

**Echoes of protest: untold stories of the 1984–1985 UK
Miners' Strike**

JOHNSON, Esther <<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8884-4192>> and BALLIN, Debbie <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1920-3022>>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:
<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/14078/>

This document is the author deposited version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Published version

JOHNSON, Esther and BALLIN, Debbie (2017). Echoes of protest: untold stories of the 1984–1985 UK Miners' Strike. *Oral History Society Journal*, Spring (2017), 100-110.

Copyright and re-use policy

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

ECHOES OF PROTEST: untold stories of the 1984–1985 UK Miners’ Strike

Debbie Ballin (Senior Lecturer in Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University)

Esther Johnson (Reader in Media Arts, Sheffield Hallam University)

Abstract

This article looks at a collaborative project by artist/filmmaker Esther Johnson and filmmaker/writer Debbie Ballin titled *Echoes of Protest*. This research investigates the legacy of being involved in significant protest movements from a child’s perspective to understand the role protest can play in the lives of children, and explore its aftermath.

The text draws upon oral testimony and photography to highlight a perspective of the 1984-1985 UK Miners’ Strike seldom explored. The stories collected are from adults remembering what it was like to grow up during the Strike. They articulate the experience with a maturity they may have been unable to express at the time. The text follows the research methodology, findings, editing process, and contributors’ reflections on their participation.

Key words

archive; cross-disciplinary research; documentary; exhibition; interviewing process; memory; 1984–1985 Miners’ Strike; museums; oral testimony; photography

ECHOES OF PROTEST: untold stories of the 1984–1985 UK Miners’ Strike

Introduction

I was 15, I was into Duran Duran.

I would listen to what people were saying ... earwiggling.

And all the discussions and things, and you just do start to become aware of what’s going on ... It’s like osmosis I guess really.¹

This article draws upon our collaborative research project *Echoes of Protest*,² which was funded through the Arts and Design Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU). The authors are media practitioners at SHU. Esther Johnson is an artist/filmmaker and Reader in Media Arts, and Debbie Ballin is a filmmaker/writer and Senior Lecturer in Filmmaking. They have a shared interest in audio-visually documenting UK protest movements and specifically the experience of protest from the perspectives of children.

In 2013 Esther Johnson undertook research commissioned by the Science Museum Group and the National Railway Museum. Her gallery installation *It’s Quicker By Hearse: The Tale of The Petitioning Housewife, the Protesting Schoolboy and the Campaign Trail Student*³ looked at the impact of *The Reshaping of British Railways* (also known as The Beeching Report, Part 1, 27 March 1963), and included facsimile protest placards and an artist documentary. Johnson interviewed protester Madge Elliot and her son, Kim, who was 11 years old at the time of the 1968 protests. Kim had never previously discussed the effect of the protest on his adult life. After this,

Johnson wanted to explore this theme further with others who had participated in protests during childhood.

Echoes of Protest extends themes explored in Debbie Ballin's practice-based research. When Ballin was a teenager her mother was involved in the peace movement and took her to protests including the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. Ballin's documentary film *Being Here Now* (2000) interviewed men aged 16–17 about their political and philosophical beliefs. In 2014 she began an MA in Creative Writing, and is writing about formative experiences of protest in novel form.

Research Approach

In late 2014 we visited archives across the country. While viewing material at the People's History Museum, Manchester relating to the 1984–5 Miners' Strike, we discovered the Hilary Wainwright papers. This collection included letters and homemade Christmas cards – among them a compliments slip with the words *A share of a pensioner's Christmas 'Bonus'* typed in blue. These letters and cards accompanied donations sent in response to national newspaper appeals inviting pensioners to donate their £10 Christmas heating bonus in support of striking miners. During the Strike, the government paid pensioners the same £10 Christmas heating bonus they had received since 1972.

Image 1 *Compliments slip* Hilary Wainwright Papers, People's History Museum (2015)

Photograph by Esther Johnson

The notes documented acts of kindness by strangers. Ordinary people, many of them pensioners, donated money so that miners' children could celebrate Christmas. This resonated with us and tapped into childhood experiences of thinking of others at Christmas. We felt this was an important story to record, because it was an aspect of the Strike that had hitherto gone untold. It differed from the well-documented, often painful stories associated with the Strike. We saw ourselves as retrieving and collecting stories that would otherwise be lost:

The collector of the spoken word – of oral memory and tradition – is in a privileged position. He is the creator, in some sort, of his own archives, and he ought to interpret his duties accordingly. His role, properly conceived, is that of archivist, as well as historian, retrieving and storing priceless information, which would otherwise be lost... However intelligent and well thought out his work, it is inconceivable that his will be the only selection of texts that could be made.⁴

We sought out families who had received gifts at Christmas 1984, and we conducted oral history interviews. The stories we collected are from adults remembering what it was like to be a child during the Strike. The starting point for our interviews – memories of acts of kindness during Christmas 1984 – subsequently opened-up a much wider conversation about childhood experiences during the Strike. The interviews were timely: those who were children in 1984–5 are now in their thirties, some with children of their own. As adults and parents they can now view their own parents' experiences from a more empathetic, philosophical standpoint.

