

Oral history projects for faith communities

Before you embark on any oral history project, you need to consider how your personal characteristics and your role as the researcher will influence how your interviewees may respond to you, and thus, how your research findings might be affected in due course. Differences or similarities in faith, ethnicity, neighbourhood, age, gender, occupation, and so on, may influence their responses. The fact that you are the interviewer and they are the subject will of course influence their reaction to your questions. In other research practices, it is possible for the researcher to remain hidden or unknown to the subject, but this of course is not possible in interview situations (and would be considered 'unethical' in many circumstances).

Such considerations relate to the 'insider and outsider' debate.¹ 'Extreme insiderism' holds that researchers must be genuine members of the group or community to be studied. It is argued that only black people can truly understand other black people, only Jews can understand Jews, only Catholics can understand Catholics, and so on.² Nor will - or can - outsiders (non-members) have the interests and concerns of that 'alien' group or community at the heart of their study. In contrast, for 'extreme outsiderism', objective knowledge about groups, unprejudiced by membership or obscured by proximity and familiarity, is accessible only to non-members 'viewing in' from an outside vantage point.³ Much has been written and argued about regarding such methodological issues, but the main point here is that you should consider how your personal characteristics, role and presence 'in the field' will inevitably influence your research findings.

What is oral history?

'Oral history' is the name usually given to the process of conducting interviews with people who have useful memories of the past or who retain recollections given to them by members of older generations. By interviewing long-standing members of faith communities, you have a very effective way of discovering and preserving the history and heritage of your community and its places of prayer, learning and community life.

An oral history project also provides an important dimension to our understanding of the past - the real life experiences of its community members. It thus allows the researcher to go beyond the 'who, what and when' often described in historical documents, such as formal letters or minutes. Oral history can enable the researcher to obtain invaluable insights into community life,

¹ For a classic summary and analysis, see: Merton, Robert K. 'Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge', *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 1, Varieties of Political Expression in Sociology (July 1972), The University of Chicago Press Stable, pp. 9-47. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/2776569

² Ibid. pp. 13-14.

³ Ibid. p.31.

providing, for example, information on the personalities of faith leaders, the success of events and styles of worship. Oral history also allows us to capture personal opinions on the activities and episodes of a particular faith tradition.

Another valuable reason for conducting an oral history project is that it can bring younger and older generations together. It also helps young people get a true sense of history first-hand from those who have actually experienced and lived through it. As interviewers, they also gain useful research experience. Crucially, they can also gain a better sense of belonging and rootedness from learning how they are part of a tradition and its continuing journey. For older generations as interviewees, particularly for the very elderly, they get the opportunity to feel that they still have a very important role in their community, with important information to pass on to others. Indeed, in terms of exploring and preserving history, the most crucial reason for collecting oral histories is that vital historical information can be lost forever once older generations have gone.

It is also increasingly important to capture oral histories in the current age because diaries and letters have been replaced by emails and text messages, and as a result, there is less information being written down and preserved. Hard copies of information, even books, are being replaced by virtual materials with less permanency.

Benefits

- Oral history can often 'fill in the gaps' – providing useful information that written sources do not provide.
- It can tell us about people who are not mentioned in the 'standard' sources – for example, long forgotten key members of the place of prayer.
- It can bring history to life - giving insights and detailed accounts of what life used to be like in the community, what people actually experienced and how they felt about it personally.
- It can be a great way of involving and valuing longstanding members of the community.
- It can connect young people to their community and local environment, as well as with their elders.
- It can be a communal enterprise – giving ownership and responsibility of researching the history of the community to that community.
- It is important to collect information before older generations are no longer around to pass it on to us.

