

talking history

The newsletter of the
East Midlands Oral
History Archive

Keep off the grass!

Dave Pick, a former Leicester Park Keeper, remembers changes in work and leisure

Two of the themes which EMOHA will be looking at for future oral history interviews are the changing nature of work and popular leisure. In this extract from a 1997 interview by the Leicester Living History Unit, Dave Pick reflected on his work as a Park Keeper

"I was called a mobile park keeper in those days. They gave us a little Puch Maxi Moped which was always breaking down, and we used to end up peddling the damned thing... it wasn't just Abbey Park which was the main park – they did have a static park keeper there – but they wanted mobile park keepers for parks where they'd taken keepers off...

In the whole park-keeping force there was about 74 people. They used to have the park keepers on the little parks, Belgrave Gardens, Spinney Hill Park, Fosse Park... but over the years they cut down the staff and up till five years ago they had 26 statics and mobiles...

As a park keeper we used to go round and make sure there were no kids cycling. It was an offence to cycle on the park, there was 'Keep off the Grass' signs in the

flower gardens. People felt secure in those days... I've still got the old regulars come down and see me. In fact, I know a lot of the kids that I nicked, they come down and bring their families on now... they realised at the time that I was only doing my job...

I did get a lot of hassle. I got the nickname of 'the little Hitler of Abbey Park' because in those days I used to look officious. I had a moustache, and the uniform I had, it did look ominous. It was good really, because without a uniform I don't think the kids would have taken any notice of you...

After about two or three years we were issued with the first two-way radios, so if we did get trouble we had a base station. If we caught anyone who had offended, we couldn't actually forcefully hold them, we had to ask them would you mind waiting while the police came. And you'd get a lot of verbal. Half the time I used to call up base station and we'd have the police down in five minutes and they usually got off with a good ticking off. That was enough from the police, a warning, and for a time it was very peaceful on the park...



Tending the grass - Abbey Park gardeners in the early Twentieth century.

Now I'm not allowed to tell anybody off. I'm here to encourage people to use the parks... children as well [but] there's a lot more people afraid to come on the parks because there's no park keeper here...

It's changed so much. I know towards the end of my time as a park keeper, you know when Jurassic Park and all the dinosaurs came out, I got the nickname of Jurassic Pick, I'd been here that long... "

(With thanks to the Community History section of Leicester City Libraries, for permission to reproduce the text and photograph)

talking history
Issue 1

September 2001

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talking history

Welcome to *talking history*

Issue 1

September
2001



Leicester
City Council

Welcome to the first issue of *talking history*, the newsletter of the East Midlands Oral History Archive. We will be featuring articles of relevance to everyone who is interested in oral history, history and their community.

In this issue we introduce the East Midlands Oral History project, telling you a bit about how it came to happen and a

little bit about the staff and location of the project. There are also opportunities for you to study for an MA specialising in Oral History, a chance to join the Centre for Urban History and articles about remembering the past in the TV age and the history of Abbey Park.

In the future we hope to feature a wide range of

articles on Oral History and the history of the East Midlands. Any articles for consideration should be sent to:

talking history, c/o Tristram Hooley, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, LE1 7LT, tjh5@le.ac.uk.



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Inside EMOHA

The project is now up and running!

From the initial idea through to the final release of the funding, the process of setting up the EMOHA has been a lengthy one, but we believe it will be well worth the wait. This is a very exciting project, with enormous potential for community involvement, as well as providing a valuable academic resource.

Since the 1980s, oral history projects have been set up across Leicester and Leicestershire. A census of existing material, carried out while we were bidding for the funding, identified around 1300 tapes held by organisations or individuals. Despite the existence of this enormous resource the tapes have never been easily accessible, and some are stored in conditions which are far from ideal.

The first aim of the EMOHA is the collection, enhancement and cataloguing of existing material, and its dissemination in the form of a website, and edited CD-ROMS and cassettes - both for educational purposes and general interest. In addition to the Record Office itself, some of the recordings will also be available in

libraries and museums, and a series of talks, events and other activities will be held to encourage wider use of the archive.