The text that follows outlines our methodology and discusses our editing process, findings, and contributors' reflections on their participation. In our research we aimed to record undocumented memories of the 1984–5 Strike from children and teenagers; to understand how formative experiences of being involved in protest movements can shape, define and affect political views in adulthood; to find out how oral testimonies can tell nuanced stories from the perspective of an adult looking back on their experiences as a child, and the synergies between then and now; to test creative methodologies and approaches to create an extended understanding of the emotional experience of history; and to explore how exhibiting archive materials alongside new audio-visual work prompts fresh and extended readings of 'official accounts' within historical discourse.

Image 2 *It's Our Future* (2015) Photograph by Esther Johnson

We wanted to create a multi-strand exhibition where historical items would be displayed next to contemporary photography and an audio documentary of interview excerpts. This interaction of different strands act as a portal into stories of the past from the standpoint of the present. Our aim was to extend upon the stories held in the archive, and by 'opening the archives', give access to historical items from the Strike.

The memory showcased in installation art of this sort is a materialized form of memory, bound to objects, documents and photographic images. The installations are designed and the images arranged to engage the viewer in this critical reflection on photography, history and memory.⁵

So far the research has resulted in two exhibitions – the People’s History Museum⁶ in Winter 2015, and the National Coal Mining Museum for England (NCMME),⁷ Wakefield in Winter 2016. At the PHM we exhibited an audio documentary, photographs and the archive material from the Hilary Wainwright papers. The NCMME exhibition included additional ephemera from their collection’ contributor artefacts and memorabilia; and a special newspaper, *The People’s Echo*. Our exhibitions were held over the Christmas period to chime with the memories shared in the oral testimonies, and the PHM exhibition took place on 30th anniversary of the end of the Strike.

Our NCMME exhibition included an opening event, a forum to discuss and celebrate themes in the research. This included ex-miners and their families sharing stories of the Strike, a live performance by a colliery band, and the launch of our Christmas Toy Appeal.

Image 3 Opening Event NCMME (2016) Photographs by Esther Johnson

Using Audio

Hearing a voice alone gives radio an intimacy unmatched by any other medium... Images are indelible because we participate in their creation.⁸

We wanted to create an audio work of first-hand testimonies, using voice as a means to express memory through nuances of intonation, accent, timbre and pause. How the stories were told, and how they sounded, was as important as the

words being said. As Raphael Samuel states at the outset of his essay 'Perils of the Transcript',

The spoken word can very easily be mutilated when it is taken down in writing and transferred to the printed page. Some distortion is bound to arise, whatever the intention of the writer, simply by cutting out pauses and repetitions... In the process, weight and balance can easily be upset.⁹

Our audio documentary places emphasis on timing, as well as words. Unlike transcribed interviews, with their grammatical punctuation, audio presents the actual voice saying the words with an emotional weight.

Punctuation indicates pauses distributed according to grammatical rules: each mark has a conventional place, meaning and length. These hardly ever coincide with the rhythms and pauses of the speaking subject, and therefore end up by confining speech within grammatical and logical rules which it does not necessarily follow. The exact length and position of the pause has an important function in the understanding of the meaning of speech...

By abolishing these traits, we flatten the emotional content of speech down to the presumed equanimity and objectivity of the written document.¹⁰

Creating an audio documentary was a means to focus on the spoken word; listening alone to enable closer attention. The work consists solely of the contributors' voices; there is no authorial narrator. We wanted to promote an empathy by which visitors could think about what the experience would be like for a child. The intimacy of

wearing headphones in the exhibition space allowed listeners to be immersed in imagining of the events being told.

What is it about the recorded voice that leads listeners of oral history interviews to transcend (however temporarily) the mediation of the recording (as a process of technology) and immerse themselves in the experience of listening? This moment of apperception reveals the transparent nature of oral history recordings to some extent...¹¹

For the exhibition at the NCMME, a series of panels were designed, on themes of Giving, Solidarity, Christmas, Day to Day, Pride, and Aftermath. Contributor quotes on these themes were presented alongside research photography. Listening in this environment encouraged a deeper interpretation of the work, and drew attention to the distinction between transcribed testimony and spoken word.

Image 4 Party Hat (2015) Photograph by Esther Johnson

Using Photography

We asked contributors if they had objects or ephemera that were meaningful to them from the Strike or which related to Christmas 1984. Searching for these personal items, often hoarded away in attics and cupboards, prompted contributors to reflect on them. The items acted as powerful mnemonic triggers. The photographs were taken directly after the recorded interviews, so that familiarity was established between contributor and interviewers/photographer. The selection of items to photograph was determined by the contributors. This in turn enriched

the interviews by taking us away from a prepared set of questions.