Potential pitfalls

- Memories are subjective and thus, never devoid of opinion. For example, a person may have had a personal like or dislike for a particular person that will distort their representation of them.
- Similarly, all people's life experiences are different, and so different people will have negative or positive memories of the same things.
- Beware nostalgia! People will often have a 'rosy' memory of the past. In some cases, it might be that dissatisfaction with the present situation in the place of prayer/worship or community will result in an individual recalling a past 'golden age' ('the church was always full', "we were more accepted in the wider community in those days").
- Remember the fallibility of the human memory. Not all recollections will be entirely accurate, and some may actually be misleading. The unwitting partial nature of memories can lead to misconceptions. For example, an interviewee may recall that a place of prayer/worship was always full in the past, but this may have been because they only went there on high days and holidays.

Oral history advice⁴

Although it is important to be aware of these potential pitfalls, oral history is still a very effective method for exploring and preserving your history and heritage. Moreover, as emphasized below, most of these pitfalls can be addressed by ensuring that you have a large sample with a wide range of participants, so that you can cross check and reference individual recollections. There are other useful tips below that will also help you avoid such concerns.

Preparation

Know your stuff! Oral history is often best used to fill in gaps in existing knowledge. It can be useful to have even a basic sense of the history of the subject of your project, including particularly significant events, so that you can use your time in the interview more effectively to ask more informed, focussed and pertinent questions. For example, significant events and changes in the local community, changes in location of place of prayer/worship and its internal and external appearance, details on imams, and so on. It can also be useful to put together a timeline of the history of such events.

⁴ The following information is informed by a guide developed by David Jacobs and edited by Marcus Roberts from Jtrails.org.uk, National Anglo-Jewish Heritage Trail, How to Collect Jewish oral History, © and with thanks to the RSGB.

You then need to identify the best interviewees for your particular project. Choose your interviewees carefully. For the specific information that you require, who would be the most useful people to interview? You also need to interview a broad range of people if you want to develop a balanced and accurate picture that offers a good representation and reflection of the community. Therefore, your sample should provide a cross-section of the community, including different sexes and age groups, and people with different occupations and backgrounds. Such a cross-section will also allow you to cross-reference different responses, thus allowing you to make more accurate and objective conclusions that avoid the pitfalls outlined above.

A useful starting point might be to identify the most long-standing members of a place of prayer/worship and local community, and those who are considered to be faith and community leaders - past and present. You might already have some key and long-standing members of the local faith community in mind as potential interviewees. If not, it could be worth making enquiries at the relevant place of worship or prayer (church, mosque, synagogue or temple), talking with the faith leader (Clergy; Priest; Imam; Rabbi), or having your project mentioned at prayer, in meetings of its faith representatives, or at community clubs and events that attract older persons.⁵ You could put up a notice in the relevant place(s) of prayer, GP practices, local community halls, or in local libraries, newspapers, newsagents or supermarkets. You can also contact a local history society for ideas. The relevant faith leader will tend to know the community very well, and is often a good person to interview at the outset, if possible. He will know about the history of the place of worship and the local community and will also be able to identify other key people to interview. If this faith leader is recently appointed, then you will need to identify others at the place of prayer/worship and within the community.

Try to find people who communicate well (good storytellers are often invaluable) and who have a supportive interest in what you are doing. Interview as many people as reasonably possible rather than relying on the recollections of one or two individuals. Again, by speaking to more people, you should be able to cross reference and piece together a more accurate understanding of the past.

A successful interview needs some preparation. You need to put much thought into designing your questions prior to the interview. Of course, your questions will be informed by your background research and identified gaps in knowledge, as discussed above. The selection of questions may be informed by any known information about the place of prayer/worship and/or the community, such as length of history and the cultural and ethnic mix of populations. You may also select different questions for different interviewees, taking into consideration their age, gender, background

⁵ Terms such as 'faith leader' and 'place of prayer and worship' will be used in the absence of more fitting generic terms to encompass the multiplicity of faith traditions that such a guide could be used to study.

(including class, ethnic and cultural heritage), place of birth, and their role within the place of prayer/worship and/or the community. You will also need to be aware that certain questions may be sensitive to some.

