



A Story to Tell: Creating, Collecting and Sharing our Stories

Black History Haringey 365

What is Oral History?

Oral History is the recording of people's memories, experiences and opinions



It can be a record of:

- **an individual's unique life experiences**
- **an organisation's, group's or community's experiences**
- **a particular event or time period**

Why is Oral History important?

Oral history fills in the gaps often found in historical documents and books

It gives us an account of history **which includes everyone**

Oral histories allow:

- people to talk about and record their own 'lived experiences'
- people who have been hidden from history or marginalised to have their voice heard
- new insights and perspectives to challenge our view of the past

It's important to record these stories because, unfortunately, when people leave us, they take their memories with them

Why is Oral History important?

The processes around creating Oral Histories are known to have a positive impact on people's health and well-being

The telling of stories, reminiscing and sharing memories can be a rewarding and enriching experience for all involved –

- for those telling their stories - building confidence, self-worth and validation
- and those learning from them - learning new skills and learning from the stories

It gives value and validation to people's achievements, and allows others to learn from their experiences which in turn helps build understanding and empathy.

It is an important part of many cultures as a way of imparting and sharing knowledge and bringing communities together.

Wisdom Speaks: A Collection of Life Experiences from the U3A

In 2002 BCM and HU3A worked together to record the experiences of some of the members of their Reminiscence Group.





Alison Nunes

Born in Jamaica in 1937, Alison followed her husband Ernest to live in England in 1964 where they raised their family together. She worked for 26 years as a post-woman (and supervisor) for the Royal Mail. She is an active member at her Methodist Church and is the Chair of the Haringey University of the Third Age.

'The Mother Country' 1964

Walking around in the September sunshine today set me thinking of the September day I arrived in London from Jamaica in 1964. The contrast is so different. Had it been as it is now, I would not have been so miserable and homesick.

It was a drizzly, wet and cold Monday morning with grey skies when I got off the British Airways flight from Kennedy Airport US. I was so sad the day I left my family - Mother, Aunts, my children and friends who saw me off. I was leaving them and I did not want to. A little streak of happiness was in my heart, as I was going to be with my husband Ernest the next day. I had not seen him in four years.

With the help of an airport porter I found my suitcase and the bus for Victoria Coach Station where I waited for Ernest. (I was shocked to see a white man lifting my luggage - unheard of where I come from.) I was still wearing my white pillbox hat, white shoes and my royal blue suit, just as I was when I left Jamaica. I could feel excitement on the journey up to London in spite of the dreariness. I thought the houses looked like barns. I waited for my husband to come, but I was thinking of the rain and cold. I saw people getting in and out of taxis - and that thought made me feel better. He arrived with two friends - but I did not want to see anyone else. I felt self-conscious and awkward. We went to get a bus because they agreed it was cheaper than a taxi and the bus passed our door. After an hour we got off near my new home.

I noticed the houses were joined up with no space between. We went in and shared a meal together and exchanged news. It was still raining and dark by four o'clock. I looked

around my new home - we had one room with a bed, a locker for kitchen utensils and food, a small television set on a small radiogram unit, a table and two chairs, a window overlooking an overgrown garden. The room was on the first floor of a 3-storey Victorian terrace house in Clapton E5. The bathroom was in the basement, shared by the landlord and family and five of us tenants. The kitchen on the ground floor served all the tenants. We had to drop coins in the gas meter for cooking and for hot water for bathing. I learnt you did not put your money in and leave - someone else would use it before you got to it! The lino floor needed a good scrub from built-up grease. We had a paraffin heater - but the room never got warm.

I felt guilty. I should be happy but I was not. I could not stop thinking of my children back home. There was no way today, or any other day in the near future I would see or speak to them. I was in despair. I started to cry, as I did so often for years. I could not get rid of the homesickness and the thought I had deserted my children. I felt trapped.

The friends went home after telling me how lucky I was - the room was bigger than average; it was clean and I was not alone. I learnt later I was indeed lucky. Some people had nowhere to stay. Many shared a room - all strangers - and slept on floors.

I had a job interview the next day. The place was a rundown factory where men's clothing was made. I hated it on sight. I cannot recall the interview but I accepted a job to stitch trousers pockets at £6 per week. I was told if I made good progress it would be increased by ten shillings after six weeks.

I found going to work tiring. It was hard getting up in the dark and cold, preparing flasks of tea and lunch to take. I could not eat much. The food and everything else was so different. I felt ill and caught a terrible cold - I continually had a cold for years!

