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## **Introduction**

Luton Voices is an oral history project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Museums Luton, Renaissance East of England, and Luton Borough Council.

The project started in September 2006 and ended in May 2010.

The project aims:

- To collect 150 oral history interviews about people's experiences of moving to Luton
- To create a website
- To design a temporary exhibition that features the oral history interviews

The main objectives of the project:

- To engage with volunteers and community groups
- To encourage the community to participate and to take ownership of the process of collecting oral history

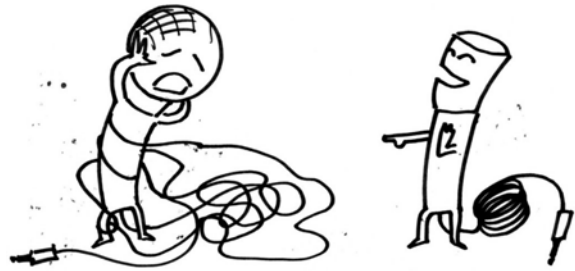
Luton Voices was committed to work with the community as one of the key objective for the project. As a working framework, we used the participatory approach in reaching out to communities. This takes the philosophy that the community takes initiative to create, develop, implement and plan for their involvement in collecting their own oral histories. In working and supporting volunteers, the Peer Education model was applied.

The Luton Voices oral history interviews are available at Museums Luton, Wardown Park Museum, Luton, Bedfordshire. LU2 7HA. Telephone: 01582 54 6722.

Or you can also visit [www.lutonvoices.com](http://www.lutonvoices.com) to listen to audio clips of the oral history interviews.

## Toolkit contents

This toolkit provides samples of completed products that have been produced by the team of young volunteers.



- Two DVD show reels of the oral history interviews
- Verbatim transcripts of the sound clips provided with time codes
- CD collection of sound clips from individuals life stories.
- One 'Little Book of Hopes and Dreams' book
- One 'Hello Luton, My New Home' image book
- One CD featuring an interview from the Life & Music programme
- One 'Migration Stories – Collected by pupils from Madrasah Al-Hikmah' book
- One 'Illustrated Words' book
- A set of postcards

## 'Doing' Oral history

In this section, we have included information and guidelines that our team used on how to collect oral history interviews.



### Before the interview

- Make initial contact by telephone (if possible)
- Check availability of equipment (recorder, microphone, etc.)
- Confirm appointment in writing (letter or email)
- Send list of general questions/topics to be covered
- Check that equipment is working (i.e. batteries fully charged)

### Interview

In the Luton Voices project, we held a general rule that the interviews were to be completed by a team of people. The team roles included an interviewer, audio tech person, camera person, photographer and occasionally there would be an observer.

### Who makes a good interviewer?

- indicate empathy when appropriate
- show appreciation for narrator's help
- listen carefully
- follow narrator's pacing
- ask for clarification
- provide space for the speaker
- offer silent feedback during the recording
- provide nods and smiles, and keeping eye contact

### General things to remember:

- Think about personal security. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Take your identity tag and show it to the interviewee.
- Explain to the interviewee that you will say as little as possible (oral history interviewers are 'silent interviewers').
- Label the recording immediately with the date and interviewee's name.
- Help the interviewee to complete the permission/consent form.
- Take a photograph of the interviewee (optional).

### After the interview

- Send the interviewee a letter of thanks, along with a CD copy of the interview, copy of the consent form and full transcription of the interview.
- Complete a synopsis of the recording.
- Prepare back up copies (master and playback versions).

- Prepare a folder with CD, transcript, and consent form for storage.

An oral history interview can be completed in many different ways. Here are some of the ways and some points about each method of collection.

#### Life story interview

- An average life story may need two to three sessions and can take anything from one to eight hours.
- In between sessions provides time for the interviewee to think about he/she has said, and gives time for the interviewer to think about the next set of questions.
- A good way to build rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee.
- May have a profound effect on the interviewee.

#### Family tree interview

- Clear way to map out individuals in the family.
- An exercise that engages the interviewees, family members and possibly the interviewer.
- More visual.

#### Single-issue testimony

- May be carried out on a one to one or group basis.
- Focus on a specific aspect of the narrator's life.
- Main method of learning about a particular event
- Requires the interviewer to have more detailed background or technical knowledge of that subject matter (than a wide ranging life story interview).

