



**University of Brighton**

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH  
IN MEMORY NARRATIVE  
AND HISTORIES

# **Archives and the Politics of History and Memory**

## **A One-Day Symposium**

**Saturday 29 January 2011, 9.30am - 6.00pm**

**Board Room (M4), Grand Parade, University of Brighton**

How does an archive become an archive?

How does agency and power operate in the archive?

How do historians of class, gender, sexuality, 'race', ethnicity, disability negotiate the archival record in relation to cultural politics today?

What role do archives play in the creation and contesting of cultural memory?

What strategies are available for deciphering the archive, reading with and against the grain?

How should historians respond to the 'silence' of the archives?

How might the creation of new archives contribute to the production of radical histories and/or popular memories?

Do personal papers and community archives offer an intimate antidote to absences in the institutional archives?

To what extent, and in what ways, has the digital revolution transformed the democratic potential of archives and their contribution to historical understanding?

What are the political and ethical dilemmas faced by archivists in conflict zones, and how might these best be addressed?

# Timetable

## **9.15 – 9.45 Registration and tea/coffee on arrival**

## **9.45 Introduction**

## **10.00 - 11.30 panel 1: Archives, memory work and conflicted pasts**

Anita Rupprecht: 'The archives of transatlantic slavery, silence and the politics of memory'

Beverley Butler: 'Archival memory – elite Alexandrias and popular engagements with Palestinian "archive fever" '

## **11.30 - 12.00 tea/coffee break**

## **12.00 - 1.30 panel 2: Archives, community histories and the politics of hidden pasts**

Red Chidgey: ' "Do You Remember Olive Morris?" Activist memory and alternative archives'

Judith Garfield: ' "*Turn Back Time*": Archives unravelled by The AbPhab Film Collective (disabled young people's project, East London)

## **1.30 - 2.30 lunch**

## **2.30 - 4.00 panel 3: Archives and working-class history and memory in postwar Britain**

Nick Mansfield: 'Archives and material culture - People's History over five decades'

Sally Alexander: 'Oral histories and cross-class conversations: reconstructing the structure of feeling of the welfare state'

## **4.00 - 4.30 tea/coffee break**

## **4.30 – 6.00 Plenary: Discussion led by respondent Anna Davin**

(Followed by a drink at the King and Queen, opposite Grand Parade)

# Abstracts

## Panel I

### **Anita Rupprecht: 'The archives of transatlantic slavery, silence, and the politics of memory'**

This paper uses the historical records of a Royal Commission of Inquiry sent to the West Indies in 1821 to reflect more broadly on the interpretive issues at stake in addressing the archive of transatlantic slavery. Black Atlantic writers have long debated the 'unspeakability' of slavery and the issue of archival absence, and yet they have also engaged the official archive and the mythic and debilitating narratives deposited there in a myriad of creative ways. The ethical imperative to brush history against the grain is founded in an understanding of transatlantic slavery as a historical and human catastrophe. In highlighting the generic and representational implications of this approach, the paper considers what kinds of memory work might be attentive to both mourning and redress, and how far the discourse of reparation can provide a mediating link between the idea of a traumatic history and contemporary political intervention.

### **Beverley Butler: 'Archival memory – elite Alexandrias and popular engagements with Palestinian "archive fever" '**

My critical objective within this paper is to give concrete examples of the diverse forms and expressions of archival memory. I critically explore my own research projects as a means to understand archival memory and its contemporary efficacies at both elite and more popular level. This elite-popular shift is mirrored in my own ethnographic studies of the revival of Bibliotheca Alexandrina and research on heritage and wellbeing in Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories. This shift of focus takes me from a case-study context synonymous with elite institutionalisation of the archive to that of a popular engagement in which the person/ community is in 'dialogue' with alternative conceptions and forms of archival memory and with the efficacies synonymous with particular modes of cultural transmission. This shift, in return, requires an alignment to the genre of 'enchanted heritage' (cf. Byrne 2004) in which the continuities of sacred, and magical, ideal and real discourses can be identified from North to South (see Parish 2007). It is also a movement that, I will argue, 'transcends modernism's limitations' (Byrne 2004:19) and is capable of offering resonance to what has been diagnosed as a popular Palestinian 'archive fever' (Doumani 2009) and as such synonymous with attempts to resist the on-going violences of occupation. In my conclusions, therefore, I argue that a key of archival memory-work is the capacity to 'speak to' the diversity of human cultural experience and to give recognition to diverse strategies of wellbeing, and cultural transmission; many of which remain 'outside' dominant archival and therapeutic discourse. These need to be re-centred in future discussions and to do so is crucially important in terms of the recognition of more 'just' archival futures.

## **Panel 2**

### **Red Chidgey: ' "Do You Remember Olive Morris?" Activist memory and alternative archives'**

Fusing artistic, activist and academic approaches to making community histories, the 'Do You Remember Olive Morris?' project was a successful grassroots initiative that reclaimed social and political memories of Brixton-based social justice activist and British Black Panther, Olive Morris. Volunteer-run, the project generated multiple sites of archival records, including oral histories, public collections, exhibitions and the blog <http://rememberolivemorris.wordpress.com>. This paper aims to look at some of the means and outcomes of this project, both in terms of creating new, digital archives alongside more conventional institutional depositories, and some of the issues raised by the dissemination of the cultural memory/image of Olive Morris. It will address questions such as: what constitutes a "usable past" within this project? and what strategies and creative methods can best be used to meet these needs? Furthermore, as the cultural memory of Olive Morris spreads, what opportunities for new connections alongside risks of appropriation and decontextualisation take place as images of Olive Morris are taken up and re-activated in various commercial and activist sites of meaning making?

