

# Thinking about...

## Oral history

February 2009

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- contacting us by textphone on **020 7591 6255**; or
- using Text Direct **18001 020 7591 6042**.

If you require a copy of this guidance in an alternative format (large print, braille or audio version), or if your first language is not English, we can provide it in the appropriate format or language if you ask us. It is also available in Welsh.

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## Thinking about... Oral history

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### Contents

|                   |   |           |
|-------------------|---|-----------|
| 1                 | Introduction                                    | 3         |
| 2                 | Our aims  | 3         |
|                   | 2.1 Meeting our aims                            | 3         |
| 3                 | What is oral history?                           | 4         |
| 4                 | Why do we fund oral history?                    | 5         |
| 5                 | Planning and managing your oral history project | 5         |
| 6                 | Making your interviews available                | 11        |
| 7                 | Community involvement and partnerships          | 12        |
| 8                 | Working with schools and colleges               | 13        |
| 9                 | Legal and ethical issues                        | 13        |
| 10                | Oral history project checklist                  | 14        |
| 11                | Sources of advice and information               | 16        |
|                   | 11.1 Publications and websites                  | 16        |
|                   | 11.2 Organisations                              | 17        |
| <b>Appendix A</b> |   |           |
|                   | Practical interview advice                      | 20        |
| <b>Appendix B</b> |   |           |
|                   | Example costs for an oral history project       | 24        |
| <b>Appendix C</b> |   |           |
|                   | Our grant programmes                            | 27        |
|                   | <b>Our offices</b>                              | <b>29</b> |

The Heritage Lottery Fund would like to thank Dr Robert Perks, The British Library Sound Archive, for his help with this guidance.

## Thinking about... Oral history

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### 1 Introduction

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was set up in 1994 to distribute money raised by the National Lottery to heritage projects throughout the UK. In our first 12 years we awarded over £4 billion in grants to over 26,000 projects, from multi-million-pound investments in well-known sites and buildings to small grants making a big difference to community groups. We have a range of grant programmes for projects of different types and sizes – see Appendix C for more information.

This guidance is designed to help you think about an application for a project that involves recording and archiving people's memories.

We can offer advice **before you apply**, but first please use our website [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk) to:

- read the guidance in the application materials for the grant programme you are interested in;
- decide broadly what you want to do and roughly how much money you are likely to ask us for;
- fill in a pre-application enquiry form online or in hard copy; and
- send it through our website or send it to your country or regional HLF team who will then contact you to offer advice on your project.

### 2 Our aims

HLF gives grants to support a wide range of projects involving the local, regional and national heritage of the United Kingdom.

We have three main aims which relate to learning, conservation and participation.

To receive a grant your project must:

- help people to learn about their own and other people's heritage.

Your project must also do either or both of the following:

- conserve the UK's diverse heritage for present and future generations to experience and enjoy;
- help more people, and a wider range of people, to take an active part in and make decisions about heritage.

#### 2.1 Meeting our aims

A project that includes oral history could meet all three of our aims.

By recording people's memories and depositing them in a public archive you will be helping to conserve our heritage.

## Thinking about... Oral history

---

If the people doing the interviewing are volunteers you will be helping people take an active part in heritage.

If you train those volunteers in oral history techniques to produce high quality interviews, or you use the interviews to produce exhibitions, booklets or education resources, you will be helping people to learn about heritage.

When assessing your application we will make a judgement about how well your project meets our aims and how far it offers value for money.

### 3 What is oral history?

*"Of course there was no birth control. Your babies came, and you said that happens, nothing you could do about it. They just took nature as it was handed out to them. And when you were pregnant, well, if you were a bit sensitive, you just did not go out, you didn't like people to see you."*

**From the East Midlands Oral History Archive, supported by HLF.**

*"Another revolution just after the [Second World] War was the advent of the freezer and frozen food... I had heard that they had frozen peas in this shop in Romford and we were all agog to try this new element of eating, and sure enough when I got there they had this cellophane, film packet of frozen peas. I brought it home in great triumph and cooked it and were well won over."*

**From the Basildon and Billericay Domestic Technology Interviews, supported by HLF.**

*"I do remember being quite aware that I was different culturally. I do remember that boys, especially little boys, used to do this thing with their eyes; they pulled back their eyes like a Chinese person. Well, that used to get to me... I was scared to be different."*

**From the Vietnamese Oral History Project, supported by HLF.**

Oral history is the recording of people's memories, feelings, attitudes and experiences using digital audio or video technology. It is living history. It is all around us: everyone has a story to tell about their life that is unique to them. Oral history enables people who might have been hidden from history to have their voices heard.

Oral history is about facts but it also records memories and opinions that are open to debate, analysis, evaluation and interpretation. This is one of the most challenging and exciting things about oral history. Memories can be selective; they can merge similar events into one and are influenced by a whole range of factors such as age, gender, social status, cultural background, and even by the interviewer. Personal testimonies can disagree with one another. The way in which people make sense of their lives is as valuable a historical source as facts.

Oral history is first-hand evidence of the past, but it is also traditions, folklore and stories passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. It can help capture the rich cultural traditions of a place or a community of people living in the UK, including different languages and dialects. Oral history preserves everyone's past for the future.

## Thinking about... Oral history

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### 4 Why do we fund oral history?

Oral history can move, explain, excite, reveal, enrich, startle and entertain. It personalises the past, making our heritage more appealing, understandable and enjoyable. But it is also history that is at risk. Memories die when people die: lost forever unless we collect and preserve them.

Spoken accounts fill gaps in the historical evidence of books and documents. They provide a more rounded view that includes all kinds of people, many otherwise hidden from standard historical accounts. Oral history can explore sensitive topics such as prejudice, fear and division, often as a way of challenging stereotypes. It can bring different cultures together, encouraging understanding and giving a voice to diverse groups and communities.