#### Diary interviewing

- Select a sample of people who will contribute regular diary entries.
- Entries might be made on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis.
- Commitment to keep a written, oral recorded diary
- Looks at continuing and long term study of social trends

#### Group interviews

- Can take the focus of individuals and they may feel less inhibited to share
- May pressure people towards a socially accepted testimony (view attitude, etc.)
- Productive to 'spark' off one another
- Group interviews can lead to one to one interviews

You can also make use of props and mnemonics. For instance, physical objects, such as old tools, photographs and traditional costumes or artefacts, can provide the focus for a more detailed testimony group discussion. Role-play can be useful as a mnemonic or memory aid, particularly in groups, but also in one to one interview. Hearing old stories, or a song or tune from the past can be particularly helpful.

### Audio recording

We used the Marantz PMD660 solid state recorder for our oral history interviews. It records on a compact flash (CF) card. The brand San Disk ultra 2.0 GB worked well with the Marantz.

A good source to purchase any equipment related to oral history work is from Inquit Audio. Website is [www.inquitaudio.co.uk](http://www.inquitaudio.co.uk)

### Background noises

Listen out for noises around you. Turn off radios, TV, computers, and dishwashers. During one of oral history interviews, we had to politely ask to unplug the refrigerator!

### Testing 123

Always do a sound check. We usually asked the interviewee to describe the weather. This meant that we were using their voice to set the recording levels.

### Practice

Always do a practice run before you arrive at the interviewee's home. Make sure you feel comfortable with setting up the equipment and that you have the list of the questions prepared and printed out.

Check that you have a blank copy of the consent form.

### Video recording (camcorder)

There are many different types of camcorders on the market. We used a Canon XL. Search for a reasonably good camcorder to record the interview. A home camcorder are also suitable for

oral history interviews. There will be advantageous and disadvantages to using either. We found that by using a camcorder that looked 'pro' added the impression that the recordings were taken seriously. However, some people were more nervous with the larger model. By using a smaller camcorder, like a home camcorder model, the interviewee was more at ease. You will need to decide what model of camcorder will be best suited for the people/community you are interviewing.



### Tripod

We used the Manfrotto tripod with a swivel head attachment. The swivel head provides smoother movement when panning during the recording.

### Mini DV tapes

There are many different brands of DV tapes. We purchased our DV tapes in bulk from a company in London. You can search their stock of DV tapes online. Go to [www.kvc.com](http://www.kvc.com)

CD/Gold CD

We purchased our CD and Gold CD in bulk.

For regular CD check the brands on [www.bigpockets.co.uk](http://www.bigpockets.co.uk)

They have next day delivery.

For Gold CD we purchased them from Stanley Productions. Please refer to the website [www.stanleysonline.co.uk](http://www.stanleysonline.co.uk)

After the recording the interview you will need to consider the following:

Audio editing

In the Luton Voices project, we used Audacity. This is an open source software available for free to download from <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

Transcribing

For transcriptions, we used another open source software Express Scribe available for free. Please download from [www.nch.com.au/scribe/](http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/)

Video editing

Before you begin to edit the video, it would be useful to have the full transcript of the oral history interview with the time codes. Have an idea of the length of your final product. On the Luton Voices project, we aimed to have 5-minute productions of each interviewee.

The 5-minute productions could include the following themes:

Name

Date of birth

Description of birthplace

Journey to the UK

First impressions of settling into the UK

## Oral history questions

The following are some examples of questions that we used in the Luton Voices oral history interviews. Try to ask open questions. One thing that seems to work for us was 'Tell me more, please' or 'Can you describe that in more detail?'

Examples:

What is your name?

When were you born?

Where were you born?

What do you remember about the place you were born?

Can you describe your family home?

Can you describe your family?

Family members? Who?

Parents? Grandparents?

Their occupation?

Relationship with siblings?

Relationship with parents?

Describe your parents? What type of people were they?

Describe family gatherings, how holidays and religious ceremonies were celebrated?

Can you describe a typical school day?

What did you do after school?

How did you spend your free time?

Describe some of the games you used to play as a child?

Who did you play with?

How did you meet them?

Who were your close friend(s)?

Describe any family vacations?

Where did you go and with whom?

How did you get there?

What do you remember of the place?

Describe your school?

Describe your teachers?

What did you study?

What subjects did you enjoy?

Project reference no. ....

Recording consent form *to be completed by all respondents*

Name of project/collection .....

Date(s) and location(s) of recording .....

Details of contribution.....

I hereby consent to the recording of my contribution. It may be used, in whole or in part, in any or all of the following ways. *(Please tick or cross and sign on the dotted line)*

- For purpose of education and research .....
- In an edited or abridged form.....
- For public use or playback to an audience.....
- Broadcasting.....
- Publications.....
- Exhibitions.....