Once this phase of the project is under way, the EMOHA aims to generate new oral history recordings through a targeted programme of interviewing, and by providing advice, training and support for community groups, students and others who are interested in developing their own projects. In the longer term, we hope that the Archive will also play a significant role in the academic programme of the University.

As the name suggests, the project is intended to have a dimension beyond Leicestershire and Rutland itself. We plan to achieve this in part by setting high standards in the collection and use of oral history materials, and acting as an example for further collaborative oral history projects. The project will link into regional strategies for cultural development and regeneration, raising awareness of the region's history and heritage, as well as the competing interests which affect economic



The staff of the East Midlands Oral History Archive.

development.

The project will employ seven members of staff. Recruitment has now been completed after a hectic round of interviewing, and they are now all in post. *talking history* profiles Cynthia Brown, EMOHA's Project Director, on Page 6. Future issues will introduce other members and associates of the project.

So, if you would like more information about the project, or might be interested in getting involved in some way in the future, please get in touch!

Fancy studying for a Masters in Oral History?

As *Talking History* goes to press there are still a few places left on the *Towns, Cities and Societies MA* which will allow students to specialise in oral history.

The course is an exciting new development undertaken by the Centre for Urban History in association with the East Midlands Oral History Archive. Taught in the evenings by experienced adult education tutors, this course will encourage students to develop a wide range of research skills and historical interests.

Students will choose from a variety of modules including: *Communities and Urban Cultures*; *Testimonies of the City, Memory and the City, Ancient to Modern*; *Victorian Cities* and *Urban Planning 1800-1950*.

Course director, Richard Rodger said, "oral testimony is arguably the most important historical source for the study of life, work and culture in the twentieth century city. This course will explore how people live, interact and remember in their communities by using oral history and other more 'conventional' historical sources'."

If you are interested in further information about *Towns, Cities and Societies* contact the Centre for Urban History at urban.history@le.ac.uk or (0116) 2522378. Alternatively write to the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester, LE1 7RH.

The Centre for Urban History also runs MA courses in *Urban History*

and *European Urbanisation*. For further information on these contact the Centre at the address above.



A little history on a Monday afternoon?

Colin Hyde and Cynthia Brown will be running a 9 week afternoon course dealing with oral history at Leicester's Vaughan College this autumn.

The course promises to allow students to explore aspects of the history of Leicester & the County. Utilising students' own memories



This course will show that people are talking history all the time without even knowing it.

The course has been organised by the East Midlands Oral History Archive in partnership with the Leicester branch of the WEA.

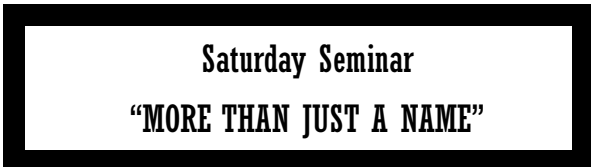
The first meeting will be on Monday 24th September 2001. This will be followed by weekly meetings **every Monday at 1.30 - 3**

pm.

For further information, contact Vaughan College. Tel (0116) 251 7368 or c. heinrich@wea.org.uk (Concessions are available).

East Midlands Oral History Archive

Family & Community Historical Research Society



Obtaining a list of names and dates is not all there is to family history—this seminar looks at how the use of oral history can enhance your research.

SATURDAY 17th NOVEMBER 2001

Time: 9.30 am to 3.45 pm

Cost: £5.00 for FACHRS members £6.00 for non-members

Contact: Clive Leivers of the Family and Community Historical Research Society for details: 01629 823687

Venue: The Centre for Urban History, 3-5 Salisbury Road, Leicester.





Significant Events

The EMOHA was recently contacted by LiveAge, a joint venture between Leicester Adult Education College, the National Space Centre and local community organisations, to ask if we could help with a project to record people's memories of 'The Day Man Landed on the Moon' in 1969.