Oral history is a vital tool in understanding our recent past. It is a lasting heritage resource in its own right when made available in a public archive but it can also help enliven other heritage activity. For example, oral history:

- adds life and context to museum and gallery exhibitions, to websites and to radio and television programmes;
- forms part of community work with a wide range of people including 'reminiscence' activities with older people, which encourages a sense of self-worth and confidence;
- makes valuable educational material. Children and adults use oral history to explore their communities and question history face-to-face. Talking about the past also brings different generations together.

We support oral history projects of all sizes across the UK, from small community projects to large national ones. We can fund projects that:

- are solely focussed on creating new oral history recordings and making them widely available;
- record some new oral histories as part of a wider heritage project; and/or
- preserve and improve people's access to sound archives that already exist.

By 'oral history project' we mean a piece of work which:

- has a set time limit; and
- is additional to the usual day-to-day activities of your organisation.

We do not support core activities (i.e. what your organisation does on a daily basis).

### 5 Planning and managing your oral history project

You will need to show us that your project has clearly defined aims and that it is well thought through and realistic. If you are applying to our Your Heritage programme you will need to provide us with a detailed project plan as part of your application, describing the activities you will do, including dates, locations,

## Thinking about... Oral history

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who will be involved and what you will achieve. These activities might include consultation with the community you want to work with, training for volunteers, doing the interviews, transcribing and/or translating the recordings, creating learning resources and holding celebration events. You will need to cost each activity that makes up your project before you apply.

For a Heritage Grant you will need to outline the activities you will do to create, archive and publicise your oral histories in your first-round application. If your project is given a first-round pass, you will be asked to provide a detailed activity plan as part of your second-round application – see our guidance *Planning activities in heritage projects*.

Thinking through the questions set out in this section will help you to plan the detail of your oral history project.

### Have you got the right theme for your oral history project?

Previous projects funded by us have recorded, for example: the experiences of people working in Tyneside's shipyards; the life and times of Welsh-speaking women between 1920 and 1960; the experiences of people with disabilities living and working in a former residential institution; the changing heritage of the Irish village of Augher; the experiences of Black and ethnic minority communities in Wolverhampton; the history and impact of the oil industry in Shetland; and the personal accounts of perilous journeys made by Vietnamese refugees to the UK. These are just a few examples. Look at our website [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk) for more.

With your project, you may want to focus on a particular group, community, place, event or activity, or tackle a specific issue. We recommend that you choose a theme for your recordings that is closely defined; this will help to keep the project manageable. You will need an idea of how much material there might be on your chosen theme in order to decide how many recordings you want to make and how large your project might be.

Make sure you research your theme thoroughly to avoid repeating work already carried out or in progress. Your project may cover a new theme or fill gaps in existing records. If in doubt, check the theme of your project with the Oral History Society or The British Library Sound Archive (see Section 11 for contact details).

Once you have identified a theme you might want to break it down into clear topics, again to make sure the project is focussed and manageable. For example, if your project is about the history of a village, you could plan your interviews so that questions are focussed on certain subjects, such as:

- family life;
- local traditions;
- industry and work;
- housing; and
- leisure activities.

## Thinking about... Oral history

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When you are clear about what is the theme of your project, you can move on to the questions below.

### Is there a need or demand for your project?

You must show us in your application that there is a need for your project, i.e. that people in your community support your plans and see the value of taking part, whether as interviewers, interviewees or as partner organisations. Before you apply, talk to the people, group, institution or community you wish to involve and gather letters of support (you can submit up to six letters to support a Your Heritage application). You need to assure us that you have a sufficient number of willing interviewees so that you can meet the aims of your project. Where possible, you should also involve and get written support from your audience: that is the people who will want to use your oral history recordings once they are available.

### How will you make your recordings available to the public?

This is an important part of all oral history projects we fund. When your project is complete your recordings must be kept safely in a place where everyone can have access to them. A local archive, library, museum or heritage centre is ideal. Make sure you talk to your chosen organisation in the early stages of planning your project. There is a lot to discuss, including your deposit agreement – see Section 6 for more information on this.

If you are not passing on your recordings to a local record office, library, museum or heritage centre, how will you preserve them for the future? And how will you make the recordings available to others? You will need to show us a suitable alternative which safeguards the recordings for the future in appropriate conditions.

You should also consider other ways of giving people access to your recordings, for example, publishing transcripts with other material in a book, using the recordings in an exhibition, art installation or theatrical performance, or creating educational material or a website. We expect the projects we fund to offer a range of opportunities for people to have access to the heritage on which the project is based. The extent of the public access we expect from your project will be in proportion to the size of the grant we give.

### What benefits will your project deliver?

Your oral history project is likely to bring benefits for heritage and for people. If you are applying to our Heritage Grants programme you will be asked to state clearly what these benefits are. For example, you might be conserving the local memories of a dying local industry or training people in new skills. When thinking about the benefits of your project, think about the wider social impacts it will have, not just for the interviewees but also for interviewers, support staff and users of the material. It might encourage community cohesion by bringing together different communities or link children and older people. Through sharing resources, it might strengthen your organisation and the groups you work with. New partnerships

## Thinking about... Oral history

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between heritage organisations and services, such as health or education, might lead to further projects and fresh ways of working.

### Are your staff resources and timescales realistic?

Oral history work tends to involve a lot of people and a lot of time. Produce a breakdown of staff time and allow a contingency (normally 10%) for when things do not run according to plan. For example, a large number of interviews might be cancelled, or one of your key staff members might unexpectedly leave the project. Analyse all the risks facing your project to work out a realistic contingency.

