The Sheffield Cathedral Oral History Project:

An Investigation into the Librarian’s Role in Oral History

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Abstract

Background. The literature reveals a growing level of specialised skills in the training of librarians, as well as a trend towards librarians becoming increasingly involved in oral history production.

Aims. The study aimed to evaluate the skills of the librarian against those needed to successfully complete an oral history project, and to comment on the efficacy of librarians fulfilling this role.

Methods. An oral history project was conducted by a librarianship student at the Sheffield Cathedral. During the process, a reflective diary was kept which commented on the effectiveness of librarianship training to oral history production. In order to facilitate further depth of thought, a rich picture was produced which illustrates perceived role of the librarian in the oral history process.

Results. The oral history process highlighted a number of benefits, as well as a number of shortcomings, of the librarian’s training with respect to oral history. While the librarian’s training places a great emphasis on research, technology, and organization skills, which are vital to the success of an oral history project, that training does not provide for the sort of historical interviewing techniques required by oral history.

Conclusions. It is concluded that while the skills of the librarian are highly compatible with those required by oral history, any foray into the field will have to be made with an awareness of budget constrictions. It is proposed that the most effective way to leverage the librarian’s skills is to partner with outside organizations in order to produce oral history collections. Further work could include a more detailed analysis of potential community partners in the production of oral history.
Introduction

As the world becomes increasingly reliant upon electronic means of communication and information storage, it has become the role of the librarian to be a preserver and facilitator of increasingly complex digital information sources (Candela, 2009). As these sources, and the systems that contain them, have begun to require an exceedingly tech-savvy maintenance staff, the training of the librarian has become increasingly specialized and sophisticated. With the increased specialization and sophistication of the librarian’s training comes a highly qualified and informed product: the Librarian 2.0 (Abram, 2006).

The Librarian 2.0 is trained in numerous techniques that require a good deal of technological expertise, from the creation of web pages and databases to the generation of digital libraries and the digitization of media forms which are swiftly becoming archaic. The development of this increased technological ability on the part of librarians, formerly thought of as clinging to their card catalogues and books, has revolutionized the way we think about the library. Libraries have grown beyond their physical structures to inhabit the world of digital media, social networking, and interactive collaborative learning and research (Candela, 2009). With this growth, we’ve seen an explosion in the capabilities of well-funded libraries, from the provision of free education via the internet, to the hosting of international conferences completely online. It seems that the future of the library trends toward the development of even greater innovations to come.

One of the most critical aspects of the librarian’s effectiveness in today’s economic reality is the funding of the library’s services. Without proper funding, the librarian’s substantial skills may be wasted. As a result of budget cutbacks, the skills of librarians have diversified greatly over the past decade, while the services that libraries are able to provide have not matched that diversity (Topper, 2009). For this reason, it is difficult for libraries to attempt to expand their range of services for their customers. One of the results of this is that some of the skills developed during the training of librarians are being underutilized during their actual employment, primarily due to the constraints of institutional budgets. Though these budget constraints limit the ways in which libraries can expand their services, they do not mean that libraries are unable to experiment with new processes on a short term basis.
Indeed, the possibilities for the expansion of the librarian’s role, even in the face of economic restrictions, are rather varied (Topper, 2009). In an effort to establish what sort of unorthodox roles the librarian can inhabit in the current market, this dissertation will examine the feasibility as the librarian as an oral historian, and will discuss the relative merits and drawbacks of such a scheme.

Engaging in the role of the oral historian allows the librarian to expand her role in the local community, and to serve the needs of that community in ways hitherto ignored. The gathering of oral history is a process that is by its very nature an intimate and local practice. As one of the prominent purveyors of knowledge to the local community, the library is in a prime position to become a hub not only in its traditional role of information retention and disbursement, but also in the role of new knowledge creation entailed by the process of oral history production.

**Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine the extent to which the training of a librarian is suited to the task of conducting and managing an oral history project. Essentially, the project will investigate the primary skills and training that librarians receive during the course of their education, and will evaluate the usefulness and applicability of those skills with regard to the responsibilities and activities of an oral historian. In evaluating these skills, the author of the dissertation engaged in an oral history project, and uses that experience, combined with research into scholarly publications, as the basis for her conclusions. In order to more clearly understand the ways in which her training was either applicable or inapplicable to oral history collection, the dissertation makes use of reflective writing throughout in order to engage with the author’s mindset during each step of the process. The aim of this reflective writing is to ascertain ways in which the training of librarians can be altered in order to better prepare them for oral history collection, and to recognize areas in which the librarians is already well trained.
Chapter 1: A Look at Oral History

1.1: Methodology
The methodology employed in this dissertation is composed of three distinct, but interconnected, strategies. The combination of these strategies is essential for discerning the full value of the dissertation as a whole, and each of the strategies plays a key role in developing that full value. As the purpose of the dissertation is to determine the appropriate role of the librarian in the creation and curation of oral histories, the first strategy involved in the methodology was to research the current state of librarian involvement in such endeavours, primarily through the use of scholarly articles. In order to better understand the intricacies of the process of oral history collection, the dissertation’s author, seeking to expand the role of the librarian within the context of the oral history movement, planned and executed an oral history project of the Sheffield Cathedral, during which she alone was responsible for planning, preparing, executing, and presenting the completed oral history. This strategic element of the methodology allowed the author to understand from a practical standpoint the amount of work and type of work involved in the production of such histories, and allowed her to apply her acquired skills to the task.

The second strategy of the methodology was a reflective review of the librarian’s firsthand experience, in which the author revisited her performance at each step of the process. This portion of the methodology served as a point at which the author could determine the suitability of the librarian’s skillset to the varied tasks of oral history production. It is important to note that at this point in the methodology the dissertation will shift to a first person perspective, as this was the clearest way of representing the author’s experiences. During the reflective reviews of each phase of oral history production, the author discusses the ways in which her librarian training had either prepared her for or not prepared her for the sort of activities required by the process of creating an oral history. This approach has both merits and drawbacks. While the results of the reflective analysis reflect only the performance of the individual librarian who performed the oral history, they still allow for the evaluation of the skills involved in oral history against the skills gained through librarian education. While the results of the project could be easily altered by being performed by a different librarian, the evaluation of the skillset training is still valuable in its
own right. This focused strategy of reflection served as the starting point for the final strategy, which was the production of a rich picture that illustrates the potential roles that a librarian could play in oral history production.

The purpose of the rich picture is to create a pictorial representation of the way that the librarian fits into the process (Checkland & Poulter, 2010). Rich pictures are a subset of Checkland’s Soft Systems Methodology, and are generally used as a means of promoting deep thinking about a particular issue. Because the researcher must draw a pictorial representation of the connections and intricacies of an issue, it is possible for that researcher to reach a greater understanding of those intricacies as a result of the amount of thought that must go into a rich picture (Checkland & Poulter, 2010). While it is generally agreed that the final phases of an oral history project, preservation and storage, should fall to the expertise of the librarian, the rich picture reveals that the librarian may be better suited to an expanded role in the process, one that involves more direct interaction throughout. Each of these three strategies of the methodology are incredibly important to the aim of this dissertation, and each has a number of components that are necessary to ensure the conclusions drawn are viable.

Research Questions

The first strategy of the methodology, in which the author examines the work of other librarians in oral history and then performs an oral history of her own, is intended to provide the author with a sense of the practical nature of the librarian’s role in oral history. This strategy of the methodology seeks to answer three questions about oral history:

1) What is the sum total of work that goes into creating an oral history?
2) What are the skills required to successfully perform an oral history?
3) What is the typical role of the librarian currently within oral history?

Much of the information gathered from this section of the methodology is derived from the process of autoethnography, which is a reflective style of research that focuses on the individual experiences of the researcher in order to glean information that can be used to answer a more broad inquiry (Holt, 2003). In this case, the author examines her own experiences performing an oral history, and then uses those
personal experiences to make broader statements about the efficacy of librarians in
general conducting oral history, based mostly on the skillset involved in their creation
versus the skillset of the librarian. This approach is not widely used, but is attracting
increasing attention in qualitative research circles (Anderson, 2006). In this study, it
adds a degree of practicability to the research project, as it allows for the combination
of academic research and practical experience. (Wall, 2006)

In order to answer the first question, the author decided to engage in the entire process
of oral history creation, from the initial planning stages through to the preservation
and presentation of the collected material. In preparation for this task, various
scholarly works were consulted that allowed the author to gain an understanding of
the sort of general process involved in every oral history project, including work by
Angrosino (2008), Charlton (2007), and Mackay (2007). This general information
was then tailored to meet the specific requirements of the project as it related to the
Sheffield Cathedral. By studying the best practices of others, and by being in control
of the creative process from its conception, the author came to understand the varied
activities that go into creating oral histories.

The answer to the second question is reached as a direct result of finding the answer
to the first question. After coming to a conclusion about the amount and type of work
involved, the author determined, drawing from both her personal experience and from
recent scholarship, what the requisite skills for adequately performing an oral history
are. In determining these skills, the author took into account technological
requirements, time management skills, interpersonal skills, research skills, and others.

The final question was answered purely from an examination of recent scholarship
about oral history. In order to determine what changes in the librarian’s role would be
beneficial to the oral history field, it was first important to determine what the
librarian’s role in the field actually was. After this determination, and with the
answers to the first two questions duly noted, the author was prepared to move onto
the next strategy of the methodology.

The second strategy of the methodology entails an in-depth analysis of the personally-
conducted oral history project, primarily examined through the use of personal
reflection. Personal reflection is an increasingly important method for determining
research outcomes. In her 1996 book, Fook relates the importance of reflection in
research in terms of the social worker, but her methodology can be applied to a number of research areas, including library science (Fook, 1996). By using reflection to determine the personal effects of research, it is possible to better relate the practical implications of that research for other researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The goal of this strategy of the methodology is to establish which of the librarian’s skills can be most readily and effectively applied to the creation of oral history and which skills need to be further developed. Essentially, this strategy of the methodology seeks to answer a further two questions:

1) *How does the training of a librarian prepare them for oral history projects?*

2) *In what ways can that training be altered to better prepare the librarian?*

In order to answer the first question, the author will examine the skills necessary for successfully completing an oral history project (gained from the first portion of the methodology) and will compare them with the skills developed during the course of her M.A. program in Librarianship. Those skills that overlap will be described in detail, while those that are lacking will be pinpointed in order to answer the second question.

The main thrust of the reflective process is intended to address the second question. Essentially, the librarian is attempting to determine what educational processes could have been implemented that would have resulted in an improved performance in her ability to create the oral history. By highlighting these shortcomings, the author hopes to inform the ways that library programs think about the future roles of their students, and hopes to promote the expansion of new coursework in the field of oral history for librarians that extends beyond their role as preservation experts.

The final strategy of the methodology is intended to synthesize the information gained from the previous two strategies into an expressible product, with the intention of defining a potential role change for the librarian in the process of oral history. This expressible product will take the form of a rich picture, an abstract illustration of the librarian’s role which will allow the author to express the complex nature of oral history production through a series of relational images. This final strategy of the methodology will serve to answer one final question:
1) What is the appropriate role for a librarian in the process of oral history collection?

By examining the results of the first two strategies of the methodology, and by determining trends in the fields of oral history and library science, the author hopes to bring some attention to the applicability of the skills possessed by librarians to the task of devising, planning, and executing oral history projects.