As we swapped our own thoughts on the event, it became clear that the memory of the landing itself was, for most of us, pretty much the same – tired eyes watching grainy black and white images on old TV sets.

The memories of ordinary people provide a context for the major events of the century, sometimes they can throw up a few surprises: a man, when asked what he thought was the one thing that had most changed his town during his lifetime, said 'tarmac'.

more interesting when we started to broaden the discussion. What did we feel about the potential – and the cost – of space travel, for instance? What else was going on in 1969? Now that television has enabled us all to view major happenings in a similar way, it is the individual circumstances of each person that can

bring more life and interest to any discussion of the events.

When we think of what has been 'significant' this cen-

tury, different people will define the

word in different ways. Some will think of armed conflicts or political acts, others of the way modern technology has changed the world around us - the things that have affected us over a period of time. However, many people would also immediately think of 'communal' events that made an impact on the whole country at the same time – the Queen's coronation in 1953, the 1966 World Cup win, Live Aid, the marriage and death of Princess Diana. Internationally there have also been the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the release of Nelson Mandela. We will all have seen the same television pictures of these events, but we will have reacted to them differently.

People often say they remember where they were and what they were doing when they heard that President Kennedy had been shot. We would like to ask how people felt about his death. Was it a far-off event that had little relevance to us in Britain? Was it something that people felt affected them directly – and how did it do so? When Lady Diana married Prince Charles, did you celebrate and have a party, or did you feel it was a huge irrelevance when compared with the strains on the social fabric of Britain at the time? Perhaps you did both!

By examining the individual stories behind the 'big' events of recent history we can look at how the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of the people of Britain have changed through the years. The memories of ordinary people help provide a context in which to place the major events of the century, and sometimes they can throw up a few surprises: a man, when asked what he thought was the one thing that had most changed his town during his lifetime, said 'tarmac'.

To the right is a transcript of an interview with a local woman, remembering the 1953 coronation. She was nearly five years old at the time.

Poetry corner: Fielding Johnson

Mr J. D. Bennett recorded this poem for us. It was taught to him by his grandmother, and he believes it was current in the years before the First World War.

It refers to the worsted woollen spinning company of Fielding Johnson in West Bond Street, Leicester, whose proprietor Thomas Fielding Johnson donated the former County Lunatic Asylum building to establish University College, Leicester, in 1921. His other benefactions – reflected in the cartoon - included the Fielding Johnson Hospital in Regent Road.



Mr T Fielding Johnson:
A Freeman of Leicester

*At 6 o'clock the bells¹ do ring
To let all Fielding's angels in.
Some to peg, doff and spin,
Others to put the rovers² in;
Some to double, some to reel,*

*All the overlookers to alter the
wheels³.
If you are a few minutes too late,
Down goes your name on old
_____ 's slate⁴.*

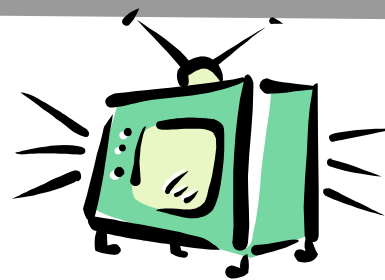
Does anyone else remember this particular poem – or similar rhymes from their local companies? Please let us know...

¹ A handbell rung by the timekeeper
² Rover = bobbin
³ A reference to speeding up the machines
⁴ It was common practice in local factories to fine latecomers. In some instances, money raised in this way was donated to local charities.

In the TV Age

The coronation in Bushby

“I just remember how boring it was!”



Fancy dress contests were a feature of Coronation celebrations in urban as well as rural areas.

“We lived in Bushby...I knew something was happening. There was this sort of build-up [but] I can only really remember the day of the Coronation itself. We saw it in the village hall [in Thurnby], and there were all these televisions – my picture of them is sort of dangling from the rafters. I’m sure they weren’t quite as wobbly as that, but there were rows of televisions either side of the village hall, and they weren’t very big screens. It wasn’t all that easy to see, but you sort of grabbed your seat, and people sat in little groups around these televisions. Where these televisions came from is something that’s always intrigued me... maybe loaned from a dealer or someone. But that’s where we watched, because hardly anyone had TV at the time.