There is no simple yardstick or formula but a full-time interviewer can be expected to complete a minimum of 50 interviews (around 250 hours) in a year. Besides recording interviews, you need to allow staff time for:

- research, preparation and training;
- building and maintaining relationships with volunteers and interviewees;
- travelling to interviews;
- making copies of the recorded interviews;
- documenting each interview, providing a written summary of the content; and
- choosing extracts from the interviews to inform learning resources.

We know from evaluations of oral history projects we have funded that applicants often underestimate the time it can take to build relationships in the community and encourage enough confidence in people to take part. Make sure your plans are realistic, especially if you are dealing with a sensitive topic or you plan to train people who have never had experience of recording oral histories before.

People also frequently underestimate the time taken to document interviews, yet it is an essential activity if your recordings are to be made widely available. On average it takes two hours to summarise a one-hour interview (2:1 ratio). Full word-for-word transcriptions take even longer (6:1). You should budget for staff time and resources in the final phase of your project to document your recordings before you pass them on to their home in a permanent collection. Your archive or museum will give you guidance about what form this documentation should take. It is not usually essential to have full transcriptions for the interviews you record. But if you want to publish extracts from the interviews you will need to allow plenty of time for at least partial transcriptions to be created.

### Is your budget realistic?

Besides staff, oral history projects require specialist equipment and consumables, such as flashcard recorders and DVDs. You may also need to budget for training for project staff and volunteers, travelling expenses, the production of publicity material, exhibitions, learning resources and miscellaneous costs. Remember

## Thinking about... Oral history

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that the value of the time that volunteers spend on your project can be counted as part of your non-cash contribution to the total costs of your project.

Every project is different but you may find the sample costs in Appendix B useful in working out your budget. You will need to get competitive tenders for any goods, works or services costing more than £10,000 that you need for your project.

### Have you talked to the experts?

To plan your project, cost it accurately and deliver the best results, you will need the input of experts. These may be experienced oral historians or experts in other fields related to your chosen topic. They need not take a direct role in recording your interviews but they might play a useful advisory role.

If your project is run by experienced people, you will need to provide evidence of their previous successful oral history projects in your application form. If you do not have a track record of running successful oral history projects, you will need to show us that you have the necessary help from outside your organisation. This could include letters of support from an oral history organisation, statutory body (e.g. a library), or other appropriate professionals. You can get advice from the Oral History Society which has representatives across the UK (see Section 11).

### Have you got the right people?

Oral history projects demand a range of skills including project management, research, interviewing (and sometimes filming), documenting, cataloguing and archiving. You need to make sure that you not only have the right people but enough of the right people's time. For example, have you allowed enough time for interviewers to record the number and type of interviews you are aiming for? Some interviews focused on a single theme might be quite short; others that take a whole-life approach with a person might last many hours and be spread across more than one day. You may need people with different skills to produce any learning and/or publicity materials.

Remember that you will need to advertise all paid posts that you ask us to fund as part of your project. If your project involves volunteers you should be realistic about how much time they will be able to give to the project and how many interviews you can reasonably expect them to complete, especially if travelling is involved.

### Have you considered the need for training?

Oral history projects offer staff and volunteers enormous scope for personal development and training. We are committed to increasing skills and involving people from all backgrounds in the UK's heritage. If you do need to train project staff or volunteers, plan and budget for recognised professional training (as approved by the Oral History Society). Additional, specialist training may be required if your project involves children, for example. The Oral History Society,

## Thinking about... Oral history

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The British Library, and the British Universities Film and Video Council run professional training courses, including using new technology (see Section 11).

Another way to meet skills gaps is to work with experienced partner organisations or to talk to groups in your area who have done oral history projects. Our country and regional teams may be able to put you in touch with such groups.

### Have you got the right equipment?

First decide whether to record people's accounts in audio or video format. Each has its merits, but videoing tends to be more expensive and complicated. You will also require computer equipment and software to document and index your recordings. You should seek up-to-date advice on the most suitable equipment, be familiar with the technical options and get quotes for costs. See Appendix A for practical advice on equipment.

Before you pass on your recordings to a public body, you will be temporarily responsible for storing them in the right conditions, probably as electronic files. You will need to make sure you have virus protection software in place.

### Have you set project targets?

You need to set targets to show how you will meet your project's aims. You could tell us about:

- the quantity of work you will undertake, for example, the number of hours of recorded interviews, the number of documented interviews, the number of recordings passed to an organisation for permanent collection, and the number of users of your recordings (if appropriate);
- the quality of work you will undertake;
- the number and quality of resources you will produce, for example, exhibition panels, learning materials, web pages; and
- the timescales in which you will complete the different project activities.

### Have you a plan in place to monitor and evaluate your project?

How will you know that you are achieving your targets and what will you do if they are not met? Larger oral history projects rely on a project manager, steering group or other experienced professional to monitor and evaluate work as it is done. You may need to allow for some top-up training for staff and volunteers or an additional recruitment drive if problems are encountered with meeting targets.

How will you know if the volunteers and others involved in your project are having a good experience? How will you know that the recordings and learning materials you produce are being used? How will you know what the users think of them? You should think about ways of gathering feedback from people taking part in the project and from users.

## Thinking about... Oral history

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Don't leave evaluation until the end of the project; if you build it in from the beginning you will be able to learn from the feedback you get and make improvements to the project in time to have a positive impact on your targets and outputs. For information on evaluation techniques see our guidance *Evaluating your HLF project*.

### 6 Making your interviews available

To receive our funding for your oral history project you will have to make your recordings available to the public. This should not be an afterthought and needs to be planned from the outset, with consideration for the following issues.

How many duplicate copies of your recordings will you make?

You should make duplicate copies of your oral history records for safety purposes and for your interviewees. Make sure you have the staff, time, materials, technical know-how and equipment to make copies of your recordings. You should store originals and copies separately, in the appropriate conditions (see Appendix A).