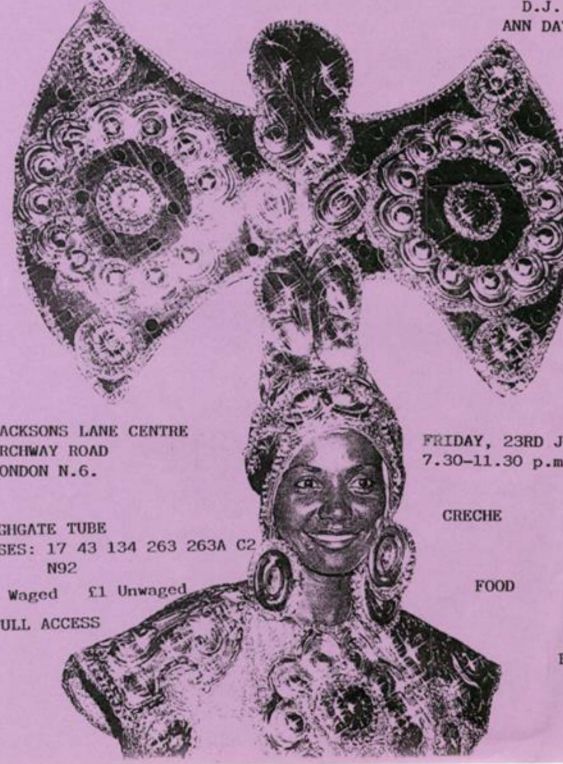
Haringey VANGUARD



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VOICES OF OYAAH MARIA ESPOSITO

DEBBIE BLINDYKE & THE TOKENS D.J. ANN DAY



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Since 2017 - supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund - 'NHS at 70' has worked across the UK, recording over 1000 interviews from patients, staff, policymakers and the public about experiences of health and the place of the NHS in everyday life and work. In March 2020 we adapted to remote interviews and have recorded over 400 interviews capturing experiences as the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded.

In July 2020 we were delighted to be awarded a £1 million grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, as part of the UKRI Covid-19 Urgency call. 'NHS Voices of Covid-19', in partnership with the British Library's oral history department, will create a permanent public resource of the history of the NHS and Covid-19. We will record an additional 900 interviews documenting experiences of Covid-19, which will sit within the British Library's wider Covid-19 collecting initiative.

We are also working with stakeholders to draw findings from the testimony through data analysis to support the development of learning resources such as briefings, engagement events, and digital resources that can inform policy and practice in the immediate post-Covid-19 period.

[Read more...](#)



