Affective Digital Histories

University *of* **Leicester**

The Sounds of the Cultural Quarter
Part of the Affective Digital Histories Project

This project is looking at how Leicester's Cultural Quarter sounds now and how it sounded in the past. Using your mobile phone or sound recorder you have the opportunity to capture a huge variety of sounds, contribute these to a library of Cultural Quarter sounds, and then create new soundscapes.

We hope you have a lot of fun collecting and using sounds in this project. This information pack contains information and ideas for you to use.

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How Can I Get Involved in Collecting Sounds?

Take part in one of our soundwalks.

Throughout this project we'll be running a series of 'soundwalks' to explore the contemporary soundscapes of the Cultural Quarter. Come and join us on one of these and borrow one of our sound records to capture the sounds that you hear.

Record with your mobile phone.

Recording technology is everywhere these days, even if we don't realise it. Most mobile phones have a facility to record sound, and because these are often with us all the time, our phones become the perfect tool for capturing the sounds that we hear when we're out and about.

Dig out that old Dictaphone?

You don't need the latest technology to get involved. There are many other sound recording devices that you can use to capture soundscapes.

Spot and identify important sounds.

You don't have to get involved with technology to be involved. Just let us know if there are interesting sounds out there which you think we should go out and record.

This is perhaps one of the most important roles and will really help us to flesh out our Cultural Quarter Sound library.

What iconic sounds are there in the Cultural Quarter?

What iconic sounds used to be heard but are now missing?

What is the most interesting sound that you have heard in the Cultural Quarter today?

We're interested in the sounds that you hear, and those that are most important to you.

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Ideas for Collecting Sounds

Using your mobile phone or sound recorder you have the opportunity to capture a huge variety of sounds and contribute these to a library of Cultural Quarter sounds. Here are a few ideas:

Themes
- Apartments/flats – what are the iconic sounds of living in flats?
- Traffic – the sound of underground car parks, tyre squeals outside Curve, the NCB multi-story car park, Big John's and other garages, the ring road, the railway.
- Work places and spaces – Phoenix, Curve, Makers Yard, LCB Depot, garages, shops, pubs, restaurants, shops.
- Music – the Soundhouse, Shed, Exchange Bar, Houstons, Midas, karaoke bars etc.
- Food – sandwich/takeaway shops, cafes, restaurants.
- Events – weddings, Oxjam, St George's day, other events.

Times of day
- Early morning – bird song, alarm clock/radios, kettle boiling, breakfast TV, cars leaving or parking.
- 9am-5pm – the sounds of people working, but also the movement in the streets – or lack of it! Delivery vans, rehearsals at Curve, office workers, crafts people in Makers Yard.
- Evening – sounds may depend on the day of the week and whether there are events at Curve or Athena. Sounds of people in the street, clubs and pubs closing, people going to bed.

Places
- Open spaces such as Orton Square
- Enclosed spaces such as the narrow streets lined with tall buildings.
- Trees and wildlife in St George's churchyard
- Points around the ring road
- The bustle of Humberstone Gate or Charles Street
- The quiet of streets where nothing seems to happen!

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Our challenge to you!

Go out and record something – anything. And bring it back to us so that we can add it to our library of Cultural Quarter sounds.

Don't forget to note the time and the place of the recording!

You can say out loud exactly where you are when you make the recording. If your sound recorder doesn't record the time and date you should say this as well. If you can take a photo of where you are, so much the better!

However you decide to record your sounds please use the **highest possible quality setting** on your sound recorder.

Send the sound to us.

Either give these sound files to us in person or send them via email. For files bigger than 10mb you can use WeTransfer at https://www.wetransfer.com/

Colin's email is ch38@le.ac.uk or you can call in to the East Midlands Oral History Archive at 1 Salisbury Road, Leicester LE1 7QR.

Make new sounds

Once we have compiled a sound library Andrew will be able to help you to create new sounds, audio trails, or soundscapes using software such as 'Compose With Sounds', which makes it easy for anyone to be able to work with sound creatively.

If you are already experienced in working with sound and have your own software you can use the sounds we have collected as a resource to work with.

Archives and Assets

We have collected a lot of archival material about the history of the Cultural Quarter/St George's area, but there is still a lot to discover! You can find some of this online or you can arrange with Colin to see it. The main resources are:

Maps and official documents
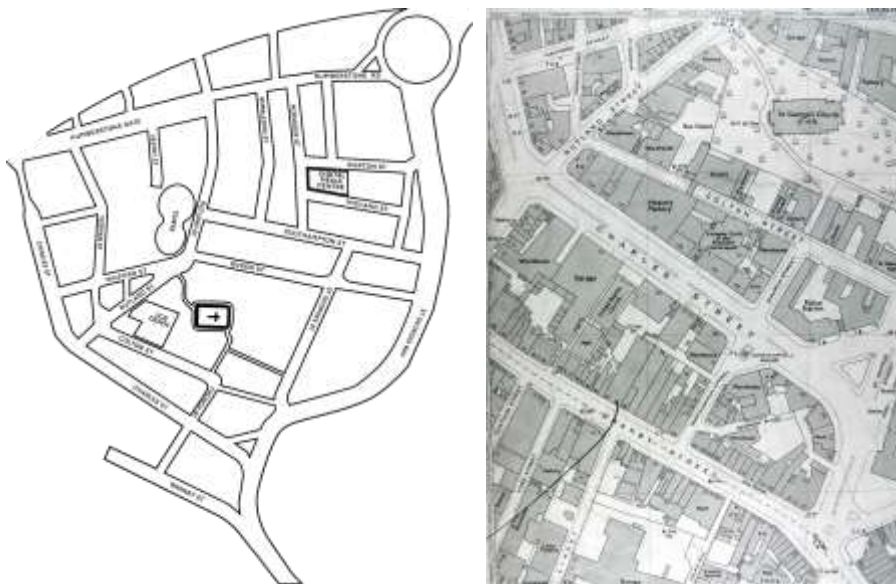
The Cultural Quarter now and the southern half as it was in 1955.