How will you document the interviews?

You will need to document and index your interviews. Without this, people will not be able to find and listen to your recordings. The best way is to use computer equipment and software, with back-up systems in place. Remember to talk to the organisation that will look after your recordings when the project is completed. They may be able to advise you on the best system to use (see Appendix A).

Do you have deposit agreements?

You will need to ask every interviewee to complete a clearance form consenting to their recording being deposited in a public collection (see Section 9). In some cases they might not want to allow access to the recordings for a set period of time for reasons of confidentiality or because they made comments about living individuals which might be upsetting or slanderous.

You will also need a written agreement (called a deposit agreement) from the organisation that will look after your recordings when you have finished your project.

Discuss the organisation's requirements thoroughly: in exactly what form do they require your recordings and documentation? You are responsible for providing your work in the right condition so that the organisation can make your recordings available immediately, with the minimum of extra work. We would not expect an organisation to charge you for holding your recordings or making them available to the public, but it is best to check.

You also need to be clear about the types of material you are gathering. If, besides recordings, you collect photographs, documents or artefacts, what will you do with them? Think this through clearly as you will be responsible for making all the material you collect through your project available to the public and you may

## Thinking about... Oral history

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not be able to pass on all the material to the same permanent home. Check with the organisation you choose that they meet British Standard 5454:2000 'Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents'. (If you're interested in finding out more about this standard, visit [www.bsi-global.com](http://www.bsi-global.com)).

Are there any barriers to accessing your recordings?

You need to think about how easy it will be for people to have access to your recordings in their permanent home. There might be physical, sensory, intellectual, cultural or financial barriers which prevent people from getting as much access as they would like. For example:

- how easy is it to get to the place where you have deposited the recordings?
- will people with mobility impairments be able to get into and around this building?
- will people with different sensory impairments be able to access information in a format appropriate to their needs?
- are there any charges for listening or viewing?
- are there adequate playback facilities for people to listen to or view the recordings?
- are there multi-lingual user guides available, if appropriate?
- are web resources involving audio designed so that most people can access them easily on their home computers?
- will web-based resources be useable and accessible to all, including those with disabilities?

The World Wide Web Consortium's useful 'W3C Accessibility Guidelines' are online at [www.w3.org/tr/wcag](http://www.w3.org/tr/wcag) and RNIB's Web Access Centre is available at [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

## 7 Community involvement and partnerships

Without community involvement or partnership with other organisations, oral history projects are less likely to succeed. The quality of work is at risk and costs can be needlessly high.

When assessing applications, we look for:

- written evidence of support from the community and partner organisations;
- a clear understanding of everybody's role in the project;
- sharing of staff, accommodation, equipment and other resources with partners; and
- the use of outside expertise, reducing the risks of your project going wrong.

## Thinking about... Oral history

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### 8 Working with schools and colleges

Some people running oral history projects want to involve pupils and students in the project itself, training them to take part as interviewers; others want to produce resources for teachers or students based on the recordings they have made. If you want to do either of these, you cannot work in isolation. Make sure you involve the school or college as early as possible and get specialist advice on how this part of the project will work. Allow yourself the time, resources and budget to edit and arrange your recordings and to have your material designed to make it attractive and appropriate for the intended users.

Any resources you create will need to be linked to appropriate national curricula. If you are involving children as interviewers or interviewees, you should also seek advice on child protection issues and staff training (see 'Involving children' below). To find out more about what we expect in projects that work with schools or colleges, read our guidance *Thinking about learning*.

### 9 Legal and ethical issues

**Practical risks** – You will need to identify and assess any practical risks involved, especially if your project involves younger people, people with disabilities or interviewers entering situations of potentially high risk. Consult with participating organisations and specialist advisors. Your project plan may need to take into account specific requirements such as statutory responsibility and personal security, both for the interviewer and the interviewee.

**Involving children** – If children are to be interviewers or interviewees, seek advice on security and staff training. You will find useful guidelines on the 'Legal and Ethical Issues in Interviewing Children' at [www.esds.ac.uk/aandp/create/guidelineschildren.asp](http://www.esds.ac.uk/aandp/create/guidelineschildren.asp)

**Involving people with disabilities** – If people with disabilities are to be interviewers or interviewees, consult with local groups that represent people with disabilities, such as your local disability organisations or Access Group (which can be found through the NAVCA website at [www.webdb.navca.org.uk/home.aspx](http://www.webdb.navca.org.uk/home.aspx)), and with specialist advisors. Plan and budget for any specialist equipment and training. You will find useful guidelines on the 'Legal and Ethical Issues in Interviewing People with Learning Difficulties' at [www.esds.ac.uk/aandp/create/guidelineslearningdifficulty.asp](http://www.esds.ac.uk/aandp/create/guidelineslearningdifficulty.asp)

**Employment** – When it comes to employing staff and recruiting volunteers, are your practices inclusive? We will expect you to have an equal opportunities policy in place. Remember that you will need to advertise all paid posts in your project team.

**Ethics** – You need to familiarise yourself with issues around personal confidentiality and sensitivity. Your interviewees should understand fully what is involved in the project and what you will do with their recorded memories. Try to anticipate future uses. The Oral History Society publishes ethical guidelines available at: [www.ohs.org.uk/ethics](http://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics)

## Thinking about... Oral history

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**Copyright** – To make full public use of your recordings, you will need the written consent of your interviewees. Ask them to sign a clearance and copyright form. There is a sample form on the Oral History Society's website at [www.ohs.org.uk/ethics](http://www.ohs.org.uk/ethics) You will also find a summary of those parts of current copyright law that relate to oral history.