Why a rich picture? By using a rich picture, the disparity between the current role of librarians and the role that their training prepares them for can be realized both fundamentally and metaphorically (Checkland & Poulter, 2010). The rich picture will illustrate the role that librarians currently play in the process, that of the preservers, those who have little involvement in the oral history until it has already been completed. The rich picture will also illustrate the role that librarians could inhabit in the process, given their highly developed skillset in research and organization. By placing these images side-by-side, it becomes clear that when the librarian is more directly involved in the process, the oral history field can become more accessible, more universally organized, and more locally representative. There are of course a number of difficulties in reaching the goal of increased librarian involvement in oral history projects. Perhaps the most unsettling of these difficulties is the worrisome issue of budget shortfalls and service cuts (Topper, 2009). If there is not enough money around to allow librarians to carry out the basic functions of their jobs, then surely it would be difficult to expand their role in any area of work outside the most limited of services. This dissertation is not promoting the idea that librarians should attempt to usurp the role of the oral historian. It simply suggests that librarians can provide valuable skills and insights, as well as important organizational standardization, to the field that both professions serve. Indeed, by working in cooperation with one another, librarians and oral historians, through the sharing of common resources, could maximize their professional impact while still remaining conscious of the effects of the current recession.

The Practicalities of the Research

For the collection of oral history aspect within this project, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three individuals at the Sheffield Cathedral. These interviews
were set up in such a way as to guide the interviewee toward discussing significant moments in their memory of the Sheffield Cathedral, specifically through asking open-ended questions. The goal at the end of the interviews was to have attained a broad picture of the history of the cathedral from the varying viewpoints of its employees and parishioners.

The interviews that the librarian engaged in followed a general format of question, answer, and exploration, in which the librarian would ask a general question of the interviewee, receive a response, and then probe more deeply based on that response in order to attain more information from the interviewee. This method of interviewing has both benefits and drawbacks. The main drawback of the technique is that the interviewer is limited by what the interviewee has told her. As a result, it is possible that some key information in the interviewee’s memory may go unrecorded because the interviewer was unaware of it (Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 2009). Conversely, one of the benefits of this method of interviewing is that the interview is not shaped and manipulated by the interviewer’s preconceived notions of history, but is rather guided by the specific knowledge of the interviewee (Angrosino, 2008). This allows the interview to grow organically based on the interviewee’s experience rather than based on the interviewer’s knowledge.

The reasoning behind the oral history interviews was two-fold: first, to enable the capturing of the stories of the employees and parishioners of the cathedral, and second to see if the training of a librarian is suitable for conducting oral histories effectively, rather than merely categorizing and maintaining them. By placing a librarian in a situation in which she was solely responsible for the entirety of the oral history project, it was possible to evaluate the applicability of her skills to each step of the process, from planning, to interviewing, to presenting. As a result, each of these phases of the process was ripe for reflection, and an overall picture of the role of the librarian could be established.

The reflective portion of the research was necessary in order to heighten the project’s applicability to the field. Though the processes performed by the involved librarian may indeed be unique to her, the focus on reflection, rather than action, allows the dissertation to make more general claims about the training methods employed at a
typical library school. This sort of reflective method centres on the researcher as the reflection of the research (Humphreys, 2005).

Following the reflective process, and in order to illustrate the intricacies of the librarian’s involvement in oral history, the creation of rich pictures was chosen as the most effective means of determining the librarian’s role. Through the diagramming of the rich picture, it became clear that the librarian can play an important role in each step of the oral history process. Though the skills necessary for conducting an effective oral history are not exclusive to the librarian, it became clear that they do form a major component of the librarian’s training and experience.

In order to conduct the oral history project, the librarian first had to become aware of the processes involved in conducting an oral history, from conceptualizing and planning the project to organizing and presenting the resultant product. To this end, the librarian enrolled in an oral history short course in order to gain an expert’s perspective on the best options for equipment, methods, and preservation (oralhistory.org.uk, 2010). In addition, the librarian performed research on the topic of oral histories, including studying guidebooks (Angrosino, 2008), completed histories (Carlson, 2010), and academic presentations, as well as joining the Oral History Society and attending their annual conference.

Once the librarian felt firmly grounded in the intricacies of conducting an oral history project, the goal was to find a topic ripe for coverage, plan a project, and execute it using the skills developed during the course of her Librarianship Master’s Degree programme. In this way, the librarian would be able to evaluate the efficacy of using the skills of the librarian to adequately complete an oral history project. In particular, the main thrust of the project was to evaluate the organizational, research, and technical training of the degree program, and to determine whether it adequately prepared the librarian for the execution of the entirety of an oral history project.

At each phase of the process, the librarian performed a reflective report on the state of the project as a whole, as well as on the state of that phase in particular. These reflective reports allow a glimpse into the thinking processes of the librarian during the project, and are a useful resource for determining the suitability of the librarian for the project (Braithwait Darrow, 2006). By examining these reflective reports alongside the completed oral history, the librarian was able to make suggestions for
improvements or alterations in the course of study, and could also determine areas in which the librarian’s abilities can be beneficial to oral history creators elsewhere.

Following the actual conducting of the oral history, and the compilation and evaluation of the reflective reports on that oral history, the next step in the methodology was for the librarian to analyse the information from these resources and synthesize it into a rich picture, or a series of rich pictures. In this way, the librarian was able to express pictorially the appropriate role for the librarian in the conducting of oral histories, be it in an advisory role, in a preservation role, or in a role of project leadership. The goal of the rich picture is to allow the librarian to think deeply about her effect on the collection and usage of oral histories, and to reflect on the ways in which her training is either appropriate or lacking when it comes to their collection and/or maintenance.

1.2: A Review of Oral History Practices

In reviewing current practices in the field of oral history, by way of an examination of the literature, a number of strategies and skills were found to form a foundation for the successful completion of an oral history project. According to Angrosino (2008), the main skill involved in the collection of oral history is the ability to converse with a purpose. By having the general social skills necessary to carry on a conversation, a person should be able to conduct an oral history, if only a minimal one. In addition to conversational skills, it is important for the person conducting the oral history to have a good deal of research experience, and to be skilled in both organization and planning (Angrosino, 2008). Other skills necessary for successfully performing an oral history are the ability to make full use of available technologies, from sound recording devices to audio editing software (Braithwait Darrow, 2006).

One of the main goals of oral history is to discover voids in the historical record in order to fill them, thus enhancing overall access to information that may otherwise have been lost (Alexander, 2006). For this reason, most oral histories are performed by oral historians, who generally have a good deal of training, both in historical research, and in interviewing techniques (Mackay, 2007). Charlton, Myers, and Sharpless (2008), in their series on oral history, list a number of methods used in the creation and collection of oral history. In addition, they discuss the history and evolution of the concept and processes of oral history through time (Charlton, et al
2007). Importantly, they reference the work of Duberman, who was conflicted about the aims of oral history: he wished to express his own views on history, while not wanting to distort the views of those involved in the oral history (Grele, 1987).

Importantly, oral history requires a varied skillset in order to be planned, collected, utilized, and finally, preserved ( Gregg, 2000). In the ensuing chapters, the dissertation will examine these different phases of an oral history project, and will establish their constituent parts and the skills necessary in order to complete them adequately. At the conclusion of each chapter, there will be a reflective examination of the author’s experience in that stage of the project, which will serve as a method of evaluation of the applicability of the librarian’s skills to that particular phase. Interspersed between these chapters will be further literature reviews focused on different aspects of the librarian in oral history, including: the current role of the librarian in the preservation aspect of oral history; additional roles held by librarians in various oral history projects; and the relationship between the librarian and the oral historian. Finally, the information gathered will be used to reach a conclusion about what the accepted role of the librarian in the oral history process should be.

Before examining each of these parts of the oral history process, it is important to first establish what is meant in referring to ‘librarian skills,’ as this is a nebulous term that could seem to refer to any number of things. By ‘librarian skills’, or ‘library skills’, this is a reference to the set of skills typical of the training provided in a librarianship course. Of course, there is no one standard of training from course to course, so these skills represent a more general idea of the training a librarian receives. This training can be categorized into three areas of interest: communication, research, and technology.

**Communication** – A portion of the librarian’s training consists of developing the skills needed in order to interact effectively with the public. The specific skills include listening and responding and communicating clearly.

**Research** – As one of the prime reference points for patrons, the librarian must be skilled in the research methods necessary in order to meet those patrons’ needs. This includes knowledge of a variety of search techniques depending on the situation, as well as a commitment to accuracy in research.
**Technology** – Increasingly, much of the librarian’s duties involve interfacing with a variety of technologies in order to perform her job. This includes computer software, computer hardware, and a wide assortment of equipment for digitization and maintenance of collections.

During each of the succeeding sections, these skills will be evaluated against the requirements of each part of the process of an oral history project. It is from these evaluations and from an examination of the literature that the dissertation will reach its conclusions about the potential role of the librarian in the process of oral history collection and preservation.
Chapter 2: Librarians Conducting Oral History

In preparation for the oral history project, the author examined a number of sources for evidence of the role of the typical librarian in the oral history process. During this examination, the author found that, with only a few exceptions, librarians generally are involved in only one aspect of conducting an oral history project: The Preservation Stage.

2.1: A Review of the Currently Accepted Role

During the process of researching the literature, the author discovered that the majority of work done by librarians in the area of oral history was concerned with the preservation and storage of oral histories that had been undertaken by others, rather than the creation of new oral histories (Weig, 2007) (Alexander, 2006). This reflects the traditional role of the librarian as the preserver and cataloguer of information, rather than someone who actively creates new information. Miller (1986) argued for the importance of the librarian/archivist as the person who made sure the oral history was put to use after it was conducted (Miller, 1986). Eeles and Kinnear (1989) made a similar statement, suggesting that there should be enhanced cooperation between oral historians and archivists/librarians, but that the two professions should remain well away from each other’s specific role. These authors seem to prefer a clear delineation of responsibilities between oral historians and librarians, with the production part oral history projects being left exclusively to the oral historian, and the preservation part being left entirely to the librarian (Eeles & Kinnear, 1989).

The majority of early sources condone an approach to historical preservation that emphasizes the role of the historian in the actual recording of history, with the archivist or librarian relegated to a more passive role as a preserver of the already obtained information. Later on in the discourse, the librarian begins to take a more prominent role in both the preservation and in the collection of oral history. As the scholarship moves into the twenty-first century, authors begin to place the onus on librarians for conducting and preserving the oral histories of their communities, emphasizing that librarians are already in possession of the required knowledge and skills to successfully accomplish such a task.
The Traditional View of the Librarian’s Role

In his 1986 article, Miller discusses the role of archivists in relation to the material that they oversee. He advocates a strict separation of the archivist from the historian, but at the same time emphasizes the importance of the archivist for the curating, maintaining, and organizing of the historical record (Miller, 1986). Miller also makes note of the increasingly professional training of archivists, and the more complex skills that they need in order to adequately perform their functions as new technologies become standard (Miller, 1986). This article seems to advocate for archivists being only preservers of existing information, rather than contributors to the creation of new information.