The aim of the photographic series was to enrich the oral testimonies, and forefront things not present in the aural. Photography was used to capture the personal ephemera described in the audio, in order to invoke a strong sense of history and memory. The compositions do not allow for direct identification of the audio contributors but instead isolate items in abstracted close-up, held lovingly in the hands of the owners. By capturing items in close-up, the contributor's hands are akin to a curator's hands holding invaluable treasures from another time. Items featured include a children's Christmas party hat covered in DIG DEEP FOR THE MINERS stickers, toys donated as Christmas presents, and a photograph of a scattering of family snapshots.

In *Oral History and Photography* Janis Wilton points out that the relationships between photographs and memory are not 'linear and unidirectional.'¹²

She stresses that there is inherent value in oral historians creating their own photographic works in addition to those provided by interviewees. Wilton talks about using images in oral history to create a 'conversation'.

Creating a conversation about the ways in which photographs shape memories and memories inform photographs and, indeed photographs become memories.¹³

Our exhibition extended this notional idea of a 'conversation'. By listening and by seeing the photographs, the audience was encouraged to form associations that

hinted at heightened narratives between the aural and visual story markers. For example, a close-up photograph of red knitting recalled a story in the audio work.

And all kids had little red duffle coats but they were knitted ...
they all looked like extras in Little Red Riding Hood [laughter]
but we all laughed,
oh he looked beautiful our Shaun in it.¹⁴

In one interview we asked a contributor what the objects from the Strike meant to her. Her response was powerfully emotive and she broke down as she described the feelings they evoked.

They just remind me, erm of erm, my mum and dad working sorry (tears)
I didn't think I was going to do this, sorry (tears/laughter)
fighting so hard to keep us all together and get through it.
Sorry, it's me mum and dad, it just obviously went through and it,
let me get a quick tissue, am I alright to move?¹⁵

Her response suggested that these objects were more than an *aide-memoire*; they acted as a conduit to re-experiencing the childhood emotions associated with them.

Image 5 *A share of a Pensioner's Christmas 'Bonus' Exhibitions at PHM (2015) and NCMME (2016) Photographs by Esther Johnson*

Exhibition

For exhibition we wanted all research elements to be in close proximity, to allow visitors to form new associations and layers of understanding. In *Framed Spaces* Janet McTighe states that the alignment and positioning of images from different contexts can produce an estranging effect for the viewer, causing them to see images in a new way.

In anthropological or ethnographic photographs and collections of artefacts, the photographic series is employed for comparison purposes. The series is also employed for the development of narrative sequences without which no basis for comparison of the details presents itself to the viewer or any means to establish categories and classifications. In the process of looking at these images, viewers become aware of themselves looking, as the process becomes the conscious effort to construct meaning.¹⁶

We also created spaces for visitors to interact with the exhibition content. Audience members were invited to share responses and memories. At PHM contributions were displayed alongside the other elements of the project to provoke a larger conversation. Here are some of these comments:

I'll always remember the solidarity,
presents given by people at home and at the other side of the world
who saw our struggle as important
and saw what it had in common with their own.

I was a striking miner and remember the 'lucky dip' lunches.

We had tins with no labels coming from Eastern Europe. Happy Days!

For some visitors – mainly those with a direct relationship to the Strike – the exhibition triggered emotive memories.

A Christmas tree acted as a focal point for the NCMME installation. Visitors could interact by writing a wish for someone else at Christmas, and hanging it on the tree.

Below are a few of these wishes:

To make my dad stay alive.

I wish for everyone to be a little kinder to others.

I hope all the countries in the world make friends and stop war.

Image 6 *Kindness is like Magic* PHM exhibition visitor cards (2015) and *Christmas Wishes* NCMME (2016) Christmas Tree decorations by exhibition visitors
Photographs by Esther Johnson

The People's Echo exhibition newspaper was stacked nearby and was free to take.¹⁷ We hoped that visitors would read it as they listened to the audio documentary. The newspaper provided a space to extend the dialogue between themed interview transcriptions, museum artefacts, archive/contemporary photography, and new documentary poems by Harriet Tarlo constructed from our original interviews.¹⁸ As the original Christmas appeals that sparked our research were in the national press, there was a pleasing circularity about the story finding its way back into a newspaper.

Process and Methodology

Contributors

Twelve people were interviewed in total, and approximately eleven hours of recorded interview was gathered. The contributors were four children, five mothers, one father, a teenage miner, and an active supporter of the Strike. It took time for us to build direct relationships and trust in the mining communities. As a result we were only able to gather oral testimonies from a small number of children of striking miners. All of those we interviewed stayed out for the duration of the 1984–5 Strike.

We have considered a number of factors that may have contributed to the unwillingness of children of striking miners to speak about that time. Neither of us grew up in a mining community, so it is possible that we were perceived as outsiders. Our interviewees referred to ongoing residual anger about the outcome of the Strike, and that may also have had an impact.

