Memories, Narratives and Histories

A Postgraduate Research Conference
Wednesday 3rd June, 10am – 5pm
InQbate, University of Sussex

This event was co-organised by the Centre for Research in Memories Narrative and Histories, University of Brighton, and the Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research, University of Sussex.

A selection of the conference abstracts:

Deniz Duru, University of Sussex

**Burgazada of Istanbul: exploring coexistence and social memory via oral history in a multi-faith, multi-ethnic island**

The central concern of my DPhil research is to explore the ways in which people from different backgrounds negotiate their personal and collective self-understandings and engage in practices of coexistence in communities characterized by differences in class, ethnicity and religion in Turkey. The Princes islands of Istanbul are home to Jews, Armenians, Rums (Greek-Orthodox living in Turkey), Catholics, Suryanis, Sunnis, Alawis and Kurds. My research is grounded in an exploration of the historical and regional background of Turkey's current political situation, the critical historical and political events that have over time affected minorities' awareness of categories of ethnicity, class and religion. I seek to document the ways in which the Princes Islanders remember the homogenisation of the country from the nation building stage until present. I will investigate the ways in which the memories of the past, both bitter and sweet, are recalled as well as being manifested in physical objects (e.g. photos, diaries, letters, gifts, clothing). I want to understand how these mental and material forms and practices of memory affect identities and interactions among different ethnic, class and religious groups. Through examining social memory via oral history, I seek to explore the extent to which people on the
Princes Islands categorise themselves as belonging to a particular class, ethnicity and religion as well as their awareness and occasions of transgression of these categories of differences.

Bibliography:

6-7 Eylül Belgeseli. 2007. Dir. C. Dündar. <available online http://www.netegel.com/belgesel_izle/video/RR2eBOSky1e6/6-7_eylul_olaylari__can_dundar_belgeseli.html>


Elizabeth Kealy-Morris, Manchester Metropolitan University

**Commemorative practices for a destroyed place: memory and absence in Chorlton-on-Medlock**

This paper will consider the ways destroyed places might be remembered and explore how the memories of absent places might reside as much in the body through tacit, unarticulated knowledge as through explicit knowledge which can be expressed linguistically.

This paper is based on a collaborative oral history project carried out with former residents of a central-Manchester UK working-class district destroyed by the post-war municipal and national practice of ‘slum clearance’. This paper will consider the commemorative practices former residents carry out in the present to remember their destroyed neighbourhoods, the knowledge about the district such practices evidence and the possible reasons for such remembrance.

Please see the project’s website for more information:

http://www.mappingmemory.info

Samantha-Jayne Oldfield & Dave Day, Manchester Metropolitan University

**Manchester Pedestrianism 1840-1880: a collective biography of ‘Sporting Publicans’**

Public houses in England throughout the nineteenth century provided many men with an alternative environment to the workplace. In particular, as the countryside and fields became developed, ‘footracing’ or pedestrianism became a public house affair with publicans becoming promoters and persuading individuals to compete near their facilities (Collins & Vamplew, 2002). The symbiotic relationship between entrepreneurial sportsmen and public houses has
long been noted and there are abundant examples in the literature of individuals who combined their sporting activities with the role of licensee. However, these biographies are often sketchy in nature and there is a clear need for more comprehensive collective biographical studies of these men. A compilation of in-depth biographies, a methodology called prosopography, would help tease out their common characteristics, such as gender, class, education, personal interests, and religious beliefs (Stone, 1987). This paper uses the prosopographical approach, to produce a collective biography, “carefully gathered biographical data on a group of individuals with common characteristics” (Erard & Bancel, 2007, p.67), and to contextualise historical processes in a specific environment, of a mid 19th Century Manchester publican with a strong involvement in local pedestrianism. An initial group of five publicans has been investigated and it is clear that while there are commonalities with respect to their sporting backgrounds, age, class and family, there are also differences, notably with respect to their sporting roles within Manchester pedestrian circles.

Bibliography:


Unit for Prosopographical Research.