In his 1987 article, Grele discusses the ways in which oral histories are conducted and used by historians. One of his main contentions is that the interviewer is as important to the content and meaning of the interview as the interviewee (Grele, 1987). For that reason, in order to create a source that has the most historical value, the interviewer must be possessed of a few necessary skills in order to be able to steer the conversation in a desirable direction. These skills include preparation and organization. Grele also states that perhaps the most glaring deficiency in oral history is that there is no single database for searching through all available histories (Grele, 1987). This last comment is reflected in the later article by Rosenzweig in which the author insists that librarians could bring standardization and organization to the oral history profession.

In his 1988 article, Ndiaye stresses the importance of preserving the oral traditions of African cultures, and states that the most important institutions needed to meet this goal are libraries. According to Ndiaye, libraries possess the ability to preserve the oral culture through recording and organizing it within national centres of culture (Ndiaye, 1988). Though he does not specifically mention the ways in which this could be done, it is important to note that it is librarians, and not historians, that he believes will best preserve the culture. This article advocates for the role of the library as a repository for local culture and history, and as the key coordinator of those areas of local study (Ndiaye, 1988).

In their 1989 article, Eeles and Kinnear call for cooperation between archivists and oral historians. Their essential goal is to bridge the gap between creating oral history
for current use, and preserving it for posterity. They propose that archival services and libraries work with and for the local community, so it makes sense for them to have a role in the preservation of oral history (Eeles & Kinnear, 1989). They come to the conclusion that oral historians and archivists must work together closely in order to ensure the maximum impact of the oral historians research, and to ensure that the information gathered is not lost to time. The article aims to encourage oral historians to ensure their histories are catalogued and preserved in libraries for posterity, rather than merely for current research (Eeles & Kinnear, 1989). The authors still draw a distinction between the role of the oral historian and the role of the librarian.

Generally, the idea of the librarian as preserver rather than as collector has fit well with the perceived skillset of the librarian: an excellence with organization, and an aptitude for research; however, with the recent changes in the nature of the librarian’s training, it may be necessary to eschew the traditional idea of the role of the librarian in favour of one that more completely makes use of the librarian’s advanced training in other areas (Abram, 2006).

2.2: 21st Century Views of the Librarian’s Role

In the past ten years or so, the focus of scholarship has been increasingly focused on the librarian’s expanded role and emphasized importance in the oral history process.

In her 2000 article, Gregg provides a guide for librarians about how to conduct oral histories. It includes who should conduct them, how to record them, how to maintain them, and how to promote them, as well as describing what they are useful for. Gregg, as a librarian herself, believes that it is well within the capabilities of librarians to conduct viable and important oral histories. She asserts that with the proper training and motivation, library-conducted oral histories can be just as effective as historian-produced ones (Gregg, 2000). At this point, the literature begins to combine the role of the oral historian with that of the librarian, insinuating that the two professions could easily be made into a single profession, given the evolving skills of the librarian.

In his 2003 article, Rosenzweig challenges historians to learn a few lessons from archivists and librarians about the current state of the information profession. He warns that the information sector is suffering from an overabundance of resources,
and that the proper preservation of history will require the combined skills of both the historian and the librarian (Rosenzweig, 2003). The librarian skills required include organization, standardization, and precision. In addition, Rosenzweig asserts that a discerning eye, along with adequate funding, are also necessary in the process of deciding what materials should be maintained (Rosenzweig, 2003).

In their 2004 article, Baranowski and Calderone describe their experiences, as librarians, in conducting an oral history at their local library. They provide insight into the challenges and rewards of the process. The article also gives a description of the additional uses of the oral history by the library after it has been conducted, including publications, expansions, and collection building in order to increase access to and use of the oral history. The article implies that librarians can play a large role in the preservation of local history, and can leverage their information skills in order to expand upon their endeavours (Baranowski & Calderone, 2004). By providing specific examples of their own oral history collecting, the authors provide evidence that it is within the capabilities of local librarians to play an active role in the preservation of their local histories.

In his 2006 article, Alexander recounts his experience as an archivist working with oral history. He points out that one of the most valuable aspects of oral history is its ability to assist in filling in “historical absences,” or gaps in the historical record (Alexander, 2006). As an archivist, and knowing what these “historical absences” were in the record, he was better able to determine the most effective means of gathering oral history from viable sources, i.e. he was better able to direct the flow of the interview because he was aware of the areas of history that needed more explaining in addition to the physical record. This article emphasizes the importance of the librarian’s existing knowledge of historical collections in the creation of effective “new” histories gathered through obtaining oral histories (Alexander, 2006).

In his 2008 article, Kargbo makes the argument for the preservation of the oral traditions of primarily oral cultures by librarians. He asserts that the people most suitable for the task of preserving these oral cultures are librarians, because it is their job to catalogue and preserve history for succeeding generations (Kargbo, 2008). Kargbo explains that librarians, working in conjunction with historical societies and universities, should be able to develop the specialized skills necessary for them to take
an active role in this preservation. The author insists that it is the responsibility of librarians to preserve oral traditions, in order to ensure that they do not die out.

In her 2009 article, Daniels discusses the ways in which oral histories can best be made available to the public. She comes to the conclusion that creating integrated online access systems on the internet is the best way to ensure that collections are most accessible (Daniels, 2009). The skills required for such tasks, which she discusses in the article, include digitization, web design, and a decent technical knowledge of information software – all areas at which librarians excel. As technologies become increasingly more complex, it falls to the librarian, who excels at making information accessible to the general public, to design and maintain the systems which preserve oral histories (Daniels, 2009).

As these sources suggest, the librarian’s role in oral history collection is becoming increasingly focused on interacting with the local community, taking an active role in collecting that community’s history. At the same time, the librarian is still expected to perform her traditional role as preserver of that information, illustrating the need for a re-evaluation of the funding practices of libraries (Topper, 2009).
Chapter 3: Planning an Oral History

3.1: Setting Up a Project

Prior to the conducting of the oral history, the librarian engaged in a good deal of research in order to set an agenda for completing her task. By combining the best practices discussed by a number of oral history experts, the librarian hoped to perform a detailed oral history that would be representative of the quality of work expected of a professional oral historian. The following guide to oral history is intended to provide an illustration of the process undertaken by the librarian during the initial stages of her project. The general outline of the guide is sourced from a number of publications\(^1\), with additional notes and clarifications provided by the librarian.

The planning phase of an oral history project is the point at which the project coordinator should determine the timeline of the oral history, as well as its focus. It is a long and complex phase, beginning with the formation of the original conception of the project and running through to the beginning of the first interview. Because of the complexity of this phase of the project, it is necessary to further subdivide it into seven constituent parts:

1. Determining the topic
2. Researching the topic
3. Locating potential interviewees
4. Contacting interviewees
5. Finding an interview location
6. Preparing the equipment
7. Preparing the paperwork

1. Determining the topic:

During this part of the planning phase, the goal of the project leader is to develop a project topic that meets a set of important criteria. The project must be: “source-able”, specific, and time-bound.

An oral history project that is “source-able” is a project which focuses on information that can be gained within the reasonable limits of the project’s
means. An oral history of the American Civil War is not necessarily “source-able”, as the primary players of the war no longer survive, but an oral history of the first Gulf War is “source-able”, as the primary players of that war are potentially accessible.

**Specificity** is also an important factor in determining an appropriate topic for an oral history project. (Charlton, et al 2007) It would be impossible to conduct an oral history on the topic of “The House”. There would simply be far too much information to cover in order to paint a picture that does justice to the subject. A far more specific topic is a far more effective topic, such as “The middle-class suburban house in 1960s Yorkshire”. By defining limiting factors to the scope of the topic, the project becomes more straightforward and useful.

In determining the topic of an oral history project, it is important to ensure that that topic is time-bound (unless the goal of the project is to create an indefinitely expanding oral history, continuously collected and revised).

By ensuring that the topic of an oral history project is “source-able”, specific, and time-bound, the planning phase of the project will become more readily accessible, and the subsequent parts of the phase will be more useful.

2  **Researching the topic:**

Before engaging in an interview for an oral history, it is important for the interviewer to have at least a general understanding of the topic that has been chosen. To this end, it is useful for the interviewer to spend at least a few days performing independent research on the topic. (Angrosino, 2008) As a result of this advanced preparation, the interviewer will be better prepared to ask questions of the interviewees, and can more specifically relate to the events being described during the interviewing process. Also, having performed previous research on a topic allows the project leader to make informed decisions about potential interviewing targets, i.e. major players in the history to be explored, or various sides of an issue that should be represented. An interviewer should never enter an interview without knowing a little bit about the person to be interviewed, as valuable information might be missed. (Charlton, et al 2008)
3  *Locating potential interviewees*

Interviewees are the source of an oral history. Without the interviewee, the oral history would cease to exist. Because of this, generating a long list of potential interviewees is paramount to the success of an oral history project. When generating this list, it is important to consider that many of the people involved with the chosen topic may be either unable to participate in the project, or, unfortunately, may not wish to participate. For this reason, it is better to have too many people on a potential interview list than it is to have too few. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998)

In compiling a list of potential interviewees, it is helpful to ask for the assistance of other participants or experts. When the topic of a project deals with an organization, leadership figures within that organization can be of great assistance in determining members who are suitable for the interviewing process. (Angrosino, 2008) Once the list of potential interviewees is substantially lengthy, it is time to move on to the contact stage.

4  *Contacting interviewees*

There are a number of effective ways to make contact with potential interviewees for an oral history project. If the project is centred around an organization, it might be suitable for the project leader to make an appeal for interviews as a meeting of that organization, or to ask a member of the organization’s leadership to make such an appeal. Alternatively, public communications systems such as bulletin boards or flyers can be useful in drawing attention to a project, but the interviewer must be able to confirm the identity of the respondents before scheduling an interview (for safety reasons). More personal and individual means of contacting potential interviewees can also be used, such as letters, telephone calls, and e-mail messages. When contacting potential interviewees, it is important to explain the totality of the project to them, from its methods to its potential uses. They should be told how the interview will be conducted, what its purpose will be, and what their role is in the process. Only after these facts have been established, and both parties are comfortable with the interview, should an interview be scheduled. (Carlson, 2010)
5 *Finding an interview location*

In planning an oral history, it is quite possible that it will be difficult to find a time and place that the interviewer and the interviewee are able to meet in order to record the interview. It is important to ensure that, whatever the location of the meeting, the interviewee is comfortable and the interviewer is not in risk of any sort of harm. The location chosen for the interview should be quiet, well-lit, and easily accessible, in order to promote a quality interview. (Angrosino, 2008) Ideally, the location will be a reserved public space.

6 *Preparing the equipment*

After the interviews have been set up, and the right locations have been found and reserved, attention should be shifted to the interviewing equipment. It is important to take note of the sort of equipment that the oral history requires. Will it be purely an audio recording, or will it include video as well? Is cutting edge equipment necessary or will basic tools be sufficient? Once the technology requirements are determined, the equipment should be rented or purchased well before the interview, to ensure a thorough understanding of how it works.

7 *Preparing the paperwork*

Legally, in order to use an oral history, the participants must provide their written consent. Preparing the consent paperwork is an essential part of planning an oral history. Without this vital step, the information gathered through an oral history is essentially useless, as it would be illegal to use it for anything. Only with informed consent and copyright documentation can the contents of an oral history interview be utilized. (Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 2009)

3.2: A Reflection on Planning an Oral History

During my independent project, I found the processes involved in planning the oral history to be highly compatible with the situation and training of the typical professional librarian. I will examine each of the aforementioned steps of the process from the perspective of its relationship with the skills of the librarian.
1  **Determining the topic**
When it came to determining the topic for my oral history project, I found that my library training was of assistance in helping to define the limits of the sort of project I could conduct. Because I was able to quickly determine what sort of projects would be unsuitable for the established criteria, I could define my final topic quite easily. Though the library skills assisted in this step, they were not essential to the process.