You may decide to provide interviewees with your set questions in advance, to give them a chance to reflect and think about their answers prior to the interview. However, you may feel that it would be more valuable to get instant and natural responses to your questions by not doing so.

Aim to achieve a good balance between the general and the specific in your questions. Your questions should be focussed enough to ensure you get the information that you need, but not so specific that they inhibit the interviewee. For example, you could ask questions like: 'How has the place of prayer/worship changed over the years?' or 'How has community life changed over the years?' More examples are provided in the section below.

Your questions must be clear and straight forward, and not too long. Of course, they must encourage responses that will provide directly and effectively the information that you require, and within the time that you have available. However, you should avoid questions which have a simple yes or no answer, and above all, you should avoid asking leading questions. That is, questions that point to a particular response. For example, it is better to ask 'Why did you move to London?' than to ask, 'Did you move to London to look for work?'. From your research or own experience, you may already have built up a historical picture about the place of prayer/worship, community or an individual, but try not to allow this to colour your questions or the interpretation of responses. In general, don't begin questions with 'Is it true that ...?'

You also need to consider how many questions to prepare and what order to put them in. You will want the conversation to flow, and you may want to ask particularly important questions nearer the beginning in case you run out of time. The number of questions will depend on the time that you have available for the interview, and also on the type of interview structure that will best suit your needs. As for all research and project activities, your strategy and goals must be 'SMART':

S - Specific

M - Measurable

A - Achievable

R - Relevant

T - Timed or time-based

It is often a good idea to have a flexible approach with only a few quite open-ended questions that can lead to a natural conversation, rather than asking many questions that interrupt and potentially

stifle or close what could lead to some useful disclosures. Indeed, open-ended questions can result in some surprising or valuable nuggets of information. Such a flexible approach allows you to 'go with the flow' rather than sticking to your script. If the interviewee says something interesting or unusual, you can follow that lead and ask them in greater detail about it before moving on. If someone seems particularly excited or knowledgeable about a certain event, person or issue, then ask them more questions along those lines. It is useful, therefore, to have some secondary questions ready at hand for such instances, but also just in case the natural conversation is not providing the information that you require, or is losing focus.

Instead of a flexible approach, you may decide that a stricter and more structured strategy with a greater number of precise questions may be more appropriate for your project, especially if there are many facts and specific details that you want to ensure that you collect in a short period of time. For example, 'When was the building constructed?' and 'Who paid for its construction?'

As indicated, time is an important factor to consider. Do not plan to interview for too long. One hour is usually long enough, and also acknowledge that some people tire quicker than others, such as the very elderly. Make sure that you let the interviewee know the designated length of time of the interview in advance. However, if you can, give them the opportunity to continue after the scheduled time has passed if they are happy to do so. It is also useful to have a clock in the interview room that is visible to you and the interviewee so that you can both check on the time, rather than you having to interrupt the conversation to give time updates.

Interviews should, whenever possible, be conducted in the respondent's home or place of work, as people are more relaxed in surroundings that they know. Although it is easier to interview people on a one-to-one basis, both you and your interviewee may prefer to have others with you, especially if the interview is to take place in someone's home. If you wish to bring someone with you, you need to explain and reassure your interviewee about the reason for their presence. In particular, children and young people should always be accompanied by an appropriate adult (who should either be a close relative – ie parent, grandparent, older sibling – or have been CRB checked). Elderly people, and females being interviewed by a male, may also wish to be accompanied. However, when interpreting your findings, take into consideration how the presence of others might have affected or inhibited the responses of the interviewee. Also note that females may wish to be interviewed by other another female, and may provide more open responses in such circumstances.

