

Oral History

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Definition People's recorded memories of lives and events, given orally.

As communication methods have progressed there will be missing paper trails to consult.

There is considerable intellectual snobbery in history especially with relation to the records of working class people.

There will be minority collections of the memories of specific groups.

Memory Essentially selective and full of errors. Events are mixed up. Confabulation occurs – the merging of outside events into our own memories.

Justification for the taking of oral history.

- Memories will contain some facts.
- They show what people thought at the time.
- They indicate what people believed had happened.
- They may show an individual stepping out of line and not be part of the commonly accepted memory of an event.
- There may be family or social reasons which will make it difficult to repeat certain items.

Advice on the collection of oral history.

History obtained orally is most often taken by interviewing senior members of the community. If written up verbatim it may end up at considerable length therefore some form of summarising will be necessary. It may be that a net has to be cast wide because people will have moved. The recording of local names for places, local dialect or slang is important. It is not only events which happened a long time ago which should be recorded. Recent things should not be missed. Take care over personal safety if it is relevant. A signature is required if there is any possibility of reproducing information collected. Explain beforehand what the procedure will be. Be inquisitive, make eye contact, nod head, be interested, listen. Non-verbal communication is important because it does not appear on the tape. Know your equipment. Understand the difference between closed and leading questions. Don't be afraid to ask how or why or tell me what it was like. A notepad can be useful but may distract the person being interviewed.

Methods of preservation.

Information collected on equipment containing a hard-drive can easily be transferred to a PC and a CD. Always add explanatory paperwork. Two copyrights are involved, the owner or provider of the history and the final recording. Dual permission for reproduction will be required. It is best to list possible uses when obtaining permission or the granting of permissions can be passed to a public body.

Uses of oral history.

Examples exist of the use of information collected orally in community plays. eg Milton Keynes the Musical! Books are an obvious result plus now CD's and DVD's from video records. Depositing on the Web means the world can read or listen to it.