2  **Researching the topic**
Learning how to best use information sources is one of the key areas of training for the librarian. When it came time to discover information about the Sheffield Cathedral’s history, I scoured internet resources, from Google searches to Jstor, and from the cathedral’s institutional website to its Wikipedia page. By checking the facts of these sources against the others, I was able to generate what I thought was a rather reliable basic outline of the history of the cathedral, and from there was able to compile a general list of questions for the interviewees. My research skills allowed me to efficiently establish a set of questions from which to work during the ensuing interviews, and provided me with a firm base of knowledge.

3  **Locating potential interviewees**
In order to locate potential interviewees for the project, I had to turn to outside assistance. For this assistance, I relied on a reverend canon at the Sheffield Cathedral, Simon Cowling. I was put into contact with Rev. Cowling through my dissertation supervisor. This illustrates one of the advantages of librarians being involved in the planning stages of oral history projects. Especially in the case of public librarians, librarians typically have connections with other organizations throughout the local community as a result of the nature of their organizations. These sorts of connections can be very beneficial in organizing oral history projects, as they can be helpful in identifying potential interviewees.

4  **Contacting interviewees**
The specific skills required for this portion of the planning process are minimal. The person contacting the interviewees must be thorough, and must have a solid understanding of the nature of the project that they are a part of. As a rule, while I was contacting potential interviewees, I made sure to state the nature of the project and the role I wanted the interviewee to play in the project. I did make an error in my
communications with one of the interviewees, which was to fail to explain how an oral history works, but I will describe this situation in the section on Collecting an Oral History. Overall, my training allowed me to be relatively clear and specific in my communications with the project’s participants.

5 Finding an interview location
Another advantage of having connections within other organizations, especially those directly concerned with the oral history being produced, is that they may be willing to allow you to use their space to conduct your interviews. In this case, the Sheffield Cathedral allowed me to conduct my interviews within a meeting room at the back of the cathedral, which was convenient both for me and for my interviewees, who were comfortable in the location, as they were all parishioners of the cathedral. The skills of the librarian did not come into play in this circumstance.

6 Preparing the equipment
For this project, I decided that I should hire out a digital recording device, at least for the first interview, as I was not confident of the reliability of the computer program Audacity for the process. I hired out a Marantz PMD-620, and experimented with it for a few days until I was comfortable with its operation. Because of my previous experience working with audio equipment, from my training in digitization methods, I was able to easily understand the capabilities and limitations of the device, and was able to utilize it adequately.

7 Preparing the paperwork
In order to prepare the paperwork for the project, I relied on my internet searching skills. I decided to research the sort of information that would be required for copyright release forms, consent forms, and information sheets, and compiled a list of these requirements. I then borrowed from the best examples in order to create papers that fulfilled the needs of my specific project.

Conclusions on Planning
On the whole, the planning stage of the oral history project allowed me to use my organizational skills and library skills in order to easily complete each step of the process. By combining my ability to perform detailed background research with my training in interpersonal communication and in technological literacy, I was able to efficiently complete the planning stage. The librarian’s skills, so focused toward
organizational efficiency and information retrieval, were a great asset in preparing this part of the project.
Chapter 4: Collecting an Oral History

4.1: The Collection Process

After the planning phase of the oral history process is complete, it is time to move on to the phase of the project that entails the actual conducting of the interviews. During this phase of the process, it is the role of the project leader to devise questions for each interviewee to answer, to attempt to provide some context for each of their interviews, and to maintain a standard of professionalism during the interviews that allows them to proceed smoothly and usefully. In order to accomplish these goals, it is important that the interviewer remain cognizant of her role in the process, and the ways in which her input in the interview could change the overall direction and spirit of the interviewee’s recollection. (Mackay, 2007)

When in the midst of an interview, there are a number of skills that the interviewer can employ in order to allow the interview to proceed well. These skills range in scope from basic social interaction skills to more complex memory and research skills (Angrosino, 2008). Regardless of whether they are basic or complex, each of the following skills can play a major role in the course of an oral history interview:

**Skill One: Listening**

This may not seem like much of a skill, but it is by far one of the most important abilities that someone conducting an oral history can possess. Listening is much more than the passive process of hearing the words that another person is using to describe an event. Rather, it is a skill that requires the listener to participate in an active process of interpreting and contextualizing the conversation within the frame of reference provided by the topic of the oral history project. (Baranowski & Calderone, 2004) The main advantages of having this skill are the ability to discern more important information of a history from less important information, the ability to draw connections between those important parts and other relevant events, and the ability to recognize when the interviewee may be willing to expound upon their recollection with a bit more questioning.

**Skill Two: Technical Expertise**

One cannot conduct an oral history interview effectively without having achieved a certain level of expertise with the chosen recording equipment. In the midst of an
interview, any number of problems can arise with the recording equipment, from microphone malfunctions to computer system errors, depending on the equipment that is being used. The interviewer must have the ability to quickly recognize when a malfunction is taking place, must have an awareness of how to fix the problem, and must be able to maintain the atmosphere of professionalism while resolving the problematic issues (Carlson, 2010).

**Skill Three: Patience and Recognition**

During the course of an oral history interview, there are times during which silence can seem to last for far too long. It is during these times that the interviewer must be able to determine how best to proceed with the interview. Is the interviewee done speaking? Does he/she have anything else to add to what has been said, but is simply trying to recollect what happened? Is there some way that the interviewer can encourage the interviewee to continue without appearing uncaring or demanding? These are questions that must be considered throughout the collection of an individual’s oral history.

**4.2: Reflection on the Collection Process**

For the particular project conducted and examined within this dissertation, the author conducted an oral history of the Sheffield Cathedral in which she interviewed three members of the congregation, each of whom had once served in a position at the Cathedral, either at a time in the past or presently. In order to successfully conduct these interviews, it was important for the interviewer to understand a little bit about the roles that each of these people played in their respective positions at the Cathedral. That way, when interesting connections presented themselves during the interview, the interviewer would know when and how to connect the dots.

The oral history of the Sheffield Cathedral consisted of three interviewees: Alan Cottam, a former verger; Margaret Garner, a member of the congregation and an authority on the Cathedral’s history; and Dr. George Atherton, a former member of the cathedral choir. Each of these interviews developed in a way which was very different from the others, and as a result, each illustrates a different approach to the practice of oral history collection.
Interview One: Alan Cottam

When the time came to begin the interviewing portion of the oral history project, I had never before taken part in an oral history-based interview. I was relying solely on the theoretical knowledge I had gained from a short-course on oral history interviewing from the Oral History Society some weeks prior to the interview. I was understandably nervous about the process, and was still a bit unsure of the recording equipment I had chosen to record the interview. As such, I decided to use a backup recording agent in addition to my hired Marantz PMD-620 digital recorder. For this backup system, I chose to use the program Audacity, combined with a Logitech microphone. This way, if either system failed, I had a backup recording preserved.

Before the interview, I had prepared a series of questions for Mr. Cottam based on what little I was able to learn about him from my conversations with the Reverend Canon Simon Cowling and with Mr. Cottam himself. My initial list of questions was rather general, the only specific queries being concerned with his role as a verger and with his experience at the Sheffield Cathedral in comparison to the other cathedrals he had been a member of. I had brought a paper and pen to the interview along with the recording equipment, so that if another question sprang to my mind while Mr. Cottam was still responding to a previous question, I would be able to quickly jot it down. I felt very prepared for the interview.

When I had exhausted my questions, and Mr. Cottam seemed to have said all he would say about his experiences with the cathedral, I drew the interview to a close. I thanked Mr. Cottam for his time, and he seemed genuinely pleased to have participated in the project. Initially, I believed that I had done an exemplary job during the interview, controlling the pace of the interview well and covering all of the information that I had set out to cover with Mr. Cottam. It was not until Ms. Garner entered the room for her interview that I realized I was mistaken. Ms. Garner asked whether Mr. Cottam had talked to me about the cathedral’s stained glass windows in any detail. He had talked about them, but not in any specific capacity, just in a few offhand comments. Ms. Garner seemed taken aback by this, and explained that Mr. Cottam had written a book about the stained glass windows a few years previous to the interview, and that he was acknowledged as something of an expert on them. This of course came as a shock to me, as neither Mr. Cottam nor the Rev. Cowling had mentioned anything about this.
My interview with Mr. Cottam revealed several lessons to me about oral history interviews. The first is that the interviewer must always be prepared for unexpected circumstances, such as interruptions or personal difficulties for the interviewee. By being flexible in my approach to the progression of the interview, I was able to ensure that neither I nor Mr. Cottam felt uncomfortable with his disability, while still maintaining the integrity of the interview. The second lesson is that no matter how thorough you think you may have been with an interview, there is a chance that you have missed out on an important bit of information, for no other reason than that it never really came up as a topic of conversation during the interview. Either Mr. Cottam was too humble to speak about his book, or I was ineffective in communicating my desire to learn more about his body of knowledge concerning each part of the cathedral experience. Finally, I learned that familiarity with the technical equipment is a must for preserving the interview. Had I been more familiar with the recording equipment during this first interview, I may have been able to pause the audio recorder before the interruption had been so far recorded.

Interview Two: Margaret Garner
My interview with Ms. Garner did not go quite the way that I had planned. In fact, when the interview took place, a plan for it did not yet exist. I had purposefully scheduled Ms. Garner’s interview to take place two days after Mr. Cottam’s interview, in order to give me adequate time to prepare for each. Unfortunately, Ms. Garner happened to have been at the Sheffield Cathedral – where I conducted the interviews – at the same time as Mr. Cottam’s interview. This resulted in a rather awkward moment, when Ms. Garner interrupted my interview with Mr. Cottam in order to ask whether I minded if she could just complete her interview after I had finished with his. Not wanting to inconvenience her by having her come back again later in the week, I agreed to this arrangement.

After my interview with Mr. Cottam, I jotted down a few questions that I knew I would want to ask Ms. Garner, and then went to fetch her. She came into the interview room with a folder filled with a number of papers. After she had signed the release form, I asked if she was ready to begin. She opened the folder and began to put the papers in order, saying she was ready when I was. I started the recording and introduced the interview, but before I could ask my first question, Ms. Garner asked if she should start. I was slightly taken aback by this, but reasoned that she must have
had something specific she wanted to mention. When I assented, she began to read from the papers she had brought.

This interview illustrates that, though the librarian may share many of the technical and research skills that the oral historian possesses, conducting an oral history interview requires a certain amount of professional and conversational expertise that is not generally considered as a part of the librarian’s training. In this respect at least, the librarian performing oral history should probably possess a good deal of practical experience before embarking on an interview without having planned for it first.

Interview Three: Dr. George Atherton

The final interview of the Sheffield Cathedral Oral History Project was conducted with Dr. George Atherton, several weeks after the interviews with Mr. Cottam and Ms. Garner. For this interview, I made sure that I had been well prepared, researching Dr. Atherton’s past involvement in cathedral activities and preparing a set of questions specifically tailored to his situation. For this interview, I relied solely on the use of Audacity as my recording medium, eschewing the Marantz PMD-620, as both options seemed to record at approximately the same level of quality for the first two interviews.