I mean people that went back to work,

they got cut-off by their families and their kids did.

The kids got affected by it because, why can't I talk to my cousin? Why her?

Why is our house daubed in eggs, or whatever,

because some went back and everyone were angry and we'd got nothing

and they were going back to work and picking their paycheck up.¹⁹

In addition our contributors spoke of a legacy of mistrust of authority and the press.

He's seen the shop at the end of his road,
he actually saw the police smash the windows that were there.
He's seen fighting in front of his house.
Got no respect for authority.
Yeah, because authority had no respect for him.²⁰

They shared memories of doing things they would never usually do out of desperation and displayed conflicted feelings about this that may have led to reluctance to be interviewed.

People did things they would never dream of doing and in desperation really.²¹

One contributor whose father was arrested at Orgreave spoke about the fear and secrecy in his family associated with this event.

It was mum that told me that, me dad never did, I don't know why.
I don't know if it was, uh, he didn't want me to know that he'd been arrested kind of thing, or if it was just something that he didn't want to talk about kind of thing, 'cause when he does talk about it,
it's still pretty painful for him,
family secret I guess so to speak.²²

Image 8 *Project Participant Invite (2015)*

We forged contact and trust with our contributors through direct referrals and attendance at relevant events. Adults who were willing to speak about their

childhood memories of the Strike tended to be those who had a largely positive experience.

We were not able to gain access for interviews with individuals whose parents either refused to take part in industrial action or went back to work during the Strike.

Contributor testimonials implied that this was because of the deep rifts in communities due to the strike.

As we talked,

I came to see that while these events had happened 30 years ago, what is said can still cause issues in the present day.²³

This limits the perspective of the work to some degree. We wanted to redress this imbalance by asking specific questions about negative experiences of the Strike, such as financial hardship, policing and 'scabs'. This provoked memories from the interviewees that were at times conflicted or difficult but which extended the scope of the research.

I had a friend whose Dad was also on strike.

The YMCA took us away on holiday and we went to Beednall on the coast and we were quite close friends.

Then her Dad went back to work and she didn't speak to me again after that.

You become very close and then he went back and that was very hard.²⁴

By also interviewing parents, we were able to include insights into the effect of the

Strike on their children. This elicited a wider discussion of the assimilation of political views in families.

Interviewing

An egalitarian approach was central to how we conducted our interviews. It was important to us that they were, 'characterised by authenticity, reciprocity and intersubjectivity.'²⁵ The contributors determined the territory for the recording, which took place on comfortable, familiar ground. We hoped this consideration of space would encourage trust and build rapport, allowing personal stories to be told with ease and honesty.

We conducted the interviews together, one recording while the other asked questions. Our interviewing technique comes from an established tradition of radio documentary, as epitomised by US-based independent radio producers, The Kitchen Sisters:

One of us is dealing with the recorder, the other has the microphone – and is very close to the interviewee, as close as can be. We try to laugh silently, nod instead of say yes, never say *mm-hmm*, so we're not stepping on their stories. We maintain eye contact and speak more through facial expressions... Really compelling radio doesn't usually come from tiny slivers of sound. It comes because people got comfortable and spilled the beans... We ask people to sing, let them laugh, and we sit quietly through their pauses. You never know.²⁶

The material gathered was to be edited, so we used a series of themed questions. Themes were discussed with contributors beforehand so they had the opportunity to raise any concerns. We initially asked everyone the same core questions. This was followed by a second series of questions tailored to specific experiences. For example we grouped questions for the miners, and for their wives and children. We asked additional questions prompted by the answers. Careful consideration was given to questions that would elicit visual responses. These sample questions illustrate our approach and include an answer given by one contributor to the final question.

1. Can you describe the impact of the Strike on your family?
2. Did you have children at home at the time?
3. What was the hardest thing about being on strike?
4. What was the best thing about being on strike?
5. What was it like day to day? What did you do? How did you organise your time?

An ordinary day would be, to get the kids up for school, get them breakfast.

And, if Bill was going on picket duty he probably would have gone.

Once they got to school I went to work, I would come home, make the tea, and then, go to some fundraising event.

Went to working men's clubs and asked for donations,
and we went to London, and spoke at a rally with Tony Benn.²⁷

Contributors were interviewed individually or in groups. In the study of cognitive psychology, research has been undertaken into the benefits of group interviews:

A group may develop a built in but invisible structure in their relationship in order to remember important events or tasks and they may also develop special techniques and cues to help one another. As soon as this structure is established ... the subjects have developed a *transactive memory* that is larger and goes 'beyond' the individual memory of one person.²⁸

Similarly, in the 1990s Graham Smith noted transactive memory in the video recordings with a group of predominantly older women in Dundee,

Unrecorded and recorded sessions mostly consisted of a free for all discussion a series of rapid exchanges as conversation passed from speaker to speaker with topics being developed, changed and returned to ... seem at first to be unstructured and chaotic compared to the more orderly turn taking involved in one to one interviews. ... However the conversations, the rhythm of talk, cross talk and listening can be understood to be the making (and breaking) of transactive memories.²⁹

Some interviewees preferred a group situation. We too found that one person's memories would often act as a trigger for another's. We talked to miners' wives Karen and Jean together, as they felt this would help them to retrieve memories, and would allow them to support one another during the process.