Photographs

There are many photographs taken in the last 15 years but fewer from before then. We have looked through the archives of the Leicester Mercury and other collections, but we are also keen for donations of images from private collections.

The Odeon/Athena under construction, when closed, and as now.

Advertisements and newspaper articles

We have looked through newspapers, trade directories and magazines to digitise many advertisements and articles about local companies and products.

An advert for Faire Bros, the Faire Bros building, an advert for Smith & Seville leather dealers.

Oral histories

As well as recordings that have been made in the past we have made some new recordings with people who remember the area. These are important for capturing memories of the sights, sounds, smells and 'feel' of the area in the past. These are available to be listened to by request.

However…

There is a shortage of material for the years 1970-2000 and we are keen to see any documents or photos about this period. We also welcome memories of that time as well.

Online

Go via the East Midlands Oral History Archive website - http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/news/affectivedigitalhistories.html

Where you will find links to -

My Leicestershire History website's Affective Digital History section: http://leicester.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16445coll8

The whole My Leicestershire History website: http://leicester.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/

The City Council history of the St George's conservation area, which is similar to the Cultural Quarter:

http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/ep/planning/conservation/conservationareas/conservationareasleicester/st-georges/character-statement/

Guide to Expanded Listening

Sounds are all around us, but we very rarely pay any attention to them. If we stop and listen we can discover that sounds tell us a lot about the spaces and environment that we are in.

People talk of the **soundscape** (the sound equivalent of landscape) a rich and detailed 'picture' of a specific location. Soundscapes are constantly evolving, on both small and large timescales. The soundscape will changed during the course of a day, and over time the soundscape will evolve as the activity in an area develops.

Our society is highly visually focussed, and as such we tend to lean more on the visual than any other sense. This is also reflected in our vocabulary as many descriptive words have visual basis.

In order to develop our listening skills we need to do two things:

1) Escape the visual bias of our senses.

One of the easiest ways to escape the visual bias is to close your eyes when listening. With our eyes closed we focus purely on the sounds, free from visual distractions.

Try closing your eyes when in different locations (if it is safe to do so!) and listen out for the sounds around you. Try to hear a new sound each time.

The more you listen and focus on sounds, the more diversity you will discover and the better you will become at listening.

2) Develop a vocabulary to describe sounds.

The more that we listen the better we will become at being able to describe the things that we hear. Sounds can be described in standard "musical" terms of relative pitch, loudness and duration.

But can also be described in terms of texture: smooth, sharp, granular, spikey, round, angular, steady, changing etc.

There are no limits to the vocabulary that you can use. Be as inventive as possible.

Within soundscapes we can hear **soundmarks** (the aural equivalent of landmarks). These are key elements of the soundscape which give the particular location its unique sonic character, listen out and try to identify soundmarks in your local area.

Affective Digital Histories – About the Project

Affective Digital Histories is a research project being run at the University of Leicester that aims to use digital technologies to look at how community ties and bonds have changed, and continue to change, through periods of decline and regeneration of urban landscapes in some of Britain's post-industrial towns and cities. The two sites for our study are Leicester's Cultural Quarter and Glossop's Howard Town and Whitfield Wards.

The decline of British manufacturing in the late twentieth century is well-documented. However, for the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, in particular, the stories 'out there' have not been told or researched for what they can tell us about people's emotional 'feel' for a place that they and their community might have been part of. These stories form an important tapestry of information about how certain communities think about, feel and use physical spaces that have undergone regeneration in recent decades.

Some of the things this project aims to do are:

Bring together existing research on historical and heritage sites that have fallen into disuse and/or disrepair and that are now undergoing some kind of regeneration by city and local councils.

Bring researchers and community participants together to develop a digital archive of open and publicly accessible data that forms a repository of some of the stories of communities that used, worked and played in these buildings.

Use creative writing and other techniques to explore how people feel about their communities.

In Leicester create an interactive 'audio trail' that provides a historical soundtrack to the various areas around the Cultural Quarter.

In Glossop, create three-dimensional models of buildings that incorporate stories and experiences of various under-researched mining communities and businesses.

In future, material created for the project may be used in any of the following ways:

- Education
- Public performance, lectures or talks
- Use in publications, including print, audio or video cassettes, CD ROM or DVD.
- Public reference
- Any media including radio, television or the internet

A key driver for our research is how people 'feel' a place and how they describe it to themselves and others. A series of activities and workshops are planned to draw in participants from a range of backgrounds: civic organisations, writers, artists, arts venues, local councils as well as arts organisations and digital arts venues (like the Phoenix in Leicester's Cultural Quarter, for instance).

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