The interview with Dr. Atherton seemed to proceed rather well. I was able to pinpoint some wonderful memories that he had of the cathedral, and we seemed to have developed a pretty good rapport by the time the interview was over. For this reason, I was shocked by my own behaviour when I went back to transcribe the interview.

I found that during the interview with Dr. Atherton, during several exchanges, I found that I had seemingly interrupted Dr. Atherton during pauses in his speech, quite possibly cutting off some further recollections that he may have had. As the interview proceeded, I was thrown off by what, at the time, I interpreted as his reticence after a few questions, but which may actually have been caused by my perceived impatience with his thinking processes. As a whole, I think my inexperience in interviewing was rather detrimental to my overall effectiveness in this interview.

In retrospect, I learned a few things items of interest from my experiences in this interview. First, it reiterated the importance of interviewing experience on the part of
the interviewer. Perhaps if I had been able to recognize, during the interview, the extent to which my bad habits were having an effect on the situation, I would have been able to step back from the interview, recollect my thoughts, and then focus more appropriately on exploring Dr. Atherton’s past, rather than on producing an oral history. However, I found that the quality of this interview was still higher than the first interview I had performed with Mr. Cottam, so my increased level of experience had seemingly resulted in better results.

**Some Reflective Conclusions**

Overall, my experience during the interviewing process revealed a number of successes and a few failures in terms of my library skills’ applicability. First, I shall reflect upon the successes. For the most part, I felt as though I had organized each interview’s method of questioning well, with each question following logically from the previous response, and the interviews developing organically as a result. Technologically, the interviews went off without a hitch. Each recording was crisp and clear, and there had been no malfunctions during the interviews.

From the viewpoint of failures, I would say the major drawback of my skillset was the lack of interviewing experience that I brought to the project. As a result of my limited experience with steering interviews, reacting to unexpected interruptions, and correcting incorrect notions of what the aims of an oral history interview are, the project suffered from an overall lack of certainty regarding my duties.

My initial conclusions regarding the feasibility of librarians as oral historians differs depending upon the level of professional interviewing experience that the librarian/interviewer possesses. My concern is that those librarians who have little experience directing an interview may come to harm the overall quality of the project. In order for a librarian to be the primary interviewer in an oral history project, advanced training in conducting interviews is recommended.
Chapter 5: After the Interview

When all of the interviews have been conducted, and all of the recorded material has been collected, it is time for the oral historian to go about the process of making the gathered information both coherent and meaningful. In order to achieve this, recorded material must be painstakingly documented, categorized, and presented. For the oral historian, this phase of the project is the final step in their task.

5.1: The Transcription Process

Transcription is the process of accurately documenting the content of each interview in a written form, so that it can be studied without relying solely on the audio format. This is an important part of oral history, as it allows for a greater potential research usage of the oral history, as well as an added method of preservation for the interviews (Charlton, et al 2008). Though the lifespan of audio-recorded interviews is relatively unknown, the lifespan of printed documentation is substantial. For this reason, it is generally accepted that an essential part of an oral history project is the creation of transcribed interview documentation.

The process of transcription is generally thought of as the most time-consuming area of an oral history project (Angrosino, 2008) (Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 2009). According to a wide range of sources, depending on a number of variables, it can take anywhere from two to nine hours to transcribe a single hour of an audio-recorded interview. In order to minimize the amount of time that it takes to complete the large volume of material that results from a series of oral history interviews, it is suggested that transcribers observe a number of techniques and practices that can expedite the transcription. Among the most commonly suggested techniques among those mentioned within the literature are:

(1) The use of a foot pedal, which allows the person doing the transcribing to play, rewind, or fast forward the recording with their feet, allowing them to leave their hands free for writing or typing during transcription. (Angrosino, 2008)

(2) The use of hotkeys, which are programmable keys on a computer keyboard which allow the transcriber to control the recording in much the
same way as the foot pedals, but with the need to use one’s hands during the transcribing. (Carlson, 2010)

(3) The use of software such as AudioLobe or Audacity, which allows the user to speed up or slow down the audio recording, or to loop individual sections of it, without changing the pitch. This allows for the transcriber to type continuously without having to use either foot pedals or hotkeys.

These techniques can make the transcription process much less stressful for the transcriber, and can reduce the amount of time required for transcription to a fraction of that which it would normally take.

5.2: The Editing Process

The main goal of this part of an oral history project is to edit the material in order to make it viable and attractive for use. This part of the project should focus on clearly presenting the contents of the oral history in order to maximise its usefulness in the future. To this end, some viable techniques include:

(1) Producing a digital audio version of the project, for use as an audio-only medium, i.e. a compact disc.

(2) Producing an interactive computerized version of the product, for use as a multimedia display, i.e. a virtual tour.

(3) Producing a digital archive within which interviews may be catalogued and stored, i.e. a digital library.

Each of these options has its advantages and disadvantages, but there is no reason, other than budgetary restrictions and technical skill levels, why any one option is preferable to the others. Indeed, a project manager could reasonably decide to present an oral history in each of these formats, rather than relying on only one.

5.3: The Art of Preservation

After the oral history project has been completed, and the final presentation process is over, what is to become of all that hard work? It is at this point that the librarian has traditionally stepped into the picture (Miller, 1986). At the conclusion of the project, the final product should be catalogued, stored, and preserved using modern library techniques, with an eye to heightening visibility, accessibility, and long-term stability.
of the project. These goals are typically achieved by means of utilizing established standardized methods of archiving, by maintaining a consistent format, and by storing the project using a medium that will not degrade through time (Rosenzweig, 2003).

This area of an oral history project has typically been reserved to the librarian, who has experience with the processes of cataloguing, and who is familiar with the typical search habits of her customers. While the librarian’s suitability to this role is relatively indisputable, in the context of the librarian having performed every step up to this point that suitability may be enhanced.

5.4: Personal Reflections on Post-Production Practices

Reflections on Transcription

The transcription process was perhaps the most tedious portion of the oral history project. It called for long periods of sitting and typing that could be excruciatingly boring. In spite of this, the process did allow me to make a number of observations about my approach.

During the process, I experimented with each of the methods suggested above, and was able to make a number of observations about each. The use of foot pedals was not a favourite technique of mine, as it required me to remain conscious of both my hands and my feet, while also maintaining enough of a focus on the audio recording so as to be able to copy it without too much repetition. When I tried using hotkeys instead, the problem of having to maintain control of my feet disappeared, but the hotkeys required me to remove my hand from typing, so there was little improvement in typing speed. For the final process, I decided to use Audacity in order to slow down my digital recording. This was by far the most effective process for me. It allowed me to have my hands free to type, while at the same time having more time to type each section of the interview. Because of Audacity’s “Change Tempo” option, the pitch of the interviews was not altered from its real life equivalent, so I was able to understand perfectly each phrase as it was said.

In terms of the transcription process, I see little advantage for the librarian completing the process as a result of her skills. Instead, it seems that the primary skills responsible for creating an adequate transcriber are an ability to type quickly and
accurately and an ability to listen acutely. Clearly, these are skills that the librarian may or may not possess, but which are not a primary component of her education.

Reflections on Editing

The editing process was illuminating in two regards. First, it allowed me to experiment with multiple formats and multiple presentation techniques for the overall project. Second, it allowed me to analyze the applicability of my library training to the production of each of these formats.

For the final presentation product, I chose to create one of each of the proposed types (compact disc, multimedia presentation, digital library). For each of these finalized products, I will offer a series of reflections about the process of its creation:

(1) An audio-only compact disc presentation

This format of the final project allowed me a fair amount of flexibility with regard to my approach. I first chose to use Audacity to divide each interview segment (each question with its corresponding answer) into its own audio file, labelling these files with the question as the title. With this system, I ended up with in excess of 30 total audio files, which I arranged on a compact disc separated by interviewee. This way, anyone using the compact disc would be able to skip to a specific question and answer segment at will, and would be able to compare the answers of different interviewees to the same question. This method of editing required the least amount of technical skill, as the Audacity audio tool has a very intuitive interface, and compact disc creation software is relatively standard.

(2) A multimedia display

This format of the final project was a combination of audio files and image files of the Sheffield Cathedral, created as a PowerPoint presentation which showed images of the Sheffield Cathedral while clips of each interview were playing. Once again, this format did not require a great amount of technical skill to complete, so it warranted little attention for reflection.

(3) A digital library
This was the format that I was most interested in for this project. It required the use of skills learned while training for the library profession, and served as a method both of presentation for the project as well as preservation. I chose Greenstone as the preferred software\(^2\). During this process, I catalogued each of the audio files created during the compact disc process according to interviewee, and then tagged each clip with relevant content tags as they related to the questions asked and answers given. This way, if someone wanted to hear comparisons between the Sheffield Cathedral and other cathedrals, they could search for “other cathedrals” in the search box and be provided with each of the audio clips that referred to other cathedrals. This was the format that made the most use of my skills as a librarian. It required me to have a good knowledge of HTML, of metadata information sets, and of cataloguing techniques. Overall, this was probably the option for presentation that would be most useful for a researcher, as it allowed for searching using a variety of tools, and was at the same time a method for preservation for the entirety of the project.

**Reflections on Preservation**

The preservation methods that I used after the project mostly involved creating master copies of each of the formats of presentation that I had created, as well as an overall master copy of the unedited interviews. For the master copies, I used high-quality Sony CDs in order to maximise the lifespan of the data. Because I don’t have a physical library in which I could store the project for use by the public, the extent of my preservation efforts ended here. I furnished a copy of each format and each master to the University of Sheffield and to the Sheffield Cathedral to keep in their respective archives and make use of how they wished. My role in the preservation process was not particularly important as an outsider. My only main responsibility was in ensuring that the data was of a format which would be compatible with the commonly used systems of today. Master copies of discs were preserved using Audacity’s .aud file format, to ensure they could be changed to a

\(^2\) Greenstone is a digital library creation software that utilizes macros in order to create an enhanced interface and format. More information can be found at www.greenstone.org.
variety of audio formats as required, but presentation copies were produced using .mp3 files, as a result of their relative saturation of the market.

Conclusions
The post-production process has portions which are very amenable to the skillset of the librarian, and portions which are not specifically amenable to any profession in particular. One observation I might make is that having been involved in each step of the production process allowed me to more accurately decide on proper forms of presentation and preservation for the material. It also gave me control over formatting, which allowed me to ensure that the type of material I produced was compatible with currently accepted forms.
Chapter 6: The Role of the Librarian

In examining the suitability of the librarian to the different aspects of oral history planning, collection, and preservation, the author hoped to gain a better sense of the way in which the skills of librarianship can be redirected toward the task of oral history. In order to better express and understand the librarian’s role, as well as the librarian’s potential role, the author created a rich picture which illustrates how the process currently proceeds.

6.1: A Rich Picture of the Current Model

The rich picture illustrates the current state of the process of oral history collection from the perspective of the librarian. The first aspect of the image to notice is that the oral historians, on the whole, are generally separated from the librarians. It is the oral historians who plan, research, interview, transcribe, and present oral histories. When the oral histories have served their purpose to the oral historian, they are dealt with in one of two ways: they are either archived by the historian (either by being given to a library or archive, or by being stored in a personal archive), or they are simply discarded.