All of our joint interviews featured examples of turn-taking and cross-talking, which could be construed as the making of 'transactive memory.' Ex-miner Dave was interviewed alone, then together with his daughter, Sam. Responses from Dave's earlier interview allowed us to formulate questions for Sam's solo interview. They had never discussed the Strike in-depth from Sam's perspective, and this opened up a new dialogue between them. Dave later told us that until the interview, he hadn't realised how much his daughter had been politicized. In the joint conversation there were points of disagreement.

I don't think I could cross a picket line,

I really don't think I could cross a picket line.

You'd write scab on me garage door.

He's got form I think.

No it wasn't me.

Me mam thinks it was.

No it wasn't she always thinks the worst.

It's the red paint under your fingernails.

No it was white.

How do you know what colour the paint was?

I was told.

I'm not convinced.³⁰

Whilst Graham Smith notes that 'transactive memories can produce division as well as unity [and that] free for all can also establish differences in remembering and resist

transactive memory'³¹, in our interviews we found there is a playfulness of tone that suggests an agreed understanding of events that is not evident in the written text.

Structure

The use of audio here allows for a broader interpretation of this conversation. The interviewing process garnered a large number of diverse viewpoints and memories relating to each question. We thought about a working process that would allow a clear dialogue about the material and to which we could both contribute. The first stage in selecting material for the audio documentary was the process of listening to the material and transcribing it. We then discussed core themes that had emerged. These were used to build a loose thematic structure for the audio piece. We were mindful of creating a strong story arc that focused on memories and emotions, rather than a journalistic work presenting a chain of historical facts.

Documentary functions best when it is not merely a long piece of fact-jammed journalism but a nonfiction drama set on an audio stage with scenes, characters, narrative arc, dramatic tension, and even silence. Above all it is the characters – the voices – that convey the deepest emotional truth in our medium.³²

Image 9 *Interview Themes* (2015) Photograph by Esther Johnson

Our methodology allowed us to become intimately acquainted with the material so that we were sensitive to the content and the nuances of each interview. Transcript

segments linked to each theme were physically cut out of hard copies of the text, and collated and colour-coded. This gave us a visual overview of all material on each theme. We could move sections around, creating links and connections between different contributors, thereby sculpting a succinct narrative that provoked emotional responses and told the story in the most effective way. Factors such as rhythm and cadence, pauses and laughter, intonation, accent and expression were considered alongside formal structure and themes.

In our hallway we had boxes of tins of soup, beans, spaghetti, meat, corned beef, fruit, which were collected each week.³³

I don't remember ever there not being food, ever.

I remember the food parcels and how crap they were.

And you always got a tin of *Pek*, which nobody ate, so in the cupboard there would be 46 tins of *Pek* which probably were multiplying on their own, err, 'cause nobody ate it.³⁴

It's as if I knew I couldn't ask for too much,

because I knew it weren't there ...

I can't ever remember waking up or thinking, 'this is horrible'.³⁵

Acoustic Fields

We asked questions about the soundscape of the Strike – particularly the use of music, songs and chants in protest. In *Musicophilia* Oliver Sacks points out that,

Music can be a very useful mnemonic or a narrative – in effect a series of commands or promptings in the form of rhyme of song.³⁶

Alongside contributors' voices, our audio included field recordings made during the 2015 Durham Miners' Gala – atmosphere, colliery bands and crowds were collaged with archival recordings of protests during the Strike, and children opening presents on Christmas morning. These transport the listener to a specific time and place. Likewise, songs and chants can be a particularly strong evocation of past experience and shared memories. Song has particular relevance when documenting the History of Protest,

Songs when coupled with people's memories and fully historicized through research, can tell a bottom-up history in profound ways. Songs do some of the same work as oral history; they also add the 'affective power of sound' that brings an additional emotional dimension to the past. Songs can document a moment or provide an interpretation; they can stir feelings of anger, sadness, jubilation or regret; they can also make the past come alive and help us as scholars turn history into something other than documents from a dusty archive.³⁷

Songs and chants from the Strike were clearly recollected, for example Dave and Sam jointly sang the lyrics,

Who am I to ask them why, which pit must live, that pit must die?

They say but sir its economics, that's juggling by financial comics.³⁸

Popular songs from the Strike evoked strong emotions for the contributors.

We are women, we are strong,

We are fighting for our lives

Side by side with our men

Who work the nation's mines,

United by the struggle,

United by the past,

And it's - Here we go! Here we go!

For the women of the working class.³⁹

For those who were children at the time, Strike songs were part of the fabric of their childhood, they became their nursery rhymes.