The best way to capture information from an interview is to use an audio recorder. It is very unsatisfactory to be scribbling down notes in the interview, as these are unlikely to be wholly accurate, and will also distract the interviewee. Many modern digital voice recorders have excellent

microphones that produce a clear recording and provide the option of downloading your interview on to a computer for playback, which makes writing up the interview so much easier. Before interviewing, practice and experiment with your recording equipment to make sure you know how to get a good quality of recording. Think about such things as where are good places to place the recorder (be aware of background noise coming from corridors or windows), how far the recorder needs to be from you and the interviewee, what the volume level should be, and what surfaces are good (for example, hard surfaces can lead to vibrations and background noise, so cushion your recorder by putting something underneath them). Also make sure that you have sufficient battery levels for the interview. It is always a good idea to bring spares.

Before the interview, it is essential that you explain clearly to the interviewee about the purpose of the interview and how the information will be used. This represents good ethical research practice, and will also help the interviewee understand what information would be most useful to you. As time is often an issue, explaining the purpose of the interview will also help ensure that you capture what you need in the time available. It is best practice is to get the interviewee to sign a sheet confirming that this has been explained to them, and that they are agreeable to use in lines with the terms stated below.

In terms of research ethics, you should also provide the opportunity for the interviewee to confirm whether they would prefer to remain anonymous. You may find that interviewees will be more relaxed and will speak more freely once they know that their identity will remain hidden. It is also important that you ask your interviewee if they mind the interview being recorded beforehand. You should explain that the recording will only be used for ease of capturing their responses and will not be shared with others, and that, if they wish, it will be deleted after your notes have been completed. It is also good practice to offer the interviewee the opportunity to check the transcript if they wish. Again, by reassuring the interviewee in this way, you are more likely to gain their consent and prevent the process of recording affecting their responses. However, it would also be worth emphasising the value of having the recordings preserved, since one of the main purposes of oral history projects is to preserve and pass on such information to future generations. Here, that the recording can remain anonymous may help gain their consent in this regard.⁶

⁶ It may be worth noting, however, that current legal proceedings by the Police Service of Northern Ireland suggest that the duty of the police to gather evidence for a criminal prosecution may override the duty of researchers to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. This is clearly a worrying development, but the implication is that interviewees should not be asked about activities that might be deemed to be outside the law, as the confidentiality of such information cannot be guaranteed.

The interview

Set up the recorder as soon as their consent for recording has been granted. Make sure that you place the recorder in a place that will provide a clear recording and is positioned away from potential sources of background noise. Also makes sure that it is recording - this may sound obvious, but these things happen!

Setting up the recorder as soon as possible will also help ensure that you capture all of the information. You often find that the respondent will begin providing you with some useful information right at the outset, and it can break the flow if you have to then ask them to repeat it, and this also attracts attention to the process of recording. From the start, it is essential to make the interviewee feel relaxed and at ease in your company, otherwise they may become tense and nervous, thus inhibiting their responses.

An interview should ideally take the form of an informal conversation, although the interviewer should let the interviewee do most of the talking. Do not interrupt or ask too many questions – the aim should be to stimulate the interviewee and allow them to speak their own minds. It is better to encourage the respondent and show your interest through non-verbal communication.

However, it is important that you keep some control. Many people are only too happy to talk about their memories of the past, while others may think that their lives will be of little interest to anyone. Others may wander off the subject. As an interviewer, therefore, it is your role to encourage their participation and keep them focused on the question. If the interviewee wanders from the point, do not be afraid to interject with a question or prompt to bring them back to the subject of interest.

If interviewees have difficulty remembering a certain date or name, this can lead to them becoming confused or agitated, and it can also waste much interview time. Here, if such detail is important to you, you should indicate that an approximation is all that is required, or you can suggest that they send it on to you at a later date when they can remember. If it is insignificant, then promptly tell them so and move on. Also, it is worth noting that most elderly people find it easier to 'date' an event or measure time with regard to significant occurrences in their lives, such as a marriage, birthday or national event.