### **Judith Garfield: ' "Turn Back Time": Archives unravelled by The AbPhab Film Collective (disabled young people's project, East London)**

One of numerous community heritage and history projects run by Eastside Community Heritage in East London (<http://www.hidden-histories.org.uk>), the AbPhab Film Collective brought together a group of disabled young people from the AbPhab youth centre in Dagenham to investigate hidden histories that might help them understand the circumstances and conflicts of their own lives. Through the project, the group learned about film-making and photography, engaged for the first time with local archives to research the history of disabled workers, and uncovered undocumented aspects of local history. The young people recorded their experiences and responses in a short video, "Turn Back Time" (2010), which tells of where they went and what they did on their journey to find out more about the past. This session will introduce the work of Eastside Community Heritage and the AbPhab project, followed by a screening of the video, to open up questions about the meaning of archives and history for a group of young disabled people who have previously been excluded from both.

### **Panel 3**

#### **Sally Alexander: 'Oral histories and cross class conversations: reconstructing the structure of feeling of the welfare state'**

Oral history archives, like memoir, are vital sources for re-thinking the subjective dimensions of need and desire which underpinned mid-twentieth-century social democracy and welfare states. Most oral history archives have been constituted since the 1960s, a product of radical social history; they are open, accessible to all and their particular quality lies in the vein of subjective feeling and thought which spoken memories reveal. This paper will explore the use of London childhood memories to reveal the structure of feeling of mid-century social democracy. D.W.Winnicott, paediatrician and psychoanalyst, one of the architects of maternal and infant provision in the 1940s and 50s, derived his ideas about ordinary mothers, the infant/mother relationship, the good-enough home and democracy from his forty years medical practice and 60,000 case-notes. These case-notes are not open to the public, but some are cited in his published papers; they give insight not only into intimate lives of working women and their families, but show how concepts and ideas which shaped a generation of mothers and children post-war were generated through clinical encounters and conversations.

#### **Nick Mansfield: 'Archives and material culture - People's History over five decades'**

Nick Mansfield was Director of the People's History Museum in Manchester for 21 years. The Museum looks after the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, including the archives of the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain. In this paper he will use the history of this institution to examine changes in the way working class history has been collected and interpreted since the 1970s. The paper will also draw on previous experiences and on a subsequent academic career.

## Contributor biographies

**Professor Sally Alexander** is Emeritus Professor of Modern History at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is a Founding Editor of *History Workshop Journal* and currently editing two issues for publication in 2011. She is also editing a book on psychoanalysis and history with Barbara Taylor for Palgrave, and writing about Winnicott and mothers.

**Dr Beverley Butler** is a Senior Lecturer and Director of the Cultural Heritage Studies MA programme at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. Her special interests are in cultural heritage theory, museology, ethnography, wellbeing, archives, memory-work and cultural transmission. Beverley has worked with UNESCO's Memory of the World archival programme and has a special interest in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East – notably Egypt and Palestine. Recent publications include her monograph *Return to Alexandria: An Ethnography of Cultural Heritage Revivalism and Museum Memory* (Left Coast Press, 2007) and the article 'Othering the archive - from exile to inclusion and heritage dignity: the case of Palestinian archival memory', *Archival Science* 9 (2009).

**Red Chidgey** is a PhD candidate at London South Bank University, looking at how contemporary young feminists undertake the memory work of feminism within their grassroots, DIY media productions. With an interest in digital archiving and memory production, she was involved in setting up the digital resource, *Grassroots Feminism: Transnational Archives, Resources and Communities* ([www.grassrootsfeminism.net](http://www.grassrootsfeminism.net)), and currently blogs on feminist media and history at *Feminist Memory* (<http://feministmemory.wordpress.com>).

**Anna Davin** is a Founding Editor of *History Workshop Journal* and the author of *Growing Up Poor: Homes, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (1986). She was a member of two 1970s oral history groups, the 'People's Autobiography of Hackney' and the 'SE1 People's History Group', and currently teaches a skills course on 'Oral History at the Institute of Historical Research, London.

**Judith Garfield** is Executive Director of Eastside Community Heritage in East London (where she was born), and is responsible for the organisations core work programme. Since its inception ECH has produced 18 publications, 80 exhibitions, 20 video documentaries, and educational resources, successfully delivered over 20 Heritage Lottery fund community based projects as well as giving birth to East London Peoples Archive (currently holding in excess of 1700 oral histories and thousands of pictures). Judith is currently a trustee of the London Transport Museum and acts as an advisor to funders and community groups in developing a range of heritage, community archives and history projects.

**Nick Mansfield** is Senior Research Fellow in History at the University of Central Lancashire, and formerly Director of the People's History Museum, Manchester.

**Anita Rupprecht** is a Senior Lecturer in Cultural History in the School of Humanities at the University of Brighton. Her interdisciplinary research interests include Caribbean slavery and abolition, colonial and postcolonial studies, the politics of cultural memory, and the representation of Empire. She has published articles on slavery reparations, abolitionist representation, colonial autobiography, and postcolonial theory. Her current research project concerns the representation of transatlantic slavery in relation to discourses of political economy and moral sentiment in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Atlantic world.