Findings

We all just like got through it together.

We just carried on playing and adults carried on helping each other.

If someone hadn't got one thing, and someone had got more another, they ended up helping each other out.⁴⁰

For contributors who grew up during the Strike the experience formed a pivotal part of childhood, irrespective of how old they were at the time. Even those who were very young children or babies talked about ways in which the Strike had shaped their lives.

Many spoke of the legacy of financial hardship and the life-changing effect of this,

It's still emotionally in me now, do you know what I mean.

I obviously would have seen people upset.

Me mum and dad obviously 'cause they couldn't give what they wanted ...

there were times when obviously they were thinking,

'how we going pay for this or that?'⁴¹

None of us in our family are materialistic

and I do honestly think that is growing up during the Strike

...if you wanted something, you had to get it yourself,

or you had to obviously wait till after hard times.⁴²

Another discussed the breakdown of his parents' marriage, and attributed this to the aftermath of the Strike.

I mean my mum was doing her training, my dad did return to work,

but my dad's job was being phased out, he was being moved around heavily

because all the pits were shutting.

Even their relationship, it became a stretch, and they ended up getting divorced five years after the Strike, and you look back at it now and all the sort of things you put to them falling out were to that event really, kind of when I look back.⁴³

Those who were teenagers during the Strike were more aware of the politics as they were more actively involved in day-to-day activities. Some described this period as having a politicizing effect on them. Parents also commented on the politicization of their children.

It was at that time in your life when you're not quite an adult.

I think you're influenced. Had the Strike not happened I would have continued with Duran Duran on my walls.⁴⁴

The older children were politicised by being involved.

My daughter certainly was.⁴⁵

Others discussed the positive impact of the Strike. Stating that it raised aspirations, through experiences such as studying at university, meeting new people, and visiting places they may not have otherwise have visited.

I think it had a positive effect on Sean.

In regards of I went to University, and then his dad went to University.

He saw me go, and saw his dad go, and knew what his dad had done at pit,
and saw that his dad had got a better life,
and I think it did impact on him quite a bit.⁴⁶

We didn't buy any new clothes for a year...

But we went to some wonderful places instead.⁴⁷

In all of the interviews these recollections still had great emotional resonance. The recalling and retelling of memories kindled heartfelt responses, and at times, tears. Stories of generosity provoked powerful emotions, and many positive stories of support in families and communities were recounted. These stories were more frequent than those of bitterness and hardship.

I mentioned to Cath Connolly that uh,
we wouldn't be having a real Christmas Tree that year ...
we'd gone shopping leading up to Christmas,
and we came back and there was the Christmas Tree in the back yard.
She'd gone out and bought a tree for us.⁴⁸

Interviewing

The setting for interviewing and being interviewed is a delicate terrain. Both interviewer and interviewee can respond, either consciously or sub-consciously, to accent, gender, and standpoint of interview; whether it is from an academic research point of view, journalistic or artist work. There can be the problematic notion of 'performance' (on both sides), and the facilitation of an environment that

encourages honesty and openness. Alessandro Portelli has argued that,

Memory is not a passive depository of facts but an active creation of meaning.⁴⁹

In order to challenge the issue of inter-subjectivity and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, we invited project contributors to reflect on the interview process.

The responses covered: remembering and the notion of ‘testimony’; the experience of being interviewed and how honest one can be in this context; and whether one’s views and understanding of the Strike had changed with time. The reflections received were an attempt to gain insight and present the point of view from the other side of the microphone.⁵⁰

Remembering and Testimony

Our youngest contributor, Craig, born at the end of the Strike commented that,

Testimony to anything is a record of our existence, evidence to our facts and our experiences...above all, remembering it has given me the chance and opportunity to further examine who I am, where I come from, and the community, people, places, and political, cultural and societal landscapes that shaped me and my upbringing.

Craig’s formative years were marked by the immediate aftermath of the Strike and it

was the backdrop to his childhood and adolescence. In the above comment he makes connections between the act of remembering and the reaffirmation of his identity, which he views as shaped by the Strike.

A positive outcome of the Strike for Dave was that he went to university. This has led to an academic career focusing on the sociology of work. Much of his research is tied up with recording the history of the Strike. Dave's primary concern was that

Voices are often not heard, and others write their histories...

Most of the stuff written about the Strike is about the government, the NUM and the NCB....The Strike was about those who were involved, and only they can tell their stories.

On being interviewed

Dave said,

You made us feel very comfortable, and able to speak with honesty and candour. On driving home that day, I also remembered things that I had not thought about for years, ...But those thoughts were generated by your interview, and have generated more than a few conversations with two of my closest friends who were also involved in the Strike.

Caroline and Flis were members of Women Against Pit Closures and gained strength and confidence through working in solidarity with other women during the Strike. They said the shared experience of being interviewed,

It felt more of a two way experience where we might be developing something together, with more ideas developing the more we talked. We remembered more and more, the more we talked.