“when it came to tug-of-war, I was shocked at some of the language I heard! It was actually quite a vicious contest...”

I just remember how boring it was!... I just felt I’d been sitting there for hours and hours and hours, waiting for this moment when they put the crown on the Queen’s head, because that’s what coronations are about. I thought it was. You know, you stick the crown on her head and she’s properly Queen, and you all go off and have a good time. But there was this endless service in Westminster Abbey, and I kept asking my mother ‘when are they going to crown her?’, and she kept saying ‘soon’, which wasn’t true... We had these sports down in the



A winning entry from Bushby

field by the church... I won this medal, which I’ve still got, for coming first in a race, and my Dad won exactly the same medal for being in the winning tug-of-war team. I do remember this because there was obviously a bit of needle between Bushby and Thurnby, when it came to tug-of-war. I was shocked at some of the language I heard! It was actually quite a vicious contest...

And then I remember this fair down at the station, and the next-door neighbour’s youngest son and I were roughly the same age, and we were dressed up – I don’t think we chose to be – and entered in the fancy dress competition, and we were bride and groom... Anyway, we won first prize and we got half a crown [12.5p] each. And the only other thing I really remember was that my mother won a china tea service, on one of the games at the fair. I couldn’t tell you what it was...

I think it [the Coronation] probably encouraged a lot of people to want a television. Whether they could actually afford it, I don’t know... but it was quite exciting...”

What do you remember?

If you are old enough to remember it, what are your own memories, and how differently do you think you will feel at the next coronation?

Talking...people

Cynthia Brown : Project Manager of EMOHA

Cynthia is a graduate of the University's Department of Economic & Social History, who has been involved in oral history work since helping to establish the Leicester Living History Unit in 1992. *talking history* caught up with her just after the project was up and running.

talking history: *You have a long record of involvement in oral history. Why did you get involved in that rather than more traditional (print based) history?*

Cynthia Brown: I have never seen oral history as separate from traditional history, but rather as a source which adds to and sometimes challenges it. Oral history gives a voice to people who are ignored in 'conventional' history. Their knowledge, the way in which they interpret their experiences, and the different perspectives they offer on their lives are of enormous value - but oral history also offers a real opportunity to involve so-called 'ordinary' people in recording and reflecting on their own history.

TH: *What was it that attracted you about heading up the East Midlands Oral History Archive?*

CB: It's a great opportunity to do work that I really enjoy, and to pro-

duce something of lasting value. Oral history projects are often short-lived and operate on a shoestring - but we are creating something of long-term benefit.

TH: *What do you hope the EMOHA will achieve over the next three years?*

CB: A permanent, easily accessible collection of oral history recordings is what the project aims to achieve - but we need to do more than simply gather all the material into one place. It has to be catalogued, and made available in a range of different ways - through tapes and CD ROMs, educational materials, newsletters, and through our website. We also want to add new recordings to the archive, not just those we record ourselves, but those produced by local groups or individuals with support and ad-

vice from us. By the end of the project, I hope we will have created a lasting enthusiasm for oral history that will ensure that people continue to add to the archive into the future.

TH: *How is it going so far?*

CB: Very well! It's taken some time to set everything up, but we've been warmly welcomed by our colleagues at the University, and have made great progress in just a few months.

“Now where did I put that tape?”

EMOHA cataloguer **Christine Thornhill** explains to *talking history* how the on-line catalogue will work.

A major part of the work of the East Midlands Oral History Archive is the creation of an online catalogue of all the recorded, printed and photographic material in the various oral history collections, held by EMOHA and the Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

The catalogue has been created specifically for sound archive material and the task of entering the hun-

dreds of detailed records is now underway.