Covid Conversations



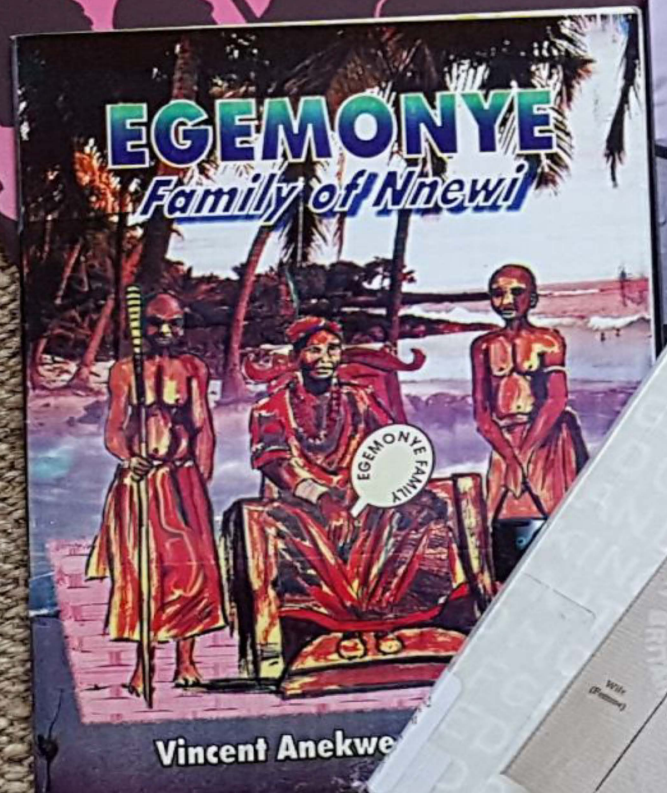
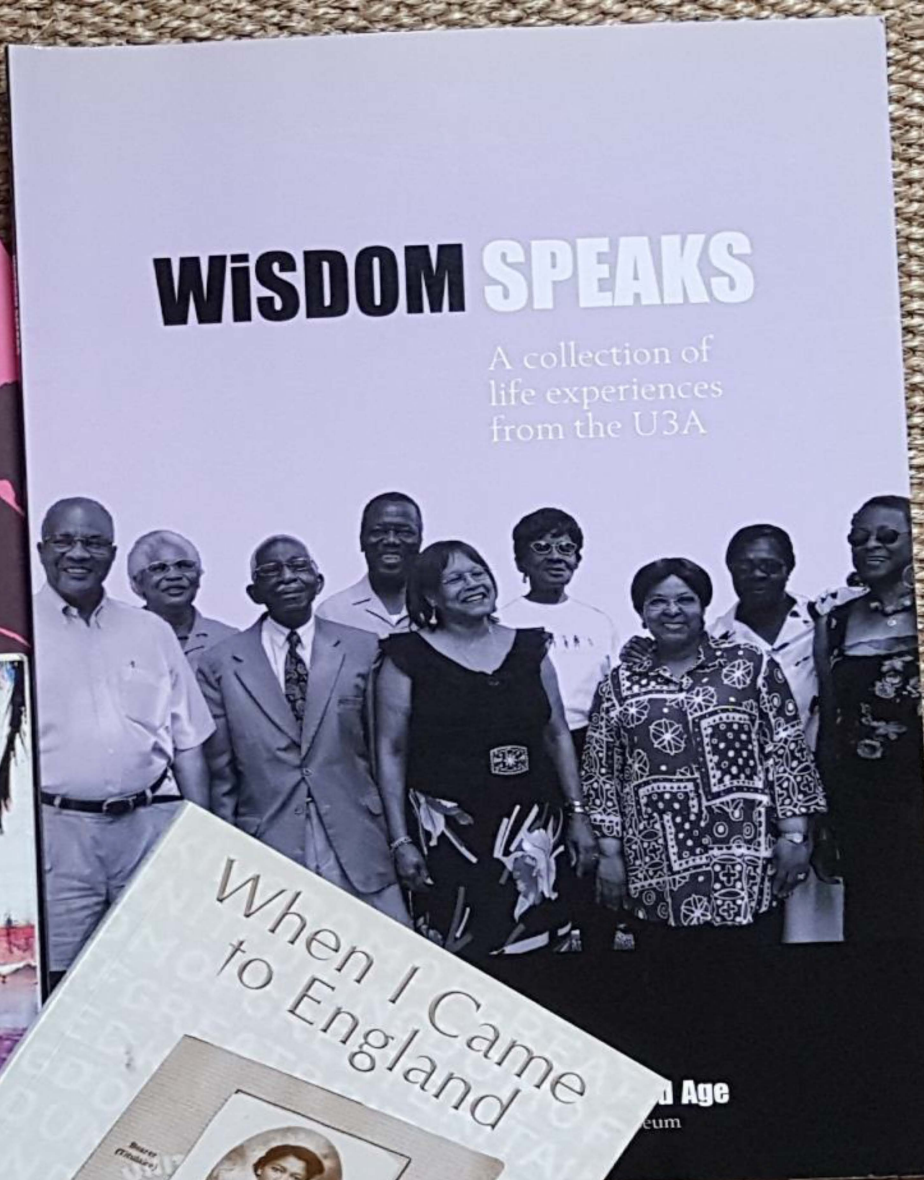
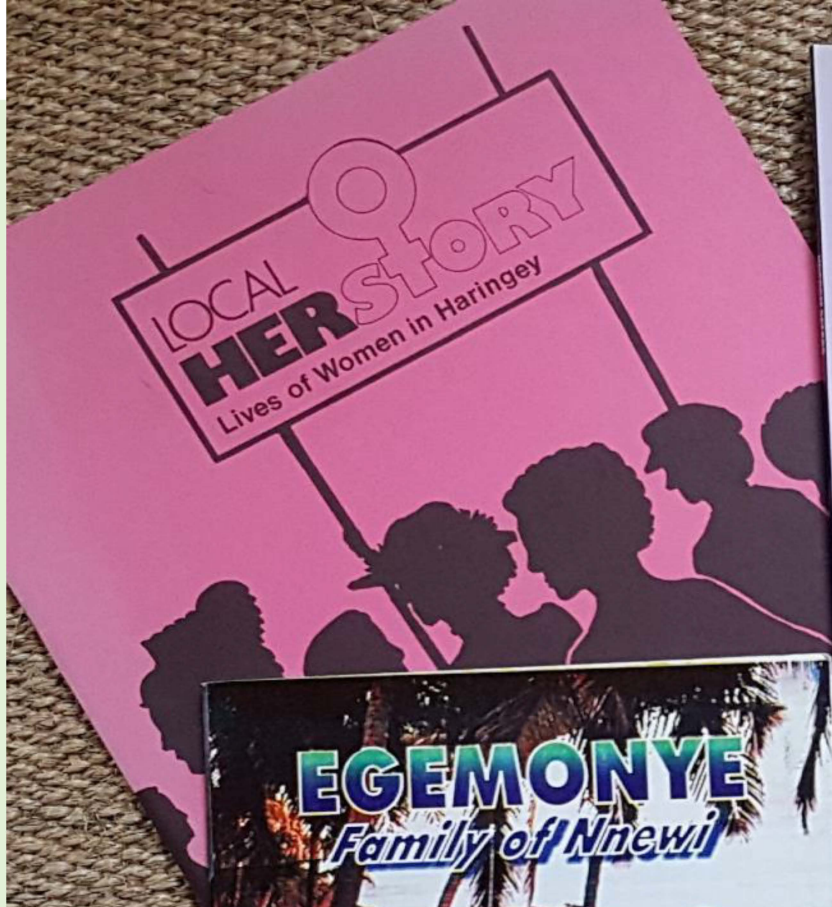
NHS at 72



