the history of their school

- The collection and preservation of people's first-hand memories of important events and everyday life to create primary source, historical evidence.
- It reaches people who may otherwise be excluded from history.
- It is an engaging way for children to discover history and an interactive method of learning about the past.
- It is a tool for making history for the future.
- It is a vehicle for community engagement and promoting intergenerational dialogue.
- It equips children with a range of life skills.
- Everyone can contribute to 'history-making', creating a more democratic historical record.

## 2. Oral History And National Curriculum In England



The Department For Education's History Programmes of Study published in September 2013 sets out the framework for teaching history in schools. Oral history is both a creative and engaging way to achieve two of the topics for what key stage 2 pupils should be taught.

These topics are:

- A local history study
- A study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066

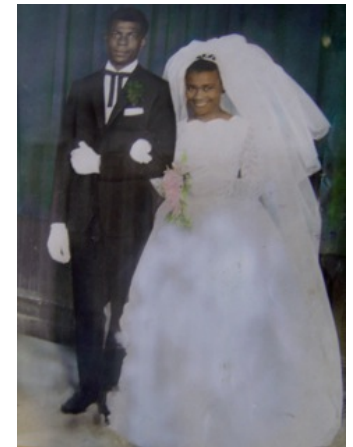
### 3. Choosing Your Topic



Oral history lends itself to a wide range of topics so long as you can find interviewees with first hand experience of the event.

Examples of topics are:

- Discovering your local history. ('The Area You Grew Up In' was a St Martin's School's topic).
- Toys and Games of the Past (this was another of St Martin's School's topics).
- A History of Our School (St Mark's School's topic, former pupils, staff and ancillary workers were interviewed).
- Learning about a local or national historical event by interviewing people who lived through it, for example, World War Two.
- Interviewing Black/ Asian elders or people from other backgrounds, to promote an understanding of other cultures, challenging prejudice.



## 4. Choosing Your Project

Oral history can be used in a wide variety of projects depending on what you wish to achieve and the time available. What you choose to incorporate in your project can offer a whole new range of skills and can expose children to a diverse range of experiences that may not only influence their learning now but open up new areas of interests and doors for their future.

- The process of learning to do oral history is an engaging project in itself. It will enable your children to learn and practice many skills such as speaking up, listening, preparing relevant questions and responding appropriately to people as required in interviewing. Other skills and interests are further developed when learning how to archive their recordings and deposit them in your school or local archive where they will become a resource for now and in the future. It also enables you to achieve many objectives of the National Curriculum in a variety of subjects.
- Projects that include basic sound editing give children the opportunity to make audio clips, which can be used for many purposes such as the creation of a CD or an audio walk.
- With additional sources such as your interviewees' photographs, a written narrative, video clips or with the inclusion of artifacts, clips can bring life to PowerPoint presentations, exhibitions, podcasts, your website and other projects.
- Clips can be used for online projects on community sites such as <http://www.historypin.com/community/schools/> and with school radio projects or video projects.
- Your oral history can be used as a research tool to discover more about how different people lived their lives through historical events or their memories of these events.
- Your classes can share their findings of their oral history interviews and these can be creatively interpreted and developed into a performing or visual art project.



Using oral history as inspiration for a performing project

## The Milford Street Bridge Project Partnership With St Martin's School, Salisbury

The Milford Street Bridge Project's partnership with St Martin's School resulted in the delivery of a range of activities to the school themed around the local area of the Milford Street Bridge Mural and the school. A characterful local historian, George Fleming, gave an entertaining guided walk where the children learned about their varied local history, the lives and trades of people who lived there, as well as hearing stories of their former school. The children also learned about the many buildings that were demolished and the destruction of the local community to make way for the controversial ring road in Salisbury in the late 1960s. The Milford Street Bridge Project's local artist worked with one class to make 3D model buildings and create a scaled drawing of the area. This resulted in a school exhibition. They also contributed their ideas for the Mural.