**Data protection** – If you are processing or holding personal information about living people on a computer, you will need to be registered under the Data Protection Act. You will find further details online at [www.dataprotection.gov.uk](http://www.dataprotection.gov.uk)

### 10 Oral history project checklist

#### Planning your project

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| Do you have a well-considered theme for your project?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you researched your theme to avoid repeating previous or current work?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do your project aims meet HLF aims?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is an aim that your recordings will be stored safely and made available to all?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is there a need or demand for your project?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you talked to your regional HLF team about your project?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do you have written support from the group or community you wish to involve and/or from your audience (people who will want to listen to your recordings once available)? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you considered all the benefits your project will bring?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you talked to oral history experts?  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you talked to other relevant experts?  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are staff resources and timescales realistic?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is your budget realistic?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you got the right people (staff, volunteers)?  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you considered the need for training staff or volunteers?  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you found the right people to interview?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you got the right equipment?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you set project targets?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do you have a plan to monitor and evaluate your project?  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Thinking about... Oral history

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### Making your interviews available

How many duplicate copies of recordings will you make?

How will you document the interviews?

Do you have a deposit agreement with an archive, library, museum or other heritage centre? If not, how will you make your recordings available to the public?

Does this permanent place of deposit have the right storage conditions and does it provide the widest possible public access?

Have you decided how else the public will have access to your recordings e.g. publication, exhibition, website?

Have you allowed for the necessary time, resources and budget to produce these resources?

### Community involvement and partnerships

Are you working with community and partner organisations before, during and after your project?

Are you sharing resources and making full use of outside expertise?

### If you are working with schools or colleges

Have you involved the schools or colleges and received specialist advice?

Have you allowed for the necessary time, resources and budget to produce educational materials?

Is your project linked to national curricula?

Are you aware of the legal and ethical issues of working with children and young people?

### Legal and ethical issues

Have you identified and assessed any practical risks?

If you are involving children, have you sought specialist advice?

If you are involving people with disabilities, have you sought specialist advice?

Do you have an equal opportunities employment policy?

Have you read the ethical guidelines published by the Oral History Society?

Have you drafted a clearance and copyright form?

Are you aware of the Data Protection Act and how it affects your project?

## Thinking about... Oral history

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### 11 Sources of advice and information

#### 11.1 Publications and websites

Oral history: talking about the past

Robert Perks (Historical Association, 1995)

A brief and basic introduction.

Museum Practice

(Museums Association, 2004)

A publication available on subscription from the Museums Association. It includes practical advice, guidance and case studies, often with wider relevance than just museums. Issue 25, pp. 44–61 is dedicated to oral history.

The voice of the past: oral history

Paul Thompson (Oxford University Press, 2000).

Essential reading for any oral history project.

Doing oral history: a practical guide

Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2003).

An accessible and sensible guide in question-and-answer format.

Giving voice:

practical guidelines for implementing oral testimony projects

(Panos Institute, London, 2003)

**[www.panos.org.uk](http://www.panos.org.uk)**

**Email: [info@panos.org.uk](mailto:info@panos.org.uk)**

Of particular value for ethnic community and multicultural projects.

Mapping memories: reminiscence with ethnic minority elders

Pam Schweitzer, Ed. (Age Exchange, 2004)

Practical guidance plus stories collected in an Age Exchange project in London.

## Thinking about... Oral history

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Every tree has its roots: refugees from Vietnam and their children speak out about here and there

(Refugee Action, 2004)

**[www.refugee-action.org](http://www.refugee-action.org)**

Tel: 020 7654 7700

A booklet and CD-Rom with useful practical advice about how to set up and run an oral history project, covering documentation, language issues and resources.

Talking in class: oral history and the National Curriculum

Allan Redfern (Oral History Society, 1995)

Essential for projects planning to work with schools.

The Oral History Reader

Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, Eds. (Routledge, 2nd ed, 2006)

An essential compilation of key writings.

## 11.2 Organisations

Oral History Society

**[www.oralhistory.org.uk](http://www.oralhistory.org.uk)**

This national and international organisation is dedicated to the collection and preservation of oral history, with a network of around 30 local representatives across the UK. Its website provides useful advice on getting started, along with information on copyright law and ethics, reading lists and back issue contents of articles and reviews from the journal *Oral History*. The society runs a range of training courses.

The British Library Sound Archive Oral History Department

**[www.bl.uk/nsa](http://www.bl.uk/nsa)**

**Email: [sound-archive@bl.uk](mailto:sound-archive@bl.uk)**

Tel: 020 7412 7676

One of the largest sound archives in the world. Thousands of oral history recordings are described online at **[www.cadensa.bl.uk](http://www.cadensa.bl.uk)** and you can listen to them by appointment. The Library's CollectBritain project also provides web access to hundreds of local-interest audio recordings at **[www.collectbritain.co.uk](http://www.collectbritain.co.uk)** Training courses are also available.

## Thinking about... Oral history

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British Universities Film and Video Council

**[www.bufvc.ac.uk](http://www.bufvc.ac.uk)**

The Council offers advice on audio-visual material and runs regular training courses.

Scottish Oral History Group

Tel: 0131 667 1000

This group offers advice and details of meetings and local groups.

Scottish Life Archive

**[www.nms.ac.uk/collections\\_scottish\\_life\\_archive.aspx](http://www.nms.ac.uk/collections_scottish_life_archive.aspx)**

Tel: 0131 247 4076

The archive's collections include oral evidence of the rural, maritime, urban and industrial history of Scotland. The archive makes oral history interviews, and also acts as a repository for work undertaken by other organisations or groups.

Museum of Welsh Life

**[www.nmgw.ac.uk/mwl/collections/sound](http://www.nmgw.ac.uk/mwl/collections/sound)**

Tel: 01222 573426

The museum has a long track-record of oral history work. It can provide Welsh-speaking advice and contacts with local groups.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

**[www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk)**

The development agency working for and on behalf of museums, libraries and archives in England.