Please indicate any additional restrictions, which you wish to place on the use of your contribution

I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution as part of the (project/collection title).

Signed..... Date of birth .....

Print full name.....

Other names.....

Address.....

.....

..... Postal code.....

Date.....

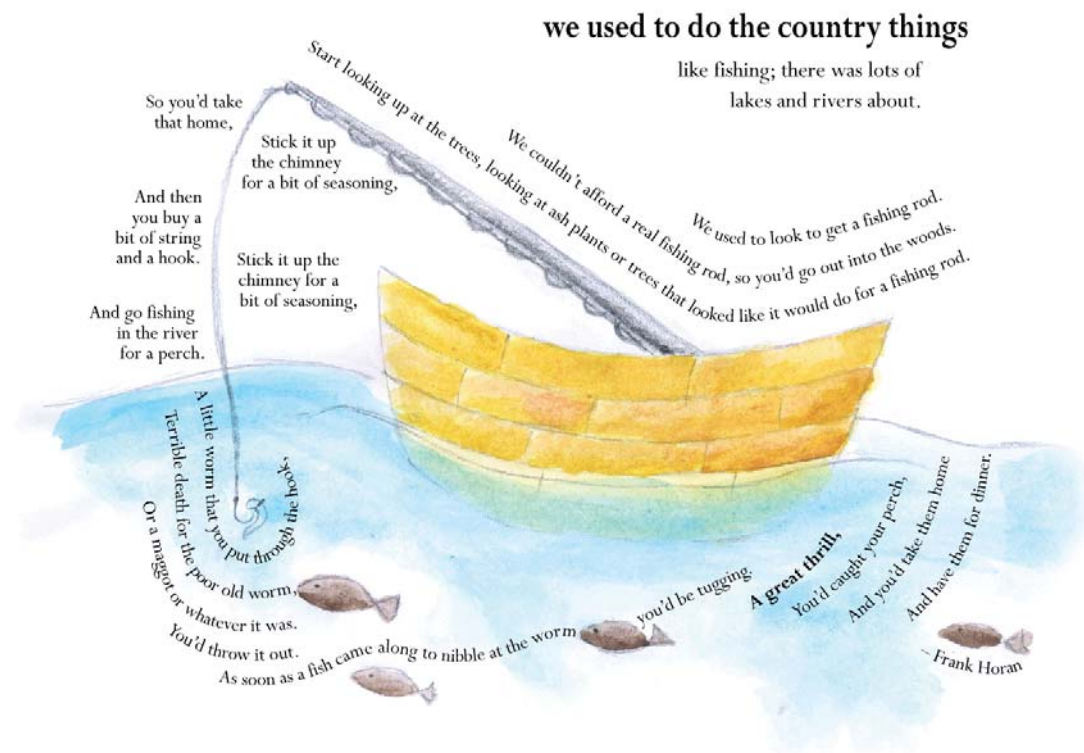
Telephone ..... Mobile .....

Email .....



## Illustrated Words

Some of the oral history interviews for the Luton Voices project are four or five hours long in audio recording. This amounts to 90 pages or more in text. We wanted to make it easy to read the transcripts, so we embarked on presenting parts of the interview as poetic representations. We found that people enjoyed reading the poetic representations and we keen to then read the full oral history transcript. Poetic representations are short and can express the essence of the spoken word. Our team of volunteers have drawn illustrations for each poetic representation.



For more information on poetic representation please look at Carolyn Lunsford Mears paper called Representing Voice in Print – An Approach Developed for the Columbine Study. In this paper, she showed how oral history interviews could be presented in the form of poetic representations, which go beyond the transcription.

## Digital Stories

This is an excellent way of engaging a group of people to tell their stories and for them to have hands on experience in creating the digital stories. Digital stories can be used with any age group and the results are impressive. You will need the personal family photos, a two- minute sound recording of someone talking about their experiences. You can use any movie-editing software to produce digital stories.

For more information, Centre for Digital Storytelling produced the Digital Storytelling Cookbook (February 2007) written by Joe Lambert.

## Animations

One minute animations were produced and all of these are available on the DVD show reels. You can get them from Museums Luton.

Animations bring the oral history interview to life in a fun and accessible form. They are popular for all ages and goes across many languages barriers.