The structure for the delivery of the oral history follows in this guide. Feedback from the school informed us that their children *'developed their listening and speaking skills' as a result of the oral history lessons and interviews, 'they gained an increased confidence in speaking with people they did not know ... after overcoming their nerves'*. They also reported that the children *'gained a greater knowledge of history and peoples lives of the local area.'* By sheer co-incidence it turned out that many of the interviewees had been to the former St Martin's School 70 to 80 years earlier! It created an additional bond between them as their interviewers showed them around the school. The children also learned about using the recorders, downloading files, archiving and sound editing and many burned a CD for the first time. The interviews are now archived in the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives.



Performing in the metal bath

Some of the 'The Toys and Games' and 'The Area You Group Up In' stories were interpreted by the children, with the help of the dance teacher from Milford Street Bridge Project, to produce a dance performance using audio clips and props. The interviewee in the photograph on the introductory page 1 of this guide was a retired florist; her story was used as inspiration for one scene and was performed alongside the downloadable [audio clip 1](#) that accompanies this guide. Another scene and audio clip came from an interviewee who told his captivated interviewers about his childhood memory of his mother boiling up water in the copper for the metal bath that had been brought into the kitchen from the backyard. He made sure he was the first or second in the bath because his siblings used the same water too. Interviewees and parents watched what was a very moving and stunning school performance.

[Listen to audio download clip 2](#) A good example of a year 6, St Martin's School child using a range of interviewing skills to draw out childhood stories from his interviewee.

St Martin's School told us one of the best bits of the project for them were:

*'Building links with the community, from gaining skills by working with local experts through to hosting visits by local people and learning about their lives. It has been a marvellous opportunity to build 'community cohesion.'*



## 5. Everyone Can Be An Oral Historian: How To Make It Happen



Year 6, St Martins School children discovering local WW2 stories  
(picture courtesy of Salisbury Newspapers)

[Listen to audio download clip 3](#)

The following pages offer you a structure for your lesson plans that contain all the elements required for children to learn about oral history and develop the skills to conduct a group oral history interview. In addition, it provides them with the basics to learn about archiving and editing their recordings and becoming aware of the pitfalls.

The structure has been designed for you to put oral history in context with broader aspects of history such as learning about primary and secondary sources, archives, interpretation and memory. You can adapt the structure to cater for what you wish to achieve and the time you have available. Ideally, your lessons will need plenty of time for interview practice, questions, small and large group exercises with peer presentations and adult feedback. You may find you can cover some topics in other lessons.

## Key Preparation Points

- Ideally, allow five half-day sessions for teaching oral history and conducting the interviews (session three). Allow extra time for follow on projects. If time is very limited you can reduce the training time to as little as half a day plus interview time. You can take out the key elements from the lesson plans to achieve your aims to fit in with the time you have available.
- Each interview is conducted with groups of three or four children and one interviewee.
- You will need one audio recorder per group, which can record archival quality WAV files. MP3 recorders will do, but your recordings will not be archival quality.
- Parents/guardians will need to give permission for pupils to sign the interview consent form; for their interview to be archived for public access; to be photographed; to participate in public performance and for their interview clips to be used. If permission is not granted, alternative related tasks can be assigned such as wandering camera operators, photo scanning, 'scribes' who can observe and write about the interview.
- You will need to set a date for interviews, advertise for interviewees, send them an information letter, if necessary arrange transport for them, identify reception room for interviewees and interviewers with tea and biscuits for the interview day. Try and get the Head to give a brief welcome talk when everyone has assembled. If required, provide use of scanner to copy interviewees' photographs.
- Identify quiet interview space for each group, interviews may need to be staggered, allow up to 30 minutes per interview.
- You will need use of computers for transferring files from recorders, editing files, burning CDs. Computers need to be set up with sound editing software such as freeware *Audacity* often used in schools for creating audio clips. You will also need a stock of CDs for storing and archiving interviews plus a copy for the interviewee if they would like one.

## Session 1: Sample Structure for Lesson Plan



Year 5 group, St Mark's School children discussing the qualities of an oral history interviewer

- Introduce your Project to pupils. How do they feel about doing this? Other feedback.
  - Conduct research and share background information on topic with pupils (more time may be needed here, especially for a site visit e.g. to archive, library, museum, guided walk, elsewhere.)
  - What is oral history?
  - How can it be used?
  - Oral history recordings, interviewee's photographs as a primary source and evidence.
  - Everyone can interview! What are the qualities of a good oral history interviewer?
  - Good interview questions – When and why use open questions/closed questions.
- 
- Practice turning closed questions into open ones, identify questions to draw more out of the interviewee such as 'Tell me more about...'
  - In groups, plan at least 10 interview questions for your topic. (Teacher to devise way to include all suitable questions from all groups into one interview guide to be used for all groups). If time is short, the teacher can prepare questions in advance.