Always end the interview by offering an opportunity for them to discuss an additional issue/topic. Try asking, for example: 'Is there anything else about this place of worship that you would like to talk about?' You may also wish to ask the interviewee to send you additional information that they have mentioned or referred to. Always ask about other material that they may possess that could be of interest to the project, such as diaries, official documents, letters and photographs. Again,

ensure that you explain clearly what you would do with this material and that you have gained their consent to do so.

After the interview - writing up and preserving oral histories

After the interview, you need to write up your notes. A full transcript is always preferable (another reason for avoiding unduly long interviews!). The closer your notes are to what was actually said in the interview, the more 'transparent', objective and 'factual' will be your study. However, it may well be sensible and reasonable for a researcher merely to summarize at points where the interviewee goes off the point or becomes repetitive, so you need to use your judgement here.

When you have written up your notes, you could send the interviewee a copy for their feedback and possible additions or amendments. It is good practice to let interviewees check and delete if they feel something is unduly personal. There is a danger that they may take out certain information, but there is also the possibility that your notes spark more memories, and thus, more information for your final report.

It is important to preserve the testimonies that you gather, together with basic background information on age, gender, occupation, and roles, if possible. If consent is given by your interviewees (see section on data protection below), you could deposit your project and recordings (and perhaps transcripts of the recordings) in a local archive or library. Again, if consent is given, you may also consider making the information available to the wider public by setting up a website. The website could include the actual recordings of the interviews.

Your final project should develop a history based on your findings. It can provide an invaluable resource for others, by scrutinising and piecing together information, comparing and contrasting the individual testimonies, and putting together a final narrative that represents them all. You can give a copy to the particular local place of prayer/worship that was the subject of your project, and they may even be able to help you get your final report published.

Important issues of safety, ethics and data protection

As indicated above, you need to consider the safety and duty of care implications of your interview. Vulnerable people, including children and young people under 18 years of age, the elderly and people with certain mental or health disabilities, should be accompanied at all times. Regarding ethical issues, some of which are discussed above, a good place to start for further guidance is www.ohs.org.uk/ethics.

In terms of data protection and legal issues, remember that personal information should remain confidential and is protected under the UK Data Protection Act. It should not be passed on to third parties or made publicly available to others without their prior agreement. Also you should also provide the option for interviewees to remain anonymous, and you may find that people are more willing to speak freely if they know that their identity will remain hidden. Also, be aware that information shared by interviewees may be (unknowingly) confidential and/or include personal data, and thus, is protected under data protection legislation. Thus, always check with the original source of the material before sharing it or publishing it on public forums such as websites.

Oral history sample questions⁷

Below you will find a list of sample questions for an oral history project. It is not a definitive list, and nor is it suggested that you attempt to use more than a limited selection of these questions. Not all these questions will be relevant to every particular project or individual interview. As emphasised above, your questionnaire design should be informed by your project aims and objectives, your background research, observed gaps in existing knowledge, and any known characteristics of your interviewees and chosen place of prayer/worship and/or community.

Questions to ask when researching a place of prayer/worship:

General

1. How has the (select name of place of prayer/worship) changed over the years?
2. Has there been a growth or decline in the number of people that use it?
3. Has the population changed that use this place of prayer/worship? (e.g. in terms of ethnicity, age, gender)
4. What activities take place at this place of prayer/worship and how have they changed over the years?

Leadership

1. Which individuals played an important role in the early days?

⁷ © This questionnaire is informed by a template provided by Marcus Roberts of the RSGB. The original project was developed by Harriet Karsch of the Association for Jewish Youth, which collected East End Jewish oral histories in the 1970s.

2. What can you tell me about prominent people in this place of prayer/worship, past and present? (e.g. Clergy; Priests; Imams or Rabbis, chairs, executive members of its committees)
3. What do you remember about them?
4. Do you remember their names and anything about their background?
5. Are/Were they involved in any particular activities?
6. Do/Did they volunteer or have personal responsibilities?
7. Do/Did they contribute financially to this place of prayer/worship?
8. Have there been changes in leadership?