If the oral historian has decided that their work should be archived, it falls to the librarian, through an orderly process, to sort, catalogue, and organize the oral histories into usable formats. After they have been organized, the librarian proceeds to archive and preserve the records for use by others. Conversely, if the oral historian has decided to discard the oral history after its presentation, the task of the librarian is a bit more difficult (Gregg, 2000). Rather than being left with an orderly project to work with, the librarian must spend a bit more time attempting to gather the constituent parts of the project into a coherent form. This process can be made more difficult by the lack of standardization across oral history practice (Rosenzweig, 2003). As illustrated at the bottom of the rich picture, there is no single way to design or organize an oral history: they may be created in different file formats, using different approaches, and including a variety of different media. It falls to the librarian to organize, catalogue, and preserve these collections as well. Regardless of the final approach of the oral historian, it falls to the librarian to ensure that oral histories are preserved and made accessible for further research.
At the top of the image are illustrated the restrictions to the possibility of librarians serving as legitimate members of the process of oral history collection. To the right, a group of librarians attempt to enter into the arena of conducting oral history, only to be rebuffed by oral historians, who largely see librarians as serving only one potential role in oral history collection: preservation (Eeles & Kinnear, 1989). As a result, oral historians are typically sceptical of accepting librarians as viable conductors of oral history. To the left, another group of librarians are kept from oral history collection as a result of budget shortfalls that result in their being unable to expand their roles. Budget restrictions represent a growing problem for libraries, which attempt to maintain their current levels of service while trying to remain innovative (Topper, 2009). The image at the very top of the page represents the rare librarian who is able to perform an oral history project, either as a result of being well-funded, or as a result of having an active partnership with organizations in the local community.

The main thrust of the rich picture is the separation of the creation side of oral history, primarily performed by oral historians, from the preservation side of oral history, primarily performed by librarians. This separation represents a false division between oral historians and librarians that arises from an emphasis on their traditional roles in the process. Until rather recently, oral history had been exclusively the domain of the oral historian, with the librarian playing only a relatively small role at the end (Grele, 1987). But a great amount of recent scholarship has raised the possibility of librarians acting as viable active participants throughout the process, both expanding their roles in their local communities as well as enhancing the practice of oral history with their considerable skills. But, these excursions into oral history are dependent largely upon the levels of funding available to the library. Without increased funding, or perhaps partnerships with other organizations, librarians will likely be unable to pursue the creation of oral histories.

**Some Restrictions to the Expansion of the Librarian’s Role**

During the production of the rich picture, and throughout the oral history project, it became clear that there exist a number of restrictions on the librarian’s ability to take a larger role in oral history production. These restrictions can be generally referred to as financial restrictions and professional restrictions.
In today’s world, libraries are faced with a good deal of funding issues that make the institution of new services and programs potentially prohibitively expensive (Topper, 2009). Because of the requisite costs of performing oral history, in terms of time, manpower, and technology, libraries cannot necessarily afford to expand into this field on their own. As such, the library will need to develop innovative ways of dealing with this restriction.

The other main issue that hinders the incorporation of librarians into the process is the divisive relationship that exists between oral historians and librarians (Eeles & Kinnear, 1989). Essentially, the oral historians are reluctant to allow the librarians to enter into their exclusive club. So long as the librarians are kept separate from the main body of oral history collection, the oral historians can maintain their primacy in the market. But I think the oral historians need not worry about this, as the projects that librarians would pursue would almost necessarily be very local in nature, and any sort of large, important project would demand the services of experienced oral historians over, or perhaps in addition to, librarians.

In addition to the divisive relationship, librarians are also restricted partially by the level of training they receive during their education. Though they are typically well-prepared for the technical aspects of oral history production, they do not necessarily possess the level of experience with interviewing that would allow them to successfully operate oral history projects.

Oral history, if these restrictions are resolved, could serve as an important new avenue of the librarian into further integrating with the local community, and delivering the level of service quality expected by that community.
Conclusions and Recommendations

After examining the recent scholarship, it is clear that in recent years librarians have begun to take a more active role in oral history collection, mainly through local projects (Kargbo, 2008) (Baranowski & Calderone, 2004) (Carlson, 2010). An evaluation of the skills of the librarian illustrates that the skills learned while training for the librarian career are largely transferrable and beneficial during the production of oral history. In particular, the organizational skills, research skills, and technological skills of the librarian assist in planning, researching, and conducting various phases of the oral history process. Perhaps the only major shortcoming of librarian training with regard to oral history processes is a lack of experience in interviewing techniques and practices. Because this is one of the most vital parts of oral history, this represents a major problem for the feasibility of librarians performing oral history projects.

There are a number of possible solutions to this problem. One solution would be to modify the training of librarians to encompass practical experience with oral history collection. Though this method would allow for the more developed skillset of the librarian, it does nothing to assuage the financial implications for libraries of librarians taking on additional responsibilities. Perhaps a more viable solution is the pursuit of active partnerships with the library’s surrounding community, including community organizations and oral historians. As a result of such a partnership, the costs of conducting the oral history would be distributed among a greater number of parties, reducing the financial impact on the library. Such a partnership, especially with oral historians, would allow for the oral history produced to benefit from the combined skills of both the librarian and the oral historian. The specific benefits could include: a better standardization of oral history formats, as a result of the incorporation of their cataloguers earlier in the process; better access to research materials, as a result of the librarian’s skill in research; and more options for research presentation, as a result of the librarian’s skill in creating digital archives of information.

3 This is an approach that is already being taken by the MLIS program at UCLA in the United States, which offers an oral history internship. More information can be found at: http://is.gseis.ucla.edu/academics/degrees/specializations.htm
In order to meet the challenges of the current era, and to continue to provide useful and quality service, librarians must rethink their roles in their local communities. By embracing the opportunities presented by oral history, the library can provide a valuable service to the public, and can participate in and enhance the process of new knowledge creation. Though budgetary restrictions may make this goal seem unachievable, by cultivating the right partnerships librarians can mitigate the costs of the process, and can add their considerable skills to those of more experienced oral historians.

A Comment on the Approach of This Dissertation
The results gained from the methodology of this dissertation are not intended to be representative of the whole of the library field. Rather, they serve as an authoethnographic account of the experiences of a single librarian in the process of conducting oral history. But, this account was informed by a thorough investigation of recent scholarship into the librarian’s role in oral history, and as such is valuable as a reflection of the sort of difficulties and advantages experienced by librarians who decide to delve into collecting oral history.

Unedited Word Count: 15,026
Edited Word Count: 14,333
Bibliography


Appendices

I. Rich Picture
II. Example of Transcribed Interview

Allan Cottam Interview Transcription (46:25):

Miss O’Reilly: This is the first interview of the oral history of Sheffield Cathedral. The date is the tenth of June 2010. My name is Meagan O’Reilly and I will be conducting the interview with Mr. Allan Cottam. OK. How long have you lived in the Sheffield Area?

Mr. Alan Cottam: Oh, I should think about forty years.

O: And, have you been involved with the cathedral that long?

AC: Um, yes, I first of all came here as a verger. Head verger at…from Carlisle cathedral I came to work here in Sheffield Cathedral, and, uh, I did about twelve years, thirteen years, and then I went down to Wells deep in Somerset. When I came back, I came on for another seven years. But first of all, I should have said seven years, not twelve years, seven years, so I did two lots of seven years. And then retired, what they said on bad health, but I don’t know about that, um, and so that’s how long the connection, and I continue to use the cathedral as my place of worship. One or two little breaks in those twenty years, when I went elsewhere, but then came back… twice (laughs).

O: Can you describe what you did as a verger?

AC: Yes, uh, it really, it was the safety of the building and looking after it. Keeping it clean and tidy, preparing for the services. And then, the verger is the one that walks in front of the clergy when they’re going to, say, read the lessons, or do the sermon or anything like that. The verger leads the way with his verge, which is a rod which he carries in front of him.

O: So you were a verger before you came here.

AC: I was.

O: Is there, uh, was there a major difference between when you were at Carlisle and then when you came here? And what were the differences?

AC: Yes. Well, the difference was it was a bigger staff. Carlisle is a lovely building, though it is not in the middle of a vast area like Sheffield is with the people coming from all sorts of things. Um, so, then I went down to Wells in Somerset, but I mean that, Christ, the difference, because there it was a very small city! The smallest cathedral city though probably beaten by Ealing or, you know, one of those two. And I was there for five years. And then I came back to Sheffield for another seven years.

O: What is it about Sheffield that drew you?

AC: I just like it. I like music, good classical music, so there’s plenty of concerts, and there’s, when I came, there was yes the, that’s right the Crucible had opened as well, so two theatres, and I like theatres, so this is good. I like to go to the theatre. And the museums are good and the galleries, especially in these last few years it’s really improved. And as for the building, I just love the building. I like the windows, I take great interest in the windows. Um, and it’s such a holy place, I felt at home first thing when I came here. I don’t know why. But that’s how it goes. (laughs)

O: Can you tell me a little bit about the windows?

AC: Well, look, we haven’t got any medieval ones (laughs), um, even though the cathedral was built many years ago. Um, and we’ve got lots of Christopher Webb’s glass, which, he was in the 1920s and 30s, and he finished those things off in the 1940s. And they’re very, very good windows he designs. But it’s a piece of the place that I think is important. You know we used to meet, obviously, members of the public who just came in, and sometimes they’d say, ‘where can we be quiet?’ And one of the chapels, which is that one, is particularly good, the chapel of the Holy Spirit. And that’s well away from all the, most of the noise and activity, and just beautifully quiet.

O: Do you have any stories of the Cathedral in your times here that stand out?

AC: Yeah, well I, you know, as we lead the clergy around, that’s quite interesting. I picked up the, not literally picked him up, but I led the provost, as he was then, and led him up to the altar. When we got to the altar, he turned to me and said, this was in the service with the congregation, he whispered to me ‘Why have I come here?’ And I said, ‘I’ve not the least idea why!’ (laughs) So, he picked up a hymn book, and pretended that that was part of the serving and that sort of thing, and I just took him back to his seat. Nobody mentioned it. Nobody mentioned it at all. So it just shows, if you do a thing with confidence, you’re OK.

O: Have there been any major changes in the cathedral in your time here?
AC: Yeah, lots of changes. Obviously, the clergy, as they come and go, um, and so I’ve known the clergy all that time. And the bishops I get to know. But the canons are the, are the ones who lead the worship and do all that side. And so there’s a number of those here. Um, we’re very fortunate, actually, because, being a cathedral we have… you know how a parish has to manage with a priest and possibly, if they’re a very big church, they would have an assistant. Well, it would be a priest, not an assistant priest, there’s no such thing. It’d be a (pelop) priest, and so there’d just be two at the most, usually just one. Well, in a cathedral, there’s four or five full time clergy on the staff. I mean the staff is quite large here, you can see we’ve got all these wonderful facilities. And then downstairs, the area where we look after the, um, poors, and they get their starts in the morning with a free breakfast. A good breakfast as well. And then, that’s open for the rest of the day, and they have sandwiches and so on. But its somewhere for them to go, which is very useful in the city centre. But before they started this scheme downstairs, we were, as vergers, we came across these that were coming in the morning asking for a cup of tea, and you found yourself probably doing half a dozen mugs of tea, and all we could get them was a biscuit as well. Well, it could be, they obviously could do with more than that. And so that’s… that’s where it started. So it’s been going through the years.