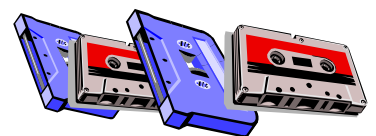
It is envisaged that online web access will be available by late autumn, for the initial entries. New entries will then be added continuously. During the course of the project other collections in existence in Leicestershire and Rutland, together with new material, will also be added. The catalogue will provide a comprehensive access point to all the material held and enable easy access to detailed information.



We now have a good idea of what material already exists, and what work is going on around Leicestershire and Rutland. The design of the online catalogue is almost completed, and the website should be up and running by September. We aim to publish our first newsletter at around the same time, and we're already providing training sessions and talks. All of the project's partners are very happy with what we've achieved so far.

TH: *What advice would you give to someone who wanted to get involved in oral history?*

CB: Go ahead and do it! You don't need academic qualifications or years of experience, and if you're not sure how to get started, we'll be very happy to give you some basic advice or training. It's a very rewarding form of research, both in terms of the material you gather and the relationships you build with interviewees and other people working in the field.



Information on how to access the online catalogue and user friendly directions on navigating the catalogue, to achieve best results, will be available on the EMOHA website.

Until the catalogue goes live and during the period that the majority of collection details are being entered you can contact me on cft5@le.ac.uk or (0116) 2571080 if you have any questions about what is in the archive or how to access it.

The House of History

Marc Fitch House is a fantastic late Victorian building situated at 3-5 Salisbury Road. It is currently the home of the East Midlands Oral History Project (not to mention the Centre for Urban History and the Centre for English Local History). However it has its own story to tell. Cynthia Brown investigates further.

The houses first appear in *Wright's Directory* in 1880, although they were not then numbered, and Salisbury Road was known as Salisbury Street. This was part of the later 19th century development of the Upper New Walk area of Leicester, as prosperous local businessmen retreated from central areas of the town to more 'desirable' locations.

The first occupants of 3 – 5 Salisbury Road were Thomas Watts, a solicitor (at 3), and George Padmore of G. & J. W. Padmore, hos-

siery manufacturers of 1-3 Rutland Street – a short walk away down London Road. By 1884 Padmore had moved to Humberstone Road, but reappeared at 3 Salisbury Road ten years later. He was then combining hosiery with the manufacture of 'pneumatic' boots, in which a cushion of air was inserted between sole and insole for greater comfort and ease of movement. Edward Padmore (George's son?) lived at 3 Salisbury Road from around 1916 until the early 1930s.

Duncan Henderson, a boot manufacturer with works in Queen Street, occupied 5 Salisbury Road by 1894. Around 1907, however, he followed a now familiar outward route to a new purpose-built house in Glebe Road, Oadby ("Cluanbeag")- designed by Leicester architect Walter Bedingfield.



Marc Fitch House, 3-5 Salisbury Road is now the home to EMOHA, but what of its former lives?

There is little accessible information about other occupants of 3-5 Salisbury Road, particularly the women listed in the directories: Miss J. B. Unthank at No. 3 from around 1932-57; and at No. 5, Mrs Mary Rome in 1884; Miss Martha Swail from 1912-16; and Mrs Perry from 1920-24. They have no identified occupation in the directories, and no obvious link with any previous occupants – unlike the Miss Donisthorpe living at 5 Salisbury Road in 1941. In all probability, she was related to the previous occupant, Hamilton Donisthorpe, a hosiery trimmer and finisher with works at Frog Island, Leicester.

By 1963 both 1 and 3 Salisbury Road had become Halls of Residence for female students at the University of Leicester. 1 Salisbury Road had been taken over by the University College around 1951 as a Social Studies Centre. Its original occupant, back in the 1880s, was Samuel Squire of the drapery business Morgan, Squire & Co. in Hotel Street – later one of Leicester's largest department stores. Described as an 'ardent and accomplished photographer', Samuel Squire was at one time a Conservative bor-

ough councillor; but in the view of the local (Liberal) journal *The Wyvern* in 1897, he was 'not by any means a hot politician. He is too gentle and complacent of disposition to care much for party broils...'. Mrs Squire continued to live in the house after his death around 1916 until the late 1940s.