## Session 2: Sample Structure For Lesson Plan

- Interview practice in pairs with a big open question that can elicit a wide variety of responses (e.g. Tell me about your toys and games?) Pupils to focus on listening, not interrupting and getting the interviewee to talk more about the topic. Feedback.
- Introduction to audio recorders and compare the benefits of the archival WAV file format for recording with the everyday MP3 file format.
- Interview practice with recorders. Feedback.
- Interviewing older people issues (speaking up, clearly, plenty of time to answer questions, appropriate language, hearing, health and mobility problems, effects of medication etc.).
- Older people's memory and emotions. Discussion.
- Interview practice by starting the interview as a historical document (team leader introduces date, location, those present and why interviewing).

**Listen to audio download clip 4**

- Interview Dilemmas (discuss fears, what can go wrong etc.)
- Ethics, confidentiality, data protection, copyright (<http://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics.php> and <http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/no4.pdf>)
- Introduce interview and photo consent form.
- Review preparation for the interview day (next).



Year 5, St Mark's School children learning to use the audio recorders

*'The children learnt new skills with the recorders and professionalism when interviewing. [They benefitted from] Good teamwork within groups and the need to be mature and responsible when working in a role.'* St Martin's School

## Preparation For The Interview Day

- Create interview groups of 3 or 4 children.
- Identify helpers or children who are unable to be part of an interview group to document and scan interviewees' photos, ideally locate equipment in the reception room.
- Others who are unable to interview can become wandering photographers. NB they must not interrupt interviews.
- Create interviewer/interviewee schedule with room and task list for yourself and team leader.
- Print questions for each interviewer in large type (team leader copy to have introduction and start the interview and end interview by thanking the interviewee). Pupils take it in turns to ask their questions (same questions for each group or different questions for some groups so they can share interviewees).
- Double check reception room is booked for interviewees and pupils. Pupils/helpers can serve tea and biscuits. Arrange brief welcome talk (by Head if appropriate).
- Prepare interview and photo consent forms (to be completed by pupils prior to interviews and by interviewees during introduction of the interview day).
- Involve the Press as publicity for your school.

## Session 3: On The Interview Day



Year 6, St Martin's interview, discovering the history of the local area

- Label and note which recorder is being used by which interview group (if using a memory card label it with a number).
- Show interviewees to reception room, pupils/helpers to offer teas and biscuits.
- Introduce interview teams to their interviewees.
- Group welcome speech.
- Helpers/staff to complete interview and consent forms.
- Team leaders take responsibility for interviews and return interviewee to reception room after.
- Adult to back up all files from recorders to computer after the interviews.
- Be prepared for, and especially re-assuring, when children make poor quality recordings or when their interviews never actually got recorded or for other things that did not turn out as expected! It is the process that is important and learning from the experience.

## **Session 4: Reflection On The Interview Day And Archiving**

- Playback some interview clips from the interview day.
- Feedback from interviews, interpretation of what they have heard and learned from their interviewees.
- Discuss role and purpose of Archives and where the interviews will go.
- Discuss archival and non-archival file formats and prepare and label audio, photo, video files on CD/DVD for archiving.
- MP3 or audio CD for CD player for interviewee if they want one.
- Plus copies for school use.

Here are a few of the comments from St Mark's Year 5 children:

*'I enjoyed interviewing, I wish we had more time to interview people!'*

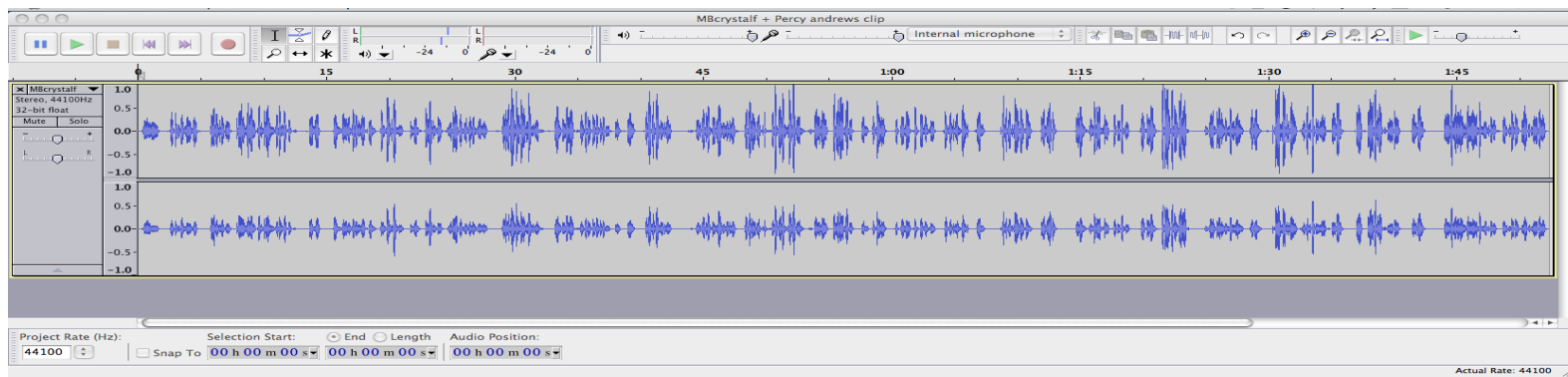
*'I enjoyed listening to all the interview facts!'*

*'I enjoyed interviewing and asking the questions'*

*'We liked getting to know how the recorders worked'*

## Session 5: What Next, Sound Editing, Evaluation

- Playback some more prepared interview clips.
- Pupils to send letter of thanks with their interviewees' copy of MP3 or Audio CD (if appropriate).
- Basic sound editing skills to make audio clips.



- Feedback and Evaluation of Learning.
- Ideas on how oral history can be used - feedback from children?



## APPENDIX 1

### Sample Consent And Copyright Form

#### Interviewee

NAME OF PROJECT and SCHOOL

**Interview and Copyright Clearance Form**

This form is to ensure that participants have all the information needed in deciding whether or not to take part in an interview for our oral history project. The recordings will become part of the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre. This collection will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the Internet.

I give permission for [name of school] to use my contribution to compile presentations for school use that may be used for publication, education, lectures, broadcasting, the Internet and for a drama production.

Any contribution will be held in the Archive in accordance with the wishes of the participants and copyright will be held by the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives.

**I agree to be interviewed and I hereby assign copyright of my contribution to the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives.**

**I agree/do not agree to be photographed/videoed and for the images to be used with my recording.**

**I agree/do not agree for my personal photograph(s) to be copied and used with my recording.**

Additional comments or requests:

Name of Interviewee (BLOCK LETTERS):

Address:

Signature: Date:

## APPENDIX 1

### Sample Consent And Copyright Form

#### Child Interviewer

NAME OF PROJECT and SCHOOL

**Interview and Copyright Clearance Form**

This form is to ensure that participants have all the information needed in deciding whether or not to take part in an interview for our oral history project. The recordings will become part of the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre. This collection will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the Internet.

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Any contribution will be held in the Archive in accordance with the wishes of the participants and copyright will be held by the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives.

**I agree for my child to interview and for their copyright of their contribution to be assigned to the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives.**

**I agree/do not agree for my child to be photographed/videoed and for the images to be used with my recording.**

Additional comments or requests:

Name of child:

Name of parent/guardian [BLOCK LETTERS]

Signature of parent/guardian                      Date:



Year 5 St Marks school children interviewing a former pupil to discover the school's past and create a resource for their archive

We hope this guide has been useful and please do contact Barbara Gibson if any parts are not clear or if you spot any errors so it can be updated. She is also available for professional help for your project.

barbara.gibson@spokenhistories.com; <http://www.spokenhistories.com>

Supplementary oral history information can be found at:

<http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/infosheet.html> (a little outdated but still very good) and

<http://www.ohs.org.uk/practical-advice.php> - audio

**The Milford Street Bridge Project may be also able to assist you in helping you gain other skills from local professionals.**