O: And it’s been successful?

AC: Oh, yes, yes it certainly is. And it’s good isn’t it, when the church is involved with outside humankind. And they’re always very welcome, and you see them quite often, you know, if there’s a cup of tea going anywhere they’ll come and find the way (laughs). They can sort of smell it, I think. But, they’re very welcome to it. Um, and it’s a very busy cathedral, this one, and Wells was busy as well, but not as many things in the evening. Here, it’s quite a lot of things. Like, it’s the Arts Festival at the moment, the Cathedral and the University Arts Festival. And that’s very much involved with concerts and lectures and so on. Well-attended, as well.

O: Is it unusual for a cathedral to be so integral to the community, and involved?

AC: Um, I can’t talk with a lot of, um, but, yes, I think, I mean I’m thinking of Wells and Carlisle, where I was. There wasn’t involvement in the social side of the homeless. I won’t say that they were not interested, but they didn’t do anything like what they do here, and I wonder, too, whether other cathedrals have got the same involvement as well. And so it’s quite a modern thing, really. I mean, St. Martin’s in the Field, they did have an open house for the needy and the homeless over Christmas. Um, and that goes back a long way, that one does. And maybe we found some ideas from that, I don’t know. But there was the involvement there. Other areas, there’s a church in Leeds, that does the same sort of work. Yeah, and I think there’s one in Newcastle that does an open house. But we were not to forget that the main purpose is the worship of the Lord, here, in this place. And for that, there’s services every day. At least three a day. On a Sunday, the same number. And we have a full-time, not a full-time, we have a very good cathedral choir. Particularly, we’ve got boys, girls, and men – not singing together – sometimes, it’s just the boys, or the boys and the men, or the girls and the men, and sometimes the men do sing on their own, and that’s lovely.

O: You said that the clergy has changed obviously over the years, are there any members of the clergy that stand out, any stories?

AC: Oh, one with (inaudible) very good, oh yes, I told you about me leading the provost around to the altar, and I quote that quite often, everyone thinks it’s funny, particularly the congregation. But I think it’s funny, too. (Laughs) Um, yes we, one of the canons was keen on the Samaritans and we each took part. He was always a great help with any difficult situations. Actually didn’t get into the cathedral. I mean it was a wonderful time when somebody… they were… I was in the vestry, I think, one of the congregation came in when we were preparing for the service and he said, ‘there’s a man up at the altar, um, playing with the candles.’ So I went out to see what was going on and he said, ‘Where else can I get a light from his pack?’ The only light he could find was the altar candles. Now, lots of places it would be… and ours just took it as part of life, which is good. I mean, there’s nothing they could do about it anyway. So there are quite, things that quite often happen. And, and they’ve always had their own interests. One was giving lectures, one his hobby was photography and birds. So, I didn’t realize this for ages, because he didn’t…didn’t… come into the cathedral with it. But he had this wonderful collection of slides of birds which he had taken. And he was often up in the early spring morning just enjoying the… the (inaudible) bird watching. Early morning, well before he’d been there, before the first service, and the first service began at half past seven, so he’d be out bird watching before that. Um, and Sheffield’s a very difficult place with the snow, as you can imagine, uh, that reduces the congregation considerably, because being in the city centre with, first there was not much housing, well there was
hanging but used as offices, and then they started building flats all around the area of
the city centre, well that’s what made a difference. There’s people around. I lived,
uh, just on East Braid, which is just to the side of the cathedral, the other side of the
street. And, um, oh, except on the party lives. It was fairly quiet in the city centre,
but then on a Friday and Saturday, you know, it was well not to be around. I was
well, well up, so it was all right. I was on the third floor, so I was above the noise.
And, that’s only, and that still goes on of course, uh, and it was handy, I think, to
have somebody nearby, living nearby, to keep an eye on the place.

O: Would you say that since the flats were developed, that the congregation grew?
AC: Well, I'm not sure it’s the flats, or the personnel, the clergy. They all have their own
style of worship and their own style of preaching and teaching. And, some went to
ones and not the others, but on the whole they were got a bigger congregation in the
meantime. And a lot of younger people in the past it was probably middle-age
upwards, but now it’s very much in the younger, married with children and, uh,
they’ve all got to travel quite a way, they’re not living in the flats most of them. I
should think they’d be a little bit too expensive, the flats in the city centre. But they
come to the cathedral, all different ages. And, we get loads of children in the
cathedral as well. (inaudible) When I was a verger here, I used to do most of that
myself, and that was quite good. Difficult with my rotten eyesight, because, when I
look at a person, they don’t think I’m looking at them, they think I’m looking past
them. And to ask children to answer you questions it was all right in the beginning
because I was able to touch them on the shoulder or on the head and they would
answer. We can’t do that now, so I have to get the teachers to read, otherwise the
wrong person looked blank, and the... it was all mixed up. Um, there’s lots going on
and it's a very busy time at Christmas. You can imagine with all the current services
their reeling. They have a greater number at one time, I think than any other
cathedral. So, um, they really did have loads of them.

O: Can you describe what goes on around Christmas in the cathedral?
AC: Well, lots of groups of people want to come and have their own choral service, and
all the different (inaudible) that we have. The police use us for their choral services,
first it was just the cathedral, but now it’s alternating with other places of worship.
And the school, the polytechnic here, and now it’s not polytechnic, sorry, it’s the
Hallam University. They come, they came. I’m not sure if they still come, but they
certainly used to fill the building. And then Whimsy and Towerman’s guild, they,
well, the place was full for the choral services. And different schools, um, and a lot
of challenges like friends of the hospitals, friends of, they liked to use it. Then we
had well, a few, that everybody was welcome, just a general one, and that brought
a lot of people in, that’s was a always at lunch time, and you could see where, how
they were together some of them, and the sound so well in certain areas you could
hear. Well they practised to all know what they’re doing. Really, it was all very
good. And we used to have Curtis was the son of a farmer, so, I think he was deaf,
but so, when we got to the Harvest Festival he was in his element. And, it was really
good when he was here, because he used to go the young farmers’ clubs on the
outskirts and get them to do things, and people would come and they would make
arrangements of flowers and vegetables and other produce. And he liked them to
produce their labours, you know like, um well, just the crops. They would bring
them up to the altar and present them. And that was, he loved that. One time, he
even had, uh, a live crib outside, the animals were alive, you know, that sort of thing.
But, nobody stood there all the time. Yes, I think on the whole, that there’s bigger
congregations. You know, people said the church, people aren’t going to worship.
But I think cathedrals and noticed how they’ve improved, that they get more people
than they used to. Interesting, isn’t it, how that whether they like this time of
worship and a good choir singing in proper settings and anthems and you can join in
the hymns of course at the end of the congregation. You can’t, it’s no good trying to
compete with the choir, but it’s, um, very good. And on a Sunday morning, we’ve
got from the very youngest ones who cry during the service, right up to the elderly.
I mean, I know that there’s a lady 93 and there was one now who just, entered old-
keepers, and now she’s in a nursing home. And she was 93. And we’ve got two
over-nineties in the congregation at the moment.

O: Have they been in the Cathedral for long?
AC: Yes, most of the people, well most all of the people have been there quite a while.

Margaret Garner: Excuse Me. Excuse me. I’ve have been (inaudible). Um, are you, have a got a time
within...
O: Do you?
MG: I’m Margaret Garner.
O: Hi.
MG: So, I apologize for interrupting
O: Oh, that’s not a problem.

MG: Only, if I could actually see you today it would, uh, cancel out next week.

O: Oh, that would be fine, um, what time is it right now? 10:20... um, would 11 o’clock be ok?

MG: Whatever suits you, and Mr. Cottam, yeah?

O: And will you be around the cathedral?

MG: Yeah.

O: Thank you very much.

MG: I’ll be in the cathedral of course, yes. Thank you, Allan

AC: It’s ok, Margaret. Yes, I was talking on the phone yesterday, I said that you would be here, and she said that... Margaret said, ‘I hope they’ll let me see them today.

That would help her, as she comes from out of town.

O: So the cathedral, you said that now there is a girls choir, a boys choir, and an adult choir, uh, men’s choir. Has that always been the case?

AC: No, when I first came here, it was just men and boys. And they only sang on the, well they sang on the Sunday two services and they sang on a weekday, one evening. But, now, now that we’ve got... like, the men are quite capable of singing on their own, or men and boys, and the girls will go on their own sometimes. So there’s no service on a Saturday or a Monday, but each of the other days, the other five day, there is a full round of services, which includes a Sunday Evensong. I still come to it on a Friday evening with the men and boys and that’s what, that was the one that, when I first came here, men and boys sang the service on a Friday evening. So, it’s like a tradition, so I come to that, and that is really excellent.

O: When did they add the women?

AC: I just can’t remember. It was quite a few years ago. I’d have thought they... I’m probably underestimating... but I would say about ten years, when it really got in full force. Before that, we got women in the clergy. That was the first step forward. Well, it was obvious that it was going to come the time when the girls would ask, ‘why can’t we sing in the choir?’ And they do it very well. And it’s, it’s just as good, probably because they have a, a man taking and, well doing the, the master of music... there is some ladies now, doing these cathedrals. But, they trained the girls with the same sort of cathedral sound, I know it probably sounds silly, but that is just, it sounds were just as lovely with the ladies, or the girls. We haven’t got a ladies’ choir. But, they stay in, the girls stay in longer because the boy, the voices break, and away they... away they go. Whereas girls continue singing up to near going to University sometimes.

O: Are they just members of the congregation?

AC: No, they weren’t. They came to be in the choir. And it’s a big thing isn’t it, when you think about it, particularly with the boys and the girls, who, I mean who’s going to let them travel on their own in the dark, in the city? In my early days, that was, nobody thought any different. They just came at any time in all the cathedrals, but nowadays, you know. So the parents have to bring them and then come to collect them. So it’s quite a, a thing for them to do, isn’t it? But the worship services are really lovely. I really appreciate it. I gave myself when I retired, I gave myself a short break, then I came to see to the verg... I came to see the verger, I said, ‘can I come back?’ They were amazed I’d stopped coming, because I didn’t want to interfere. I just wanted to be a member of the congregation. And so, so I have a good relationship with the present vergers.

O: The cathedral has undergone a lot of architectural changes...

AC: Yes.

O: Have you, were you here for any of the projects?

AC: Oh, well this part that was added, I was here, but when I came, they’d just added the, the, um, west end, you know what I mean, when you first come in. That was the last thing to be added, and before, then this was added, but of the actual church, the back of the church was worked on just before, and so we um so that was interesting. It was, it’s a very bright cathedral, that was one of the first things I noticed when I came here was the light. You could actually see if you walked around without the lights on, which was good. I was just trying to think then, I can’t... all of a sudden just something came to mind, and... But the building is a lovely building, but there’s work going to start in the building now. They were going to do it at the same time as they built this part, but, but the time they built this, the money had almost run out, so now we’re going to have another appeal, and do lots of work in the church. But there was one winter when we didn’t have any heat at all. And the, the, uh, heating is underfloor heating, so that broke down, so to get to it you have got to take the floor out, to get to the pipes. I hated it. I think it’s such a strange, strange thing, that. So they’re going to have to take all the floor up again, to, uh, replace the heating. And I was amazed to hear that the best way – the best way the experts said – to heat a
building of this size is underfloor. The most economical and best way. It just sounds strange, you know, but that’s what they say. And there’s all sorts that got to go in as well as that: new seating, new entrance, possibly, a new organ, well, a second-hand organ, if we get it. So, all this, so it’s the church doesn’t stand still, it just continues, um, and the personnel leave, and even the congregation, well, they die at the end. And yet the church goes on, and the cathedral, and the life of the cathedral goes on, irrespective of who’s here at the... it just goes on.

