

What is Oral History?

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Ronald J. Grele (1972):

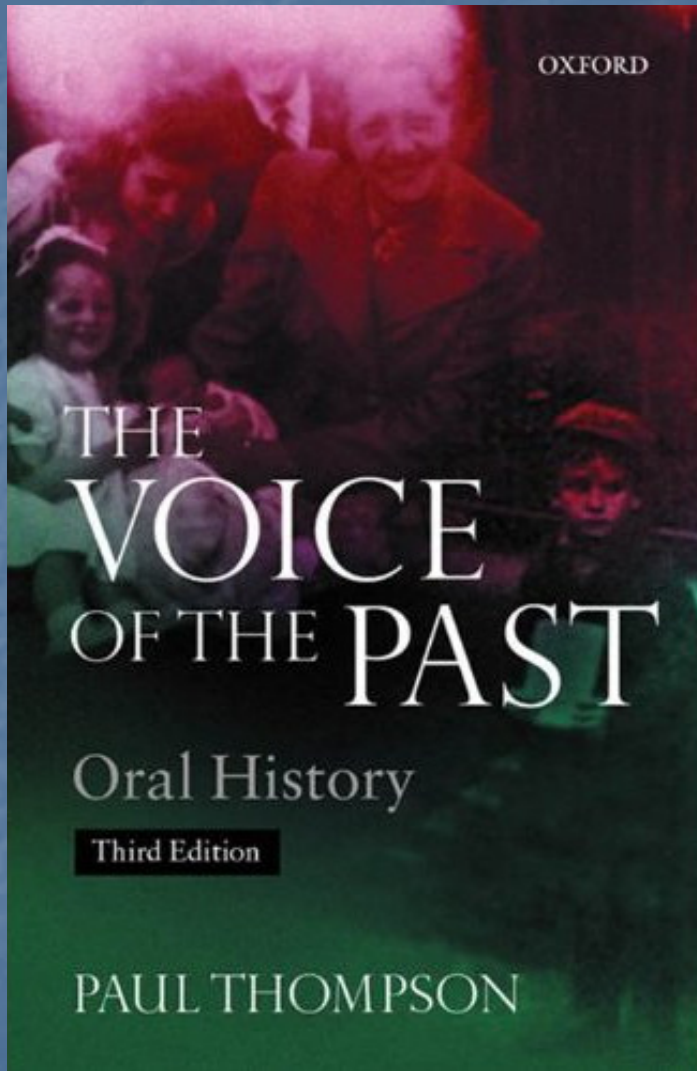
‘the interviewing of eye witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction’

Shift from 1970s to present:

- From information
- To narratives, construction of memory
- From data for interpretation
- To access to experience, subjectivity, historical imagination

- Recovery history
- Interview dynamics
- Culture and memory
- Ethics and protocols

□ Recovery History



Criticisms:

Fallibility of memory

Unrepresentative

Responses:

Reliability of memory varies

Representative samples
impossible

Standard questionnaires
inappropriate

1978, 1988, 2000

- Discovery
- Revising the historical account



Interview dynamics

- Life review:
- Retrospective questioning
- Search for self affirmation
- Comparisons

Composure:

- Composition of a narrative
- Achievement of composure or psychic equilibrium
- Fairy tales; epics
- Anecdotes

KW. Well anyway er, I remember when war was er, when the war started er, my father had his revolver, from I suppose, I don't know whether it was from India or from the 14–18 war, but he had this, was it Webley? Webley, big, big revolver with six er bullets that go in a valve. He would take me down on the tennis court to shoot at some tin cans, you know. Because er, so that my mother and I could defend ourselves if the Germans landed, you know. And er, we were taking pot shots at these tin cans and of course the terrific bang, you know, when the, when it went off, it was a very loud, and somebody rang the police up to report that the Germans had landed, you know! The Germans were attacking in Stainmoor, parachutists had arrived, you know. And um, the, the next thing we knew was that er, I don't know if it was the police or, or an Army er came and er it was very embarrassing really but we were, my father was advised not to do it, you know. But er, it was er, it was funny really when you think about it.





Kaitlin Wells 1923-2003

'Composure' as psychic equilibrium

- Integration
- Repetition
- Inaccuracies
 - truths beyond the facts
- Discomposure
- Importance of audience

Culture and memory

- Impossibility of 'pure recall'
- Effects of language and discourse
- Example of nostalgia for community spirit of the Second World War
- Mediation of memory
- The cultural circuit



Cast of 'Dad's Army' BBC TV 1968-77

Ethics and Protocols

- Questions: open, simple, invite reflection
- Follow up
- Release forms

RELEASE FORM

Project on the Home Guard in the Second World War

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I accept the above arrangement.

I do/do not wish my name to be used in any publication arising from research. (Please delete as applicable.)

Signed:
(Interviewee)	(Interviewer)

Date:

- Good quality recordings
- Transcription (5:1)
- Summaries