Building - location, structure and appearance (internal and external)

1. Have there been any changes in location of this place of prayer/worship that you are aware of?
2. Can you tell me anything about this?
3. Do you know why the specific location was chosen?
4. Did you pray elsewhere before using the present building?
5. Do you recall the purchasing of the building?
6. How was the construction of the building funded and by whom?
7. How did this come about?
8. Has the building been used for other purposes and other communities prior to its present use?
9. Is it used for different purposes and by different communities today?
10. What was the building like when you first prayed there?
11. How has the building changed since then?
12. Have there been any external changes to the building over the years?
13. Have there been any changes to the interior over the years?
14. How does this particular place of prayer/worship compare to others for the same faith in the area and to others in London?
15. Can you tell me or suggest why there are these similarities or differences?
16. Has its size changed over the years, and if so, why?
17. How does the external structure and architecture compare to that of other places of prayer/worship for this faith?
18. Can you tell me or suggest why?
19. How does the interior compare to other places of prayer/worship for this faith?
20. Can you tell me or suggest why?
21. Was its development and construction affected by local, national or international issues, events and contexts, and if so, why and how?

22. Has its development and construction reflected local political, economic, social and cultural dynamics?

The relationship between a place of prayer/worship and the local community

1. What is the constituency of this particular place of prayer/worship? (e.g. the mix of ethnic groups, gender, age)
2. Does this place of prayer/worship tend to attract people with a particular ethnic and cultural background and heritage?
3. Has this constituency changed over time, and if so, why and when?
4. Have there been any changes in the amount of people that prayer/worship here?
5. How has this changed over the years?
6. How successful do you think that the (select either church/mosque/synagogue/temple) has been in bringing different (select relevant faith group) communities together?
7. How has its role changed for all aspects of the community (e.g. young and old, male and female?)
8. What do you know about the education of children at this place of prayer/worship?
9. How has the role and inclusion of women changed over the years?
10. What can you tell me about its relationship with other places of prayer/worship for the same faith?
11. Have these relationships changed over the years?
12. What can you tell me about its relationship with places of prayer/worship for other faiths?
13. Have these relationships changed over the years?
14. What role has this particular place of prayer/worship played in the local (select relevant faith group) community?
15. What role has the (select either church/mosque/synagogue/temple) played in the broader local community?
16. How has this changed over the years?
17. What can you tell me about its relationship with the wider community?
18. How has this changed over the years?
19. What can you tell me about its relationship with other religious groups in the local community?
20. How has this changed over the years?

A place of prayer and the individual

1. What are your earliest memories of this place of prayer/worship?
2. What can you tell me about your earliest experiences at this place of prayer/worship?

3. What is your favourite memory of this place of prayer/worship?
4. What was your favourite activity at this place of prayer/worship when you were a child?
5. What particular memories do you have about activities at this place of prayer/worship in the past (for example, celebrations, festivals, lectures and education, social activities)?
6. How have these activities changed over the years?
7. Has your experience and time at this particular this place of prayer/worship affected your life and identity, and if so, how?

Closing questions

1. Who else do you think I should talk to about the history of this place of prayer/worship?
2. Do you have any old photos or other information (diaries, letters, documents, leaflets, etc) that may of interest to this project?
3. If so, would you be happy to share these with us?
4. Would you allow us to make them publicly available and organise their preservation for future generations and for those with an interest in the history of this place of prayer/worship and its community?

Questions to ask when researching about the local community:

New arrivals

1. When does your family heritage in the UK begin?
2. Did you/your ancestors migrate there alone or with their family?
3. Did you/your ancestors previously live elsewhere in the UK?
4. What can you tell me about your family migration history that eventually brought you to London and to your present home?
5. Why did this migration take place?
6. Why did you/your family end up in London?
7. What was community life like on arrival?
8. What was the transition to life in London/UK like?
9. How has your life experience in London changed since arrival or throughout your life?
10. When did you/they first go to a place of prayer/worship in London/UK?
11. How did this happen?
12. Who introduced you?
13. How did praying there differ to praying where you/they were before?
14. Within London/UK, have you moved from using a different this place of prayer/worship, and if so, why?