As with 'transactive memory' the interview for Caroline and Flis led to a cycle of remembering where one memory branched into another.

The story of Craig's father being arrested at Orgreave was a secret that cast a shadow over his childhood. As an adult Craig wanted to illuminate the injustices that took place that day. He is now closely involved with the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign.

I was completely open and honest, and to be frank, I feel this is what is necessary given the topic. So much has been clouded, manipulated, omitted, edited, and shaped about the Strike that clarity of honesty is the only thing that will cut through.

Image 10 *Our Children Need Our Mines* (2015) Photograph by Esther Johnson

Conclusion

After presenting this research in two exhibitions, we have gained multiple perspectives on our initial research questions. The research territory captured the imagination of exhibition visitors. This was particularly evident from feedback at the opening event at NCMME. One audience member, a retired secondary school teacher, described it as 'the best history lesson' she had ever experienced. Other

people said it was important for a forum like this to exist where untold stories could be shared and live on.

We have addressed our initial aims, sometimes with surprising results. Finding contributors was challenging; we extended our aim of solely recording children of the Strike to include observations from parents. This expansion enriched the research in an unanticipated way. As research progressed it became clear that the point of view of the Strike we were researching was an area that was not well documented. The individuals we interviewed had never previously told their stories from this perspective. Contrary to expectation, everybody we recorded talked about their memories of the Strike with great fondness, warmth and candour. We felt on reflection that the focus on Christmas 1984 and on acts of kindness may have generated more positive responses than a general exploration of the Strike.

Our testimonies include stories of key moments of politicization, such as Sam's refusal to stand in a separate line in the school dinner queue because her dad was on strike, and Craig's stories of his mother struggling to keep the family warm and fed.

Contributors also talked about a gradual shaping of their views through osmosis – for example through talking about Strike events at the dinner table. We gained a greater understanding of the way that formative experiences of the Strike affected contributors' political views in adulthood as a result of this.

We wanted to explore the synergies between the experiences of the Strike 'then', and how this connects to the 'now'. The decision to create an audio documentary allowed nuances of emotion to be forefronted. Interviews tapped into strong emotions about

the Strike that were still very close to the surface for some contributors. Some stories could be interpreted as 'rose-tinted' in that they are from adults looking back on a Christmas experienced as a child. However, the converse was also true: contributors expressed a very real anger of the present rooted in the legacy of the Strike. In her interview and at the NCMME opening event Jean displayed raw emotion when talking about the physical sites of particularly potent strike memories. Gayle articulated the fact that her youngest child is now the same age as she was in 1984. This similarity of age allowed her to reconnect with and embody her mother's experiences of the Strike.

From our opening event feedback it is evident that the methodologies we employed enabled audiences to gain an extended understanding of the emotional experience of history. This was enhanced at the exhibition preview when supplementary stories were triggered and recounted through discussion. The presence of a brass band playing traditional mining music and Christmas carols provided an evocative backdrop that acted as a portal to memory. A further prompt was the inclusion of toys such as a Care Bear and a descant recorder in the NCMME exhibition – both received by interviewees that Christmas.

We have discovered that exhibiting archive materials alongside audio-visual work in a museum setting can reinvigorate and expand on 'official' historical accounts. NCMME had not previously curated a show of new artist work inspired by archival material. This was an exciting new development for them, and they now wish to develop other work with artists in future. The museum has asked us to develop a session for staff to reflect on the process of working together and to discuss future projects. Part of this

process is the possibility that our audio-visual work will be added to the museum's archive. Our work will then become publicly accessible and thus contribute to an on-going discourse. As one of our contributors, Karen, said at the opening event,

I could never have believed that I would end up in a museum... it's unbelievable.⁵¹

We hope to collect further stories of children and protest, and have set up an online form on our own project website, and the NCMME website, so that these can be shared.

<http://echoes-of-protest.weebly.com>

esther.johnson@shu.ac.uk

d.ballin@shu.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the research contributors whose voices are included in this text: Caroline, Craig, Dave, Elspeth, Flis, Gayle, Jayne, Jean, Karen, Sam.

6,768 words – excluding endnotes (828) and image captions (129)

Notes

¹ Interview with Sam Oldfield, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 10 July 2015.

² Accessed online at <http://echoes-of-protest.weebly.com/exhibition.html> 12 November 2016.

³ Accessed online at <http://blanchepictures.com/its-quicker-by-hearse> 12 November 2016.

⁴ Raphael Samuel, 'Perils of the Transcript', vol 1, no 2, 1972, p 22.

⁵ Monica E.E McTighe, *Framed Spaces*, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2012, p 75.

⁶ Accessed online at <http://www.phm.org.uk/whatson/a-share-of-a-pensioners-christmas-bonus> 28 November 2016. People's History Museum will hereafter be referred to as PHM.