O: Can you tell us any of the history of the cathedral that you know of off the top of your head?

AC: Ah. Well I know Margaret’s going to do a lot of that. I think you’ll get... we all tend to give the same, so really you will hear Margaret’s a historian really, so ideal for that side of the building. Yes, we... it is beautiful, do you know the cathedral at all?

O: I went on a walking tour with, I believe it was actually Margaret.

AC: Ah, well I wouldn’t be surprised.

O: So, I have a little bit of the history, and I did a little bit of research before the project.

AC: Yes, so well, I’m sure she’ll... and you get down the vestries and you see the size of what you call the plant, because it really is, its got to be professional now. When I was here we just had, there was just one secretary. And that was the staff. You know we had the master of music, and vergers, and cleaners, but the actual office side of the was just unchanging. She counted full time, not part time. And now of course we’ve got quite a lot of stuff and I would reckon they must be getting over a dozen. And one used to do. That shows how much things have grown, I mean, and we used to manage all right. But we didn’t have the numbers, and we weren’t involved in so many things outside the cathedral, like our clergy are involved. What do we call ourselves? ‘A place for all people’... not ‘old’ people, ‘all’ people. And that’s what we’d like to think it is. One of the best things, one of the things that have brought a lot of people in is, they used to come and say their prayers and ask could they light a candle. Well, we didn’t have a candle stand for individuals lighting candles, and, now we have. And the numbers who come in... I was at Wells cathedral where they introduced the lighting the candle for the prayers, and there they were queuing up to put them in, and the stands couldn’t hold all the candles. So they were leaving the candles for us to light them. Just masses. And, now that’s good, because it brings people in, it’s not because of the, but I mean, they did come in, but they came in especially to light a candle. Probably lost a loved one, or somebody was gone into hospital and or they would, some of their family doing exams or so on, and they would come and light candles. And, when it was any major things, we would certainly do it, like they come here when they had that man who shot all those people. I mean there were lots of candles left there in memory, for those who died, were killed. We were, we get, I mean when Diana, Princess Diana did, she died like that, this place was crawling. The numbers who came in to sign the book, and to bring flowers or other mementos, and it was constant. And that’s when people turn to the church, so it’s good to hear that we get a good congregation for just the normal day to day.

O: Are there any other major events, like the death of Princess Diana, that you can remember something happening in the cathedral?

AC: Yes, there was that time when there were a lot of people killed at the football, from Liverpool. Um, there was a lot of people, I can’t remember the numbers, but that was a few years ago. Now that brought lots and lots of people, and when it came to the services, they really turned up for it. And it was the same for people who had, soldiers, well the men or women who had died in the present struggles. And they very often have a memorial service for them if their local... and people really do turn out. Which is good. And it was good, we, when the roman catholics would have a cathedral in the city, but when I first came here, it wasn’t a cathedral, it was just St. Marie’s church. And then it was Mary Cathedral. Now, they were having really major work, like we are going to have, and, but, they used the cathedral here, for their worship. Isn’t that good? So the roman catholics used it as well, and on the saints, say St. Peters, for example, our congregation probably turned up with ten or a dozen or so. Well, the romans would fill it. It was just before I got here that they’d just fill it. I suppose there’s a, in the city centre, there’s so many churches, isn’t there, with all the major denominations around us. Yeah, I, thinking of your first question, ‘what does the verger do?’ Well it is, really, the safety of the building. Now that’s changed dramatically. You know, you could just lock up and just not worry. Now you have to check every, we used to check under the altars even, because see, yes I was in the chapel of the holy spirit one day, and I could smell cigarettes. Somebody was smoking and I thought, ‘where are they?’ I couldn’t see them in that chapel, so I just went up to the altar, and whipped up the altar cloth, and there they were, two boys underneath smoking away. (laughs) Thought they’d found
a safe place for a quick fag, and they hadn’t. Those are the human stories, which, and, when a little lad came in one day, and he wanted to say he was sorry, he was trying to get the (inaudible) off the chestnut trees, and he had a children’s shovel. I mean he was getting them by throwing stones at them, and he broke a little bit of the glass window. Now what do you think of that? Coming in to say he’d done it. Not many boys would have done that, I think they’d have run away, but he, he came in, so we didn’t worry about it, he... he said he wouldn’t do it again.

O: Being responsible for the safety of the building, you must have seen quite a bit of stories like that, the children smoking, or throwing...

AC: Oh, that sort of thing, yes, and when I lived just on the other side of the street occasionally there were some boys in the grounds doing some damage, or trying to climb up onto the roofs and so on. Well, my being so high, I just used to lean out of my window and shout. I’m sure they thought it was God talking to them (laughs). They couldn’t see where the voice came from, all they knew was it was above them, and they couldn’t see (laughs). Oh, yes, there was and of course, when the police come with their dogs, and they do a search before any really big events. They come in and see these dogs come round the cathedral, seems strange. They don’t bring the horses in, the mounted police force. We had them in Wells one day, at least, we had a canon there who was very keen on animals, so he had an animal service and he got the police to send a couple of the horses and riders. They led the procession into the church. And, I don’t think I’ve seen the police on the horses inside here... not yet. This time, you know, there will be... and they even go up on the roof and search the roof, a thing I didn’t like doing myself, it’s a long way up there, and sometimes it’s quite old, and I’m a bit nervous of that. But, the city used to be so quiet in the early mornings of course, and then it started once the buses started properly and so. I enjoyed my time as a verger, and I certainly appreciated the cathedral here. All the cathedrals I liked, but this one, well, I came back to it, and I was able to introduce my successor and uh, predecessor, because he was just retired when I came back, so it was good fun that, successor and predecessor. You don’t often get that. Um, and you, you keep very often in contact with the clergy you’ve known, that, you know, who you’ve worked with. And you, you sort of still keep in contact. Well, especially I do because I come here, and it gives you that sort of contact with the past as well as coming in for the worship. And the congregations, I go and visit some people. 93 year old one, she’s gone into the nursing home, I go visit her. I used to sit next to her in church, and we had to move pews because it was broken, the pews are. She was a very slight 93 year old, very slim and small. I accused her of breaking the pew, I said ‘it wasn’t me, it must have been you, Norma.’ I don’t know if that covers what you were wanting

O: Yes, thank you very much.

AC: You know it’s not, it’s a bit difficult, you know it’s easy if you just wanted the east part of the church explained to you, and the history of it, but you’re going to get that from somebody else, Margaret, and have you got a few more to see?

O: Yes, I do. I don’t have any set up yet, but Simon Cowling is going to give me...

AC: He’ll give you some more people who probably have known for such a long time. And, hopefully, you can meet somebody who’s more recent that joined us in worship.

O: That would be nice.

AC: So I mean, we get some from the university, not a lot, because they do come, and one of our canons is the um, chaplain at the university. So that’s a good contact isn’t it, an excellent contact. Um, so he, well, probably, someone would have followed him here, but there certainly. You can tell when the holidays start. You think, ‘ah, now they must have been from the university!’ They suddenly disappear, then come back, of course, eventually. And, oh that, there’s a little.

O: Your stories were fantastic, thank you.

AC: I know, well, I mean yes, it’s difficult. People say to me, you ought to put it down in writing. It’s not as easy as that, the stories, and uh, especially when the clergy are still around. You’ve got to be careful about what you say! (laughs)

O: Thank you very much, sir.

AC: No, no, it’s been nice.
III. Example Copyright Form

ORAL HISTORY RECORDING AGREEMENT

The recordings of oral histories are integral to the preservation of memory, stories, and history, and it is the intention of this Master's dissertation to preserve such accounts with regard to the Sheffield Cathedral. Your recorded interview will become part of a collection cared for by the Sheffield Cathedral and the University of Sheffield where it will be preserved as a permanent reference resource for use in research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the internet. The purpose of this Agreement is to ensure that your contribution is added to the collections of the Sheffield Cathedral and the University of Sheffield in strict accordance with your wishes:

This Agreement is made between The Sheffield Cathedral and the University of Sheffield and you ("the Interviewee", "I"):

Your name:

Your address:

With regard to the recorded interview/s which took place on:

Date/s:

Declaration: I, the interviewee confirm that I consented to take part in the recording and hereby assign to the Cathedral and University all copyright in my contribution for use in all and any media. I understand that this will not affect my moral right to be identified as the "performer" in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

If you do not wish to assign your copyright to the Cathedral and University, or you wish to limit public access to your contribution for a period of years, please state these conditions here:

This Agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with English law and the jurisdiction of the English courts.

Both parties shall, by signing below, indicate acceptance of the Agreement.

By or on behalf of the Interviewee:

Signed:

Name in block capitals:

On behalf of The University of Sheffield:

Signed:

Name in block capitals:
Last Updated: 18 April 2010
IV. Example Interview Consent Form

Date: ___________________________  Name of Applicant: ___________________________  
Participant Consent Form: Interview  University of Sheffield

Project: The Sheffield Cathedral Oral History Project: an Investigation into the Librarian’s Role in Oral History Collection and Preservation

Researcher: Meagan O’Reilly

Please initial next to each statement

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 18 April 2010 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3. I agree to take part in an interview for the above research project.

Name of Participant ___________________________ Date ___________________________ Signature ___________________________

Lead Researcher ___________________________ Date ___________________________ Signature ___________________________

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project’s main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

Last Updated: 18 April 2010
V. Digital Library Screenshots

The first interview of the Sheffield Cathedral Oral History Project, in which Allan Cottam describes his time as a verger at the cathedral.

Allan Cottam Interview Transcript (4625):

Mr. O'Reilly: This is the first interview of the oral history of Sheffield Cathedral. The date is the thirty-first of June 2010. My name is Megan O'Reilly and I will be conducting the interview with Mr. Allan Cottam. OK. How long have you lived in the Sheffield Area?

Mr. Allan Cottam: Oh, I think about forty years.

O'And, have you been involved with the cathedral, that long?

AC: Yes, I first of all came here as a verger. I've been here at the Cathedral. I was born here in Sheffield Cathedral, and, oh, I did about twelve years, fifteen years, and then I went down to Wakefield for another seven years. But first of all, I have had seven years, not twelve years, seven years, so I did two lots of seven years. And then retired, what they said so bad health, but I don't know about that, and so that's how long the connection, and I continue to use the cathedral as my place of worship. One or two little breaks in those twenty years, when I went elsewhere, but then came back... twice (laughs).

O'Can you describe what you did as a verger?

AC: Yes, it really, it was the safety of the building and looking after it. Keeping it clean and tidy, preparing for the services. And then, the verger is the one that walks in front of the clergy when they're going to, say, read the lesson, or do the sermon or anything like that. The verger leads the way with his verger, which is a rod which he carries in front of him.

O'So you were a verger before you came here.