Community life

1. What was community life like when you were younger?
2. If at all, how has community life changed over the years?
3. What do they remember about any religious celebrations as a child?
4. If at all, how have religious celebrations changed over the years?
5. If at all, how do the older generations of your faith community differ to the younger generations?
6. If at all, how do any newer communities of this faith differ to the more established local communities of this faith?
7. If at all, how has your participation and inclusion in local community life changed over the years?
8. Do you participate in any social activities that involve the wider community? If so, please could you tell me more?
9. Do you participate in any local political and civic activities? If so, please could you tell me more?
10. Do you socialise with people outside your faith community?
11. What percentage of your friends would you say are of the same faith?

Identity and belonging

1. What is it like to be a (select faith group) in London?
2. In terms of your identity, how would you describe and categorise yourself?
3. First and foremost, would you describe yourself in terms of:
 - a. Your faith group
 - b. Your ethnic group
 - c. Your local community/London borough
 - d. Your city - as a 'Londoner'
 - e. Your country - English or other
 - f. Your nationality - British or other
 - g. Your class
 - h. Your gender
 - i. Your age
 - j. Your occupation/status
4. In terms of your identity, how do you think others outside your own faith community see and categorise you?

5. What do you think people from other faiths in your local community feel about you and your faith community?
6. What do you think people from other faiths in the UK feel about you and your faith community?
7. Have you encountered any misconceptions or stereotypes about your identity? If so, please could you tell me about this?
8. Have you encountered any misconceptions or stereotypes about your faith? If so, please could you tell me about this?
9. Have you encountered any prejudice or discrimination? If so, please could you tell me about this?
10. Could you tell me about any experiences of bullying, prejudice or racism?
11. Were you converted to Islam?
12. If so, why did you decide to convert?
13. When did this happen?

Closing questions

1. Who else do you think I should talk to about the history of this local community?
2. Do you have any old photos or other information (diaries, letters, documents, leaflets, etc) that may of interest to this project?
3. If so, would you be happy to share these with us?
4. Would you allow us to make them publicly available and organise their preservation for future generations and for those with an interest in the history of this place of prayer/worship and its community?

Other general questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your address?
3. What is your date of birth?
4. What was your place of birth?
5. Where do you live now and how long have you lived there?
6. Have you lived elsewhere?
7. Where have you lived for a majority of your life?
8. Where were your parents born?
9. If they were not born in England, when did they and / or you arrive in this country and why?
10. How did your parents meet?
11. When and where did they marry?

12. What was their trade of occupation?
13. Where did they live?
14. Which particular place of prayer/worship did they attend, if any?
15. Can you think of any major events or achievements in your parents' lives?
16. Can you think of any events in your first five years or any related anecdotes?
17. What was your home and street like during this time?
18. What languages were spoken?
19. How did the family get by? Who ran the home and family?
20. Can you recall your attendance at any school or nursery before the age of five?
21. What are your earliest memories of your school or nursery life?
22. What are your earliest memories of your religious education?
23. At this time, did you attend a particular place of prayer/worship, and if so, which one?
24. What are your first memories of religious life?
25. How has religious life changed since then?
26. When and where was your first primary school?
27. Any memories of your first primary school - friends, members of your class, teachers, heads or headmistresses?
28. When and where was your secondary school?
29. Any memories of your secondary school - friends, members of your class, teachers, heads or headmistresses?
30. What were your teenage pastimes and activities?
31. Did you attend any other schools, and if so, how did this experience differ?
32. Did you attend any institutes of further or higher education?
33. What did you study and why?
34. Do you have any memories of the place of further education, fellow students, teachers or anecdotes?
35. What qualifications or training did you obtain?
36. What was your first job?
37. What was it like and where was it?
38. How much were you paid?
39. Are you married?
40. When did you meet your spouse / partner?
41. When and where were you married?
42. What are your memories of your wedding day?
43. Where was your first marital home?
44. What was your street or area like?
45. Which place of prayer/worship did you attend, if any?
46. How did this mosque differ to others that you have visited or prayed at?