The International Journal of the History of Sport, 21, 16-33.

“A Fitting Memorial”:
History and memory in the One Day for Life photography archive

The 55,000 amateur photographs that make up the One Day for Life collection, housed since 1990 in the Mass Observation Archive, are the result of an ambitious charitable competition. Participants were invited to submit a photograph of everyday life in Britain on 14 August 1987, accompanied by a pound per print, to compete for a place in a commemorative publication to be sold in aid of cancer research. The resulting book, One Day for Life: Photographs by the people of Britain taken on a single day, contained the 350 winners, sold a quarter of a million copies, and was intended to be “a lasting record” of “the nation in all its moods”. This volume, however, represented less than 1% of the total submissions and the rejected majority thus form a complex and sometimes critical counter-narrative to the final edit. Seeking to institute an “ordinary day” as a historic event, the project inspired a range of national portraits, historical image-statements and public performances of intimate moments, particularly in relation to the experience of illness and grief. This paper explores the intersections of history and memory in a project perceived by many as offering a photographic monument to those lost to cancer.
References:


Mass Observation Archive [www.massobs.org.uk](http://www.massobs.org.uk)

Elke Sie-Weesjes, University of Sussex

**Doctor Spock or Makarenko? A Communist upbringing in the Netherlands and Britain 1940-1970**

This paper will discuss the theory and practice of a Communist upbringing and draws upon 40 interviews with Dutch and English respondents who grew up in Communist working class families in the period 1940-1970. I will examine the considerable contrast between the Communist theory stressed by the Party and the actual practice within the Communist home. The party had a huge influence on the political aspects of Communist lives, but I argue it had little influence on certain very private aspects of their lives, like the upbringing of their children. Parents themselves and not the Party decided which elements of the Communist ideology they wanted to blend into the upbringing of their children. As opposed to the sociologist Jolande Withuis, who emphasizes how one sided and restricted a Communist upbringing was, in this paper I will argue it was very varied. Two different worlds came together within the Communist home; the Soviet culture and Communist ideology blended in with the British and Dutch culture.

In this paper I will use the works of two famous pediatricians to show how Soviet culture and ideology were mixed with the overall quite ordinary ‘western’ lives of the respondents. I will compare the ideas of Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose book ‘The Common Sense Book of Baby and Childcare’ published in 1946 became an integral part of Western culture and the ideas of Soviet Educator Anton Makarenko whose work ‘A book for parents’ published in 1954 had huge impact on the Soviet society. Both were translated in many languages. A large number of respondents remember that their parents had a one of Makarenko’s books at home. So did these Communist parents who brought up their children in Western Democracies follow Makarenko’s ideas, or were they more influenced by the Western ideas of Dr. Spock like many of their non-Communist contemporaries?
Capturing the memories

First year students from University Centre Hastings captured the wartime memories of pensioners from the local Women’s Royal Voluntary Service as part of an interviewing practical for their Broadcast Media course between November 2008 and January 2009. With the pensioners used to telling their stories and the students new to both interviewing and the technical apparatus, the balance was tipped in the favour of the elderly. But as their stories unraveled, revealing the full horror of what these pensioners had experienced as children during the war, the students began to engage more in the subject matter and less in their own discomfort.

While most students observed in their reflective essays that they were passive interviewers in the face of such a wealth of memories, the over-riding experience that both interviewer and interviewee took away was the mutual respect and reassessment of intergenerational communication. Stereotyped judgments were replaced by the universal language of humanity, proving the power of storytelling across the ages.

Some of the students’ work will be posted on the WRVS’ Heritage Plus website and its oral history project to which the students’ work will contribute, will be stored at the British Library.

Gilly Smith, lecturer in Writing for Media at UCH, who organised the assignment, introduces some of the students and pensioners to discuss how their perceptions were changed by the experience and how both interviewer and interviewee benefited. She suggests that media students can use the interviewing process to raise their own confidence while providing a valuable therapy for their interviewees and contributing to the vital work of capturing oral history.