Museums Association

**[www.museumsassociation.org](http://www.museumsassociation.org)**

Tel: 020 7426 6970

Publishes 'Museums Practice' and other information about museums.

Your local record office, archive, museum or library

These organisations might already be involved in oral history and be able to offer support and advice. Useful websites include:

**[www.upyourstreet.com](http://www.upyourstreet.com)** for local community information;  
**[www.local-history.co.uk](http://www.local-history.co.uk)** to find local historical organisations;

## Thinking about... Oral history

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**[www.hmc.gov.uk/archon](http://www.hmc.gov.uk/archon)** to find local record offices;  
**[www.mda.org.uk/vlmp](http://www.mda.org.uk/vlmp)** to find local museums; and  
**[www.mla.gov.uk/links/fulllist.asp?linkcatid=2](http://www.mla.gov.uk/links/fulllist.asp?linkcatid=2)** for a list of public libraries

British Standards Institute

**[www.bsi-global.com](http://www.bsi-global.com)**

You will find details of all British Standards online including BS5454:2000, *Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents*.

Age Exchange

**[www.age-exchange.org.uk](http://www.age-exchange.org.uk)**

Tel: 020 8318 9105

Age Exchange aims to improve the quality of life for older people by emphasising the value of their memories to old and young, through pioneering artistic, educational, and welfare activities.

World Wide Web Consortium

**[www.w3.org/tr/wcag](http://www.w3.org/tr/wcag)**

W3C Accessibility Guidelines.

Data Protection, Information Commissioner

**[www.dataprotection.gov.uk](http://www.dataprotection.gov.uk)**

You should familiarise yourself with the Data Protection Act, which applies to oral history projects.

Vermont Folklife Center

**[www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/res\\_audioequip.htm](http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/res_audioequip.htm)**

Useful information on technical equipment.

## Appendix A

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### Practical interview advice

The following is a summary of the comprehensive advice offered by the Oral History Society and The British Library (see Section 11 for contact details).

#### Preparing for interviews

Start with an overall plan. Have a clear idea about what you want to find out and a list of questions on the theme of your project. Group the topics you want to cover in a logical way. Often a chronological (life story) structure is best. You can also refer to this list later to help you compare what people have said. However, do not stick rigidly to your list. It is not a script. It is there to jog your memory. Be flexible by giving each person the space and time to say what they think matters. The best interviews flow naturally and some of the most interesting things you discover will be unprompted. Of course, if the interview drifts too far from the theme, you can use your list of questions to get the interview back on track.

Before interviewing it is useful to do some background research, but make sure you do not lead the interview with your knowledge. You want your interviews to be lively, spontaneous, vivid and insightful. The best piece of advice is to allow people to be themselves.

#### Conducting interviews

Few of us are good at remembering dates and we sometimes merge similar events into a single memory. We also tend to add things we have been told by other people or have read about. So when we interview people it is important to get them to tell us about direct personal experiences (eye-witness testimony) rather than things that might have been heard second hand. Your interviewees are likely to feel nervous so be reassuring, sensitive and unhurried. Put your interviewees at ease by talking about the project: what you are doing, why you are doing it and what will happen to the recordings once they have been made. Offer them a copy of their recording and content summary. Leave a contact number and thank people for their time.

#### Interview tips

- Interview people one-to-one in their own homes. If possible chat to your interviewee by phone beforehand. Take issues of personal safety seriously.
- Choose a quiet place to make the recording and get the microphone close to the speaker.
- Use lapel microphones if your interviewees are happy to use them.
- Keep the questions short and clear (for example 'what can you remember about your grandparents?') and avoid asking leading questions that suggest answers (for example 'I suppose you must have had a poor and unhappy childhood?')
- Do not interrupt: your aim is to get the interviewee to talk.

## Appendix A

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- Listen carefully and maintain good eye contact.
- Nod and smile: positive body language is very effective. Lots of 'yes' and 'ums' on the recording can be off-putting for the listener.
- Ask questions that encourage description and reflection. Questions like 'Why?', 'How did you feel?' and 'What sort of person was she?' will help explore the interviewee's motives and feelings.
- You may also need some closed questions that encourage precise answers ('Where did you move to next?') but do not press for this information if the interviewee is struggling to recall it.
- Be aware that interviewing can be an emotional and tiring process.

### Video interviewing

There are lots of training courses available which teach all aspects of film-making using digital cameras, many of which are aimed at non-professionals. The following two websites offer online training packages about using video for interviews: [www.channel4.com/fourdocs/guides/index.html](http://www.channel4.com/fourdocs/guides/index.html) and [www.bbctraining.com](http://www.bbctraining.com)

Here are some tips specific to video recording.

- Always film interviews on a tripod; jerky interviews will look dated and unprofessional.
- Find a good, light location for the interview. Usually the living room will work best. Get the interviewee to sit in their favourite armchair and put them in the best setting. Don't worry about moving a few things around as long as you put them all back.
- Backdrops of fireplaces, paintings hanging on walls and cabinets with photographs often look good. So too does a framing with depth, so try not to sit interviewees directly against a wall.
- Don't use professional lights unless you've been trained to – they can be difficult and sometimes dangerous.
- Sit just to the right or left of the camera. Make sure that the interviewee is looking at you and not at the camera – unless this is your chosen style.
- Get the shot size you want – head and shoulders is usually the best. Tell your interviewee not to move around too much, otherwise they will move out of your camera frame.

### Advice on interview equipment

Technology, formats and prices change regularly. Get up-to-date advice about the most suitable recording equipment from the Oral History Society.