47. Do/Did you have any pass times and participate in any clubs and societies?
48. What are your political affiliations?
49. Please provide details of your children - who was born first and where, and how about the others?
50. World War II - did you live through the War?
51. How old were you in the War?
52. Did you serve in the forces in the War?
53. If so, in which force and in what capacity, where were you stationed?
54. What happened to you in the War, what were the main events of your War experience?
55. Any outstanding memories of the War or anecdotes?
56. How did your war experience affect you and imprint on your identity and personality in the future?
57. What happened to other members of your family?
58. What happened at the immediate end of the War?
59. What did you do next?
60. How did you re-establish yourself at the end of the War?
61. What subsequent jobs did you have after your first job?
62. Did you remain in your original trade or occupation?
63. Did you do any official or unofficial work in the community or in a place of prayer/worship?
64. What were or are your favorite sports, hobbies or pastimes?
65. What did you children do when they grew up and left home?
66. Do you have any grand children or great grand children?
67. How many?
68. How old?
69. Where do they live?
70. Have you directly witnessed any particular events that may be of interest to this project?
71. Have you directly witnessed any particular events that have significantly affected your life or remained prominent in your memory?
72. Have you met any famous or important people?
73. What is the best piece of advice that you could give your family members?
74. Comparing now to your childhood, what would you say have been the biggest changes in local community life?
75. Do you know anyone else that you think it would be useful for me to interview for my project?
76. Is there anything else about this place of prayer/worship and the local community that you would like to talk about?
77. Do you have any photos, diaries, letters or other documents or artefacts that may also be useful to my project?

Useful links

General

The British Library – Help for Researchers:

www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/sound/ohist/ohcoll/education/education.html

Building on History: The Church in London, How to use Oral History:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/resource-guide/source-guides/oral-history.htm>

Eastside Community Heritage (including oral histories and education resources):

www.hidden-histories.org.uk/wordpress

The Oral History Society (membership and volunteering opportunities, advice, resources, conferences and networks):

www.oralhistory.org.uk

Dr Graham Smith, Oral History - Historical Insights:

www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/heahistory/publications/focusonresearch/oralhistory

Voluntary Action History Society - Occupy Oral History: Documenting History in the Making:

www.vahs.org.uk/2012/01/occupyoralthistory

For schools

How can I use oral history in school?:

www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/no9.pdf

Jtrails: <http://www.jtrails.org.uk/schools/student-area>

Oral history education:

<http://oralhistoryeducation.com>

Teachers' Notes for Oral History Project - KS2:

www.irespect.net/schools/Oral%20History/teachers-notes.htm

Case studies

Asian Youth Alliance, Muslim Experience in Croydon:

www.asianyouthalliance.co.uk/croydon_muslim_heritage.html

The British Library, Oral history: Jewish experience in Britain and Holocaust testimonies:

www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/sound/ohist/ohcoll/ohhol/jewish.html

A Canadian mosque example:

<http://mosqueone.com>

Concluding note

It should be acknowledged that this guide will not be suitable in its present form to all those who may wish to undergo an oral history project. It is impossible to provide a generic 'one-size-fits-all' guide for different studies and subjects. However, we hope there is sufficient useful guidance here for everyone. If not, please get in touch with us and also see the 'useful links' section at the end of this guide. We have also sought to develop relevant material for different faith communities in the individual resource guides on this website. Our blog also has useful information on oral histories, particularly relating to our public seminar held at the Croydon Mosque and Islamic Centre (www.open.ac.uk/blogs/boh/?p=292).