⁷ Accessed online at www.ncm.org.uk/whats-on/a-share-of-a-pensioners-christmas-bonus 28 November 2016. National Coal Mining for England will hereafter be referred to as NCMME.

⁸ Jay Allison, 'Afterword' in John Biewen and Alexa Dilworth (eds), *Reality Radio, telling true stories in sound*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010, p 188.

⁹ Raphael Samuel, 'Perils of the Transcript', *Oral History*, vol 1, no 2, 1972, p 19.

¹⁰ Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop*, Oxford University Press, no 12, 1981, p 98.

¹¹ John B Fenn, 'Recording Culture: Audio Documentary and the Ethnographic Experience/Sounding New Media: Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture', *Oral History Review*, vol 37, issue 1, 2010, p 98.

¹² Janis Wilton, 'Imaging Family: My Mum, Her Photographs, Our Memories' in Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (eds) *Oral History and Photography*, US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p 61.

¹³ Janis Wilton, 'Imaging Family: My Mum, Her Photographs, Our Memories' in Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (eds) *Oral History and Photography*, US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p 62.

¹⁴ Interview with Jean Akid, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 8 July 2015.

¹⁵ Interview with Gayle Trueman, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 27 July 2015.

¹⁶ Monica E.E McTighe, *Framed Spaces*, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2012, p 32.

¹⁷ Accessed online at https://issuu.com/blanchepictures/docs/the_peoples_echo_newspaper_2016 12 November 2016.

¹⁸ Accessed online at <http://www.shearsman.com/browse-poetry-books-by-author-Harriet-Tarlo> 28 November 2016.

¹⁹ Interview with Jean Akid, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 8 July 2015.

²⁰ Interview with Jean Akid and Karen Waddington, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 8 July 2015.

²¹ Interview with Jean Akid, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 8 July 2015.

²² Interview with Craig Oldham, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 27 July 2015.

²³ Email correspondence with Dave Wray, 18 January 2016.

-
- ²⁴ Interview with Sam Oldfield, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 10 July 2015.
- ²⁵ Joan Sangster, 'Feminist Debates and Oral History' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (eds) *The Oral History Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p 92.
- ²⁶ Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva, 'Talking to Strangers' in John Beiwen and Alexa Dilworth (eds) *Reality Radio, Telling Stories in Sound*, Chapel Hill: The Centre for Documentary Studies, 2010, pp 39-40.
- ²⁷ Interview with Elspeth Frostwich, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 9 July 2015.
- ²⁸ Olof Johansson, Jan Andersson and Jerker Ronnberg, 'Do Elderly Couples Have a Better Prospective Memory than Other Elderly People When They Collaborate?' *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, vol 14, issue 2, 2000, pp 121-133.
- ²⁹ Graham Smith, 'Conflicts and Continuity', *Oral History*, vol 32, no 2, 2007, p 82.
- ³⁰ Interview with Dave Wray and Sam Oldfield, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 10 July 2015.
- ³¹ Graham Smith, 'Conflicts and Continuity', *Oral History*, vol 32, no 2, 2007, p 88.
- ³² Sandy Tolan, 'The Voice and the Place' in John Beiwen and Alexa Dilworth (eds) *Reality Radio, Telling Stories in Sound*, Chapel Hill: The Centre for Documentary Studies, 2010, p 418.
- ³³ Interview with Elspeth Frostwich, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 9 July 2015.
- ³⁴ Interview with Sam Oldfield, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 10 July 2015.
- ³⁵ Interview with Gayle Trueman, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 27 July 2015
- ³⁶ Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia*, New York: Random House, 2008, p 258.
- ³⁷ Michael K. Honey 'Sharecroppers Troubadour: Can We Use Songs and Oral Poetry as Oral History?', *The Oral History Review*, vol 41, no 2, 2014, p 218.
- ³⁸ Interview with Dave Wray and Sam Oldfield, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 10 July 2015.
- ³⁹ Mal Finch 'Women of The Working Class' song, 1984.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with Gayle Trueman, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 27 July 2015.
- ⁴¹ Interview with Gayle Trueman, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 27 July 2015.
- ⁴² Interview with Jayne Smith, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 27 July 2015.
- ⁴³ Interview with Craig Oldham, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 27 July 2015.
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Sam Oldfield, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 10 July 2015.
- ⁴⁵ Interview with Elspeth Frostwich, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 9 July 2015.
- ⁴⁶ Interview with Jean Akid, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 8 July 2015
- ⁴⁷ Interview with Elspeth Frostwich, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 9 July 2015.
- ⁴⁸ Interview with Elspeth Frostwich, recorded by Debbie Ballin and Esther Johnson, 9 July 2015.
- ⁴⁹ Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different?' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (eds) *The Oral History Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p 69.
- ⁵⁰ The following section includes direct text from email correspondence with project contributors, 18 January 2016 (Dave), 26 January 2016 (Craig), 26 February 2016 (Caroline and Flis)

⁵¹ Conversation with Karen Waddington at NCMME exhibition opening event, 12 November 2016.