## Appendix A

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For audio recording, solid-state flashcard recorders are recommended (cassette, or analogue, is virtually obsolete and minidisk equipment is not recommended as it is a format unlikely to be around for much longer). You should record in PCM WAV format, not MP3, as WAV files are uncompressed files, which means that all the data from the recording is stored. Once the flashcard is full download the .wav files to a computer via a cardreader plugged into USB2 port on the computer. You should download, rename, burn to a DVD or CDR, and make an additional copy as an MP3 for playback and security purposes (if you do not have a digital editing programme such as SoundForge, you can download two programmes free from the internet which can convert .wavs to MP3: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> or <http://winlame.sourceforge.net/download.php>). When you have made copies of your interviews and you have checked the copied files are not corrupted, it is then possible to wipe the flashcard ready for the next recording.

The advent of cheap, miniature and easy-to-use digital video (DV) cameras in recent years has revolutionised the audio-visual market. It is now possible to buy a good quality DV camera for under £500. Professional cameras cost more. Online the BBC's training pages give a free guide to the more advanced DV cameras ([www.bbctraining.com](http://www.bbctraining.com)). The other vital pieces of equipment are a tripod and good external microphones (such as a lapel microphone), which gives better results than one built into the recorder – good sound is very important.

### General tips on CD-Rs and DVD-Rs

- Avoid cheap CD-Rs or DVD blanks that can be bought for a few pence each. They are of low quality and may well not last.
- Avoid using CD-RW or DVD-RW. Rewritable discs are unlikely to be as compatible on different machines as CD-R or DVD-R.
- Make back-up and/or playback copies on a different brand of CD-R or DVD-R to the Master version. This is to spread the risk in case one batch or brand of disc is found to have problems.
- For all discs ask for thermal printable surface discs, which have an extra layer of protection between any printed or written labels on the CD and the area that contains the data.
- When labelling a Master CD/DVD make sure there is as little writing or printing as possible to prevent any possible damage to the data as the CD/DVD ages.

### Specification for computer hardware for processing digital files

- **RAM** – 512MB minimum; 1GB recommended.
- **Operating system** – Windows XP or later versions. Other systems would probably work but you may run into compatibility problems at the archive/storage site.
- **Processor** – any computer with a processor at least 1GHz is acceptable.

## Appendix A

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### Documenting interviews

When an interview is completed you should first make a copy of your original recordings. You might also want to budget for an extra copy to give to the interviewee. Now you are ready to document your recordings by typing a summary of the interview's content. Start by noting the basic information: the interviewee's full name, address and date of birth, and the place and date of the interview. Then list each significant theme as it occurs on the recording cross-referenced to the time-coded track-mark on the digital recording. You may also wish to collect a portrait photograph of each interviewee.

Documenting each interview is time-consuming but essential if recordings are to be made widely available. On average it takes two hours to summarise a one-hour interview (2:1 ratio). If you wish to produce transcriptions of recordings (the full interview typed out word-for-word), bear in mind that these are expensive. Allow six hours to transcribe a one-hour interview (6:1 ratio). You will also need special equipment or transcription software (such as [www.nch.com.au/scribe](http://www.nch.com.au/scribe) or [www.startstop.com/home.asp](http://www.startstop.com/home.asp) both of which allows you to use a remote foot pedal). Full transcriptions of all your recordings are not essential if you have a summary of the interview's contents.

### Using interviews

If you are producing a publication or exhibition from the oral history interviews, make sure you have planned sufficient time, budget and resources. Selection and editing take a great deal of time. There are a number of digital editing software packages that will run on a personal computer (such as Adobe Audition at [www.adobe.com/products/audition/main.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/audition/main.html) and Sound Forge at [www.mediasoftware.sonypictures.com/products/soundforgefamily.asp](http://www.mediasoftware.sonypictures.com/products/soundforgefamily.asp)). These allow you to produce edited audio for exhibition soundtracks or CD/DVD publications.

## Appendix B

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### Example costs for an oral history project

The project budget will vary according to the number of paid and/or volunteer staff; how much training and research is required; the number of recorded interviews; the travel involved; the number of interviews to be documented; the timeframe; and the type and number of outputs (e.g. exhibitions, publications, websites).

Use the following list to help you think about your project budget. You may not need to budget for everything in the list. For example, you may already have equipment or you may be able to share or borrow it from a partner in your project.

#### Costs

Where costs are given they are exclusive of VAT and are estimates at February 2008. These prices are given here as a guide only and you should research up-to-date costs for the equipment you will need to deliver your project.

#### Staff (people not already on the payroll)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Project Manager  | £23k–£33k per annum plus on-costs                                   |
| Interviewers/Fieldworkers  | £20k–£28k per annum plus on-costs                                   |
| Administrative/Clerical Support  | £18k–£23k per annum plus on-costs                                   |
| Technical Support  | £18k–£28k per annum plus on-costs                                   |
| Plus possibly education officers, cataloguers, web authors                       |   |
| Plus translation services<br>(assume minimum of 12:1 ratio)                      | c.£50 per hour  |
| Value of volunteer labour<br>(one of your non-cash contributions to the project) | £150 per day for skilled labour<br>£50 per day for unskilled labour |

#### Recruitment costs

Local, regional, national advertising

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Interview expenses

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#### Office overheads

Office space, rent, heating/lighting, security specifically linked to your project

See our guidance  
*Understanding full cost recovery.*

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## Appendix B

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### Equipment

|   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| Solid-state flashcard recorders<br>(see: <a href="http://www.inquitaudo.co.uk">www.inquitaudo.co.uk</a> ) | c.£350+                |
| Flash cards (1Gb)   | c.£20 each             |
| Video recorders (DV)  | £500+ plus tripod etc. |
| Microphones (e.g. lapel microphones,<br>two per recorder plus spares)                                     | c.£90 each             |
| Playback decks for office use   | c.£500+                |
| Dubbing/copying equipment<br>(e.g. MD-CDR decks)  | c.£400+                |
| Computer with software to index/edit/<br>catalogue recordings   | £500+                  |
| Computer/printer/software for transcription   | c.£800+                |
| Additional back-up hard drive   | c.£100+                |
| Upgraded sound card for PC  | c.£500                 |
| Scanner   | c.£200+                |
| Stills digital camera   | c.£160                 |
| Storage furniture (lockable)  |                        |