NHS Voices of Covid-19

MEMORIES OF THE HIGH ROAD
BRUCE CASTLE MUSEUM
24 MARCH - 1 JULY 2018

AN ORAL HISTORY EXHIBITION ABOUT TOTTENHAM



Starting your own Oral History project

Some things to think about ...

- **Aims and objectives:** Why, Who, What, How?
- **Scope and scale:** Is it feasible? Has it been done before?
- **What is your budget? Do you need extra funding?**
- **Interviewees:** Finding them, building relationships, supporting them
- **What else might you like to collect at the same time?** Photographs? Archives? Objects?
- **Staffing, volunteers, stakeholders and partners:** Who will you need to work with? training? project staff?
- **Forms and permissions:** documentation, sharing project outcomes, evaluations



Starting your own Oral History project

Technical requirements:

- Recording equipment – mobile phones vs dedicated recorders
- What to do with the files once the interviews are done
- Data storage and backing-up your files
- Audio editing and outputs
- Virtual interviews – different software and skills



Interviews

Setting up/Pre-Interview:

- **Respecting people's privacy and their stories:** Appreciate that it is a privilege that you are able to speak with them and record them.
- **Be very clear from the start** why you want to record their stories and why they are important.
- **Build a relationship with the interviewee:** Some people will be self-conscious and nervous, help them by giving them an idea of what to expect and what your questions will be about.
- **Background research:** If you're talking about a subject, event etc do some research so that you are prepared and can ask informed questions.
- **Think about where to conduct the interview:** In their house? In a community space? Outdoors?
- **When to do the interview:** Time of day? Fit around their schedule, not yours.
- **Check your equipment!** Does it all work? Batteries OK? Enough memory space?
- **Confirm time and date** with the interviewee, make sure they are still OK for the interview.
- **Be prepared:** they are giving up their time to help you, respect that and don't waste their time.

Interviews

The Interview:

- **Permissions:** Make sure you have all the permissions and forms signed before you start recording.
- **Make a record of who you are recording**, where and when. A photo?
- **Check the session is recording OK** – do a little test.
- **Start with introductions** of yourself, what the project is where you are recording the date and who you are recording, then ask the interviewee to introduce themselves. Easy questions first.
- **Allow people the space and time** to say what they want to say in their own words.
- **Find a balance** between trying not to lead them too much, but gently direct them back on topic if they stray too much.
- **Try not to say too much** when recording – nod, smile and visually encourage them.
- **Being interviewed is tiring**, ask them if they need a break, or come back another day.
- **If they are upset ask them if they'd like to stop** for a moment and pause the recording – again respect their privacy. Have a cup of tea (take some nice biscuits!)

Interviews

After the Interview:

- Are any follow-up sessions needed?
- Transcriptions of the interviews? 6 hours for every hour of recording. Software?
- Forms and permissions – make sure you have everything signed and agreed.
- Do they want to hear the interview before they sign it off? Anything restricted or embargoed?
- Editing for publication and storing the full versions.
- Copies to the interviewee? Inviting them to talks, exhibitions etc.
- Thank them!



Help & Advice

- **Oral History Society** – <https://www.ohs.org.uk/> lots of professional advice about setting up a project, funding, permission form templates, equipment and training.
- **Local Authority Heritage Service** – e.g. Bruce Castle Museum, London Metropolitan Archives
- **Other Oral History Projects**

Funders

- **National Lottery Heritage Fund**
- **Big Lottery Fund**
- **Arts Council England**
- **Esmee Fairbairn Foundation**



Thank You!

Black History Haringey 365
www.haringey.gov.uk/culture/black-history

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