At some point after 1941, 5 Salisbury Road became the County office of the Women's Land Army, and was still occupied by them in 1951. By 1954, however, it had been taken over by the Ministry of Transport as a Driving Test Centre – the only such centre in Leicester at that time. Its last known occupant before it became part of the University was Duplicating Services (Leicester), who moved in sometime between 1966-69, and were still listed at that address in 1971.

Do you have any memories of the Salisbury Road Houses or their previous occupants? Were you among the nervous driving test candidates (or instructors) awaiting their fate at number 5? If so, we would like to hear from you!

Why not join the Centre for Urban History?



The Centre for Urban History is a multi-disciplinary research institute which seeks to promote scholarly work and collaboration in the field through research seminars and workshops, projects, publications and other activities. It also publishes the Urban History Newsletter in association with the Urban History Group and the Pre-Modern Towns Group.

Many publishers offer significant discounts - often up to 40% - for CUH members.

To join the Centre for Urban History send a cheque to the Secretary, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH. **Membership rates:** Ordinary £12.00; Student £5.00; Overseas £13.00; Dept/Institution rate £25.00.

Or visit our on-line membership form at <http://www.le.ac.uk/ur/membership/order.html>

The East Midlands Oral History Archive has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to establish the first large-scale collection of oral history recordings covering Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. It is a partnership between the Centre for Urban History at the University of Leicester, Leicester City Museums and Libraries and the Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

The East Midlands Oral History Archive can be used by anyone. Local historians, family historians, students, academic researchers and teachers will find it particularly useful—but anyone can help by contributing their own memories to the recordings.

To hear more about EMOHA and Oral History in general join our mailing list. Send your name, address or email address to us and we will send you *talking history* and news of other events, special offers and opportunities to get involved.

The newsletter of the
East Midlands Oral History
Archive

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We're on the web
www.le.ac.uk/emoha/

Oral History Diary

Send us your events for inclusion in the next Oral History Diary.

All news, views or diary dates must reach us by Friday 16th November 2001.

All of the events advertised in the Oral History Diary are open to the public unless otherwise stated.

September

Mon 24 (1.30-3.30pm): Start of the Vaughan College Oral History course. Phone 251 7368 or email c.heinrich@wea.org.uk to enroll.

October

Mon 1 (7.30pm): Cynthia Brown (EMOHA), *Talking About the Past*. Organised by the Community History Network. The City Rooms, Hotel Street, Leicester.

November

Sat 3rd (9.45am-4.00pm): Local History Group Conference. At Cropston Reservoir Visitor Centre. Contact Carolyn Holmes on (0116) 267 1377 or cholmes@leics.gov.uk

for further information.

Sat 17 (9.30am-3.45pm): *More than just a name*. A one day seminar on using Oral History when researching family history. Organised by the East Midlands Oral History Archive and the Family and Community Historical Research Society. At the Centre for Urban History.

Other Events

Fri 26 October (2.30pm) John Black. *"As Man and Wife": Cohabitation and Long-Term Sexual Liaisons in London, 1740-1830*. Centre for Urban History, Marc Fitch House.

Fri 2 November (2.30pm): Alastair Owens (University of Luton). *"Money in the funds: geography, gender and investment in Bank of England stocks, 1810-1840."* Centre for Urban History.

Sat 10 November: *Friends of*

English Local History at Marc Fitch House. Ring Audrey on (0116) 2522762 for further information.

Fri 16 November (2.30pm): John Griffiths (Gyosei International College). *Citizenship and the 'New Worker: Middle-Class Anxiety in the Second Industrial Revolution, Coventry 1870-1914*. Centre for Urban History.

Fri 23 November (2.30pm): Nicholas Purcell (Oxford). *'Statics and dynamics: ancient Mediterranean urbanism'* Centre for Urban History.

Fri 30 November (2.30pm): Donna Loftus (Open University). *Markets and morals: limited liability and community in mid-Victorian England*. Centre for Urban History.

talking history is available in large print and on audio tape on request.