### Consumables

Stationery

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### Travel for staff and volunteers

Allow a minimum of two visits  
per planned interview

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### Training of staff and volunteers

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Oral History Society-recognised<br>interviewing course (Recommend one<br>introductory day plus minimum two<br>follow-up/feedback days) | c.£350 per day plus<br>room hire, catering, travel |
|--|--|

IT training and support

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Specialist training as required

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### Meetings

Travel, room hire, catering, for project  
meetings, volunteer meetings, advisory  
meetings

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## Appendix B

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### Publicity

Leaflets/introductory publicity

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### Outcomes

Website design, authoring and hosting

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Exhibition design, layout, construction

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DVD or CD and/or print publication

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Production of learning resources

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### Miscellaneous costs

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Data Protection notification | £40 |
|------------------------------|-----|

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|                                 |        |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| Oral History Society membership | £30 pa |
|---------------------------------|--------|

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### Contingency

Add 10% of the total project costs

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## Appendix C

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### Our grant programmes

#### General programmes

##### **Heritage Grants (above £50,000)**

This is our main programme for grants over £50,000 for all kinds of heritage, and is open to all not-for-profit organisations. All applications go through two rounds (unless you are unsuccessful at the first round) and you can apply for development funding to help develop your project to the second round. Assessment takes three months at each round and the outcome of your application will then be decided at the next available decision meeting.

##### **Your Heritage (£3000–£50,000)**

This is our general small-grants programme for all types of heritage project. It is a flexible programme, open to all not-for-profit organisations, but is particularly designed for voluntary and community groups and first-time applicants, with a much simpler application process and a shorter assessment timetable (10 weeks).

#### Targeted programmes

##### **Young Roots (£3000–£25,000)**

Young Roots is a targeted programme for 13–25-year-olds who want to explore their heritage and develop skills. Young Roots projects stem directly from young people's interests and ideas, harnessing their creativity and energy, building their confidence and helping them work with others.

##### **Parks for People (£250,000–£5 million)**

Parks for People supports the regeneration of existing public parks, garden squares, walks and promenades across the UK.

##### **Townscape Heritage Initiative (£500,000–£2 million)**

Through our Townscape Heritage Initiative we make grants to help communities regenerate the historic parts of their towns and cities. The programme is designed for areas of particular social and economic need throughout the UK. Partnerships are funded to carry out repairs and other works to a number of historic properties within a defined area, some of which may be in private ownership, and improve the quality of life for all those who live, work or visit there.

## Appendix C

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### **Landscape Partnerships (£250,000–£2 million)**

Landscape Partnerships is our primary vehicle for promoting heritage conservation as an integral part of rural regeneration, delivered by partnerships representing a range of heritage and community interests to tackle the needs of landscape areas that may be in different ownerships. Each scheme is based round a portfolio of smaller projects, which together provide a varied package of benefits to an area, its communities and visitors.

### **Repair Grants for Places of Worship (£10,000 upwards)**

Through this programme we help conserve and sustain heritage at risk through urgent repairs to places of worship. The UK-wide scheme is delivered through four programmes in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Repair Grants for Places of Worship in England and Scotland are awarded up to £250,000 and in Northern Ireland and Wales up to £100,000.

You can get more information by:

- downloading application materials from **[www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)**;
- emailing **[enquire@hlf.org.uk](mailto:enquire@hlf.org.uk)**;
- phoning our helpline on **020 7591 6042**;
- contacting us by textphone on **020 7591 6255**; or
- using Text Direct **18001 020 7591 6042**.

## Our offices

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### East of England

Terrington House  
13–15 Hills Road  
Cambridge CB2 1NL  
Phone: 01223 224870  
Fax: 01223 224871

### East Midlands

Chiltern House  
St Nicholas Court  
25–27 Castle Gate  
Nottingham NG1 7AR  
Phone: 0115 934 9050  
Fax: 0115 934 9051

### London

7 Holbein Place  
London SW1W 8NR  
Phone: 020 7591 6000  
Fax: 020 7591 6001

### North East

St Nicholas Building  
St Nicholas Street  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 1RF  
Phone: 0191 255 7570  
Fax: 0191 255 7571

### North West

9th Floor  
82 King Street  
Manchester M2 2WQ  
Phone: 0161 831 0850  
Fax: 0161 831 0851

### Northern Ireland

51–53 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8FE  
Phone: 028 9031 0120  
Fax: 028 9031 0121

### Scotland

28 Thistle Street  
Edinburgh EH2 1EN  
Phone: 0131 225 9450  
Fax: 0131 225 9454

### South East England

7 Holbein Place  
London SW1W 8NR  
Phone: 020 7591 6000  
Fax: 020 7591 6001

### South West

Trinity Court  
Southernhay East  
Exeter EX1 1PG  
Phone: 01392 223950  
Fax: 01392 223951

### Wales

Hodge House  
Guildhall Place  
Cardiff CF10 1DY  
Phone: 029 2034 3413  
Fax: 029 2034 3427

### West Midlands

Bank House  
8 Cherry Street  
Birmingham B2 5AL  
Phone: 0121 616 6870  
Fax: 0121 616 6871

### Yorkshire and the Humber

4th floor  
Carlton Tower  
34 St Paul's Street  
Leeds LS1 2QB  
Phone: 0113 388 8030  
Fax: 0113 388 8031

### Head office

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