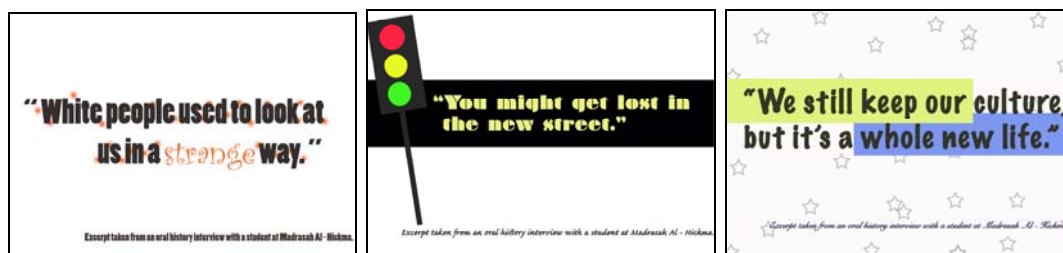
This sunflower figure was produced by the team of volunteers and was used for the Doreen Lynch oral history interview.



Gary Ward, DCTV Project Co-ordinator says,  
"It was really useful for the students to learn about developing narrative structure. It was satisfying for the students to be able to edit a two-hour interview into a comprehensive format and producing a consumable narrative."

## Quote designs

These are some designs of how to display the oral history excerpts, which have attracted many people to want to read the full interview transcripts.



## Bookmarks



Bookmarks are useful items as they are easy to produce and can be cheaper to print. For the project, there was a series of bookmarks created and this provided those volunteers experience in using software such as Illustrator and Photoshop.

## Displays

The following are suggestions on how to use oral history interviews for display purposes. These displays can take shape in various shapes and sizes. We purchased a set of portable walls from MBA. Search on line for Mila Walls. These walls were extremely useful when using them in the community.

For further information on putting a community exhibition together, please refer to 'The Beginners Guide to Community Exhibitions', a Brighton Museum and Art Gallery Handbook.

## Show reel

Most people have facilities to play a DVD. This is an easy way to bring the oral history interviews into people's homes. Or you can have a public event with a projector to play the DVD show reel. This could be projected onto a white wall, or a temporary theatre could be built. Add comfortable seating to encourage visitors to stay longer. Ensure that the sound is clear, or prepare the DVD show reel to have subtitles.



## **Working approaches**

### **Peer education approach**

This approach has been used for health education among young people. We have employed the peer education approach and used it as our framework for learning about oral history and to develop other skills. The framework enables young people to be trained in certain areas, such as computer, interviewing skills, recording, editing etc. They then train other young people. Many young people have commented that their training and the experience to train others have helped raise their self-confidence.

### **Participatory approach**

The participatory approach places emphasis on participation and interaction among the various interested groups. It includes the learners themselves who are seen as having an important role to play. The goal is to stimulate different actors to participate in a dynamic and interactive process. This allows their perceptions of the 'ideal' to be made explicit and then made compatible and/or modified as necessary.

There is an emphasis on the process of engaging people. The following are some exercises that can be used for groups to be engaged in the process of making decisions and becoming key stakeholders in the project.

## **Reading materials & inspiring resources**

### **Oral History – An Introduction for Students**

By James Hoopes © 1979

### **The Oral History Reader**

Edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson © 1998

### **The Voices of the Past – Oral History**

By Paul Thompson © 2000

### **Murmur website**

Stories can be heard at [www.murmurtoronto.ca](http://www.murmurtoronto.ca)

### **Seeing history**

By Tom Harwood

### **Young Voices DVD**

Produced by Norwich Mind and BBC Voices.

A collection of inspiring and thought-provoking films produced and directed by young people who have come from all over the world to live in Norfolk.

### **Living Memories – Key Stage 2/Key Stage 3**

An education pack produced by Northamptonshire Black History Association.

[www.northants-black-history.org.uk](http://www.northants-black-history.org.uk)

### **Speaking for Ourselves DVD & CD-ROM with electronic teaching pack**

Produced by Scope.

### **Collecting memories – guidelines for intergenerational work between museums, libraries, archives and schools**

Produced by MLA East of England.

### **Where the Lines Meet ... The People's Story**

Produced by Living Archive.

[www.livingarchive.org.uk](http://www.livingarchive.org.uk)

### **The Cypriot Diaspora Project book and DVD**

Produced by the Greek Parents Association.

[www.cypriotdiaspora.com](http://www.cypriotdiaspora.com)

### **Millennium Faces – Chinese Older People in the United Kingdom**

Produced by Islington Chinese Association.

### **A Grandparents' Book – Our Story, Our Life – A Record of Your Life, For Your Family**

[www.flametreepublishing.com](http://www.flametreepublishing.com)

### **'Collecting memories, guidelines for intergenerational work between museums, libraries, archives and schools'**

Produced by MLA ([www.cultureandschoolseast.org.uk](http://www.cultureandschoolseast.org.uk))