

Kent's Sporting Memories



Kent's Sporting Memories: An Introduction to Oral History

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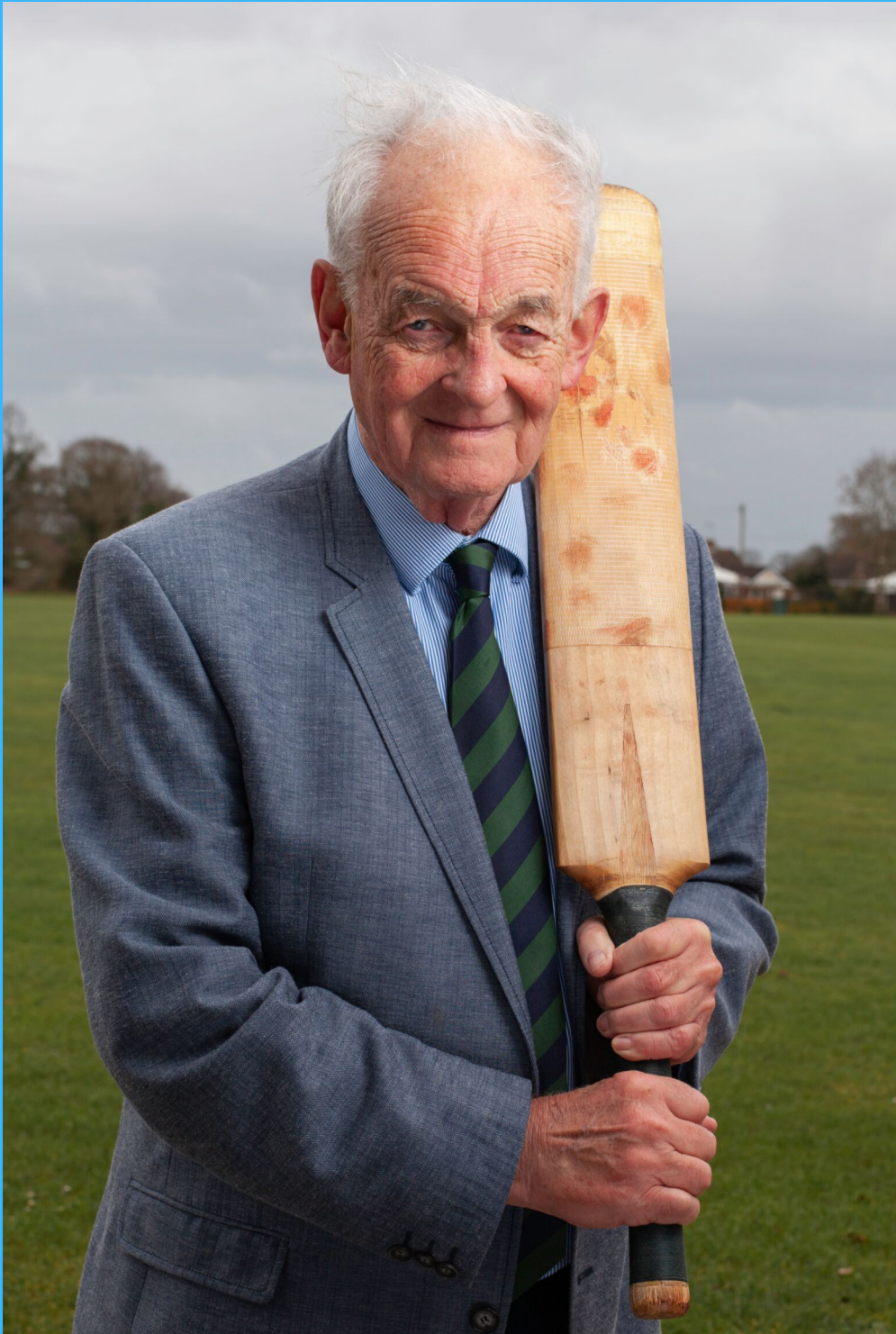
The Project

Kent's Sporting Memories aims to record and preserve the post-war history of sport in east Kent using oral history. By raising into focus people's memories and lived experiences of sport in the region, we intend to build a fuller picture of east Kent's sporting past – including some of its traditions, places, social practices, events and icons – and to illuminate the ways in which this sporting and social landscape has changed over time. It is our hope that the project will give people the opportunity to discover and share the history of sport in east Kent for generations to come.

Background: Beginning in 2019, the two-year funded Kent's Sporting Memories project is being carried out on behalf of Kent Sport, the Active Partnership for Kent, and in coordination with the Sporting Memories Foundation. It is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Our online archive is hosted by Omeka, a purpose-built site for online archives. Each oral history collection will focus on an individual's life and experience as a way of building up a detailed and multi-layered picture of the local sporting past. Each collection will usually contain an audio recording of the oral history interview, a summary of the interview, audio excerpts of the interview with accompanying transcripts, a contemporary photo of the interviewee, and any supplementary materials that are available, including old photos, newspaper articles or match programmes. The archive can be found at:

<https://sportingmemorieskent.omeka.net/>



'We all played one particular game and that bonded us, brought us all together. They became your friends, and they've been lifetime friends, from all walks of life actually.' - Bill Day

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What is Oral History?

Oral history can be defined variously:

- The recording of an individual's memories, experiences and life stories.
- The recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information based on the personal experience and opinions of the interviewee.
- An important source of information about the past.

Oral history is both a process (the act of interviewing and recording) and a product that is created (the audio file and/or the transcript).

Oral history is a widely-used and accessible research practice, used by academic researchers, family historians, schools and community groups. It can provide one of the richest sources of information for the recent past, and is by nature creative, sociable and co-operative.

Unlike other types of interviewing, like journalism, oral history is about a distinctive engagement with the past. As an oral historian, you are creating a source about the past that will be used in the future - a first-hand record of an individual's memories, life stories and experiences.



'In the seventies I think Folkestone Sports Centre led the market really, in the development of multi-sports, and it was very popular, and still is. I mean the main badminton clubs in the area still play there, the squash clubs play there still, and when I played badminton there and I was working there as well, you know, the place was absolutely heaving. The bar was always full at night when the sport had finished and that sort of thing.' - Hilary Casey

Why do Oral History?

From the friends you'll make, to the cups of tea (and possibly biscuits) you'll consume, to the fascinating stories you'll hear, the reasons to carry out oral history are numerous. Here are a few more:

- Oral history fills in gaps in the historical record; it can provide new information, alternative explanations, and unique and personal insights into the past.
- Oral history creates a record for now and for the future. By recording stories and first-hand experiences now, we are capturing a valuable resource for future use.
- Oral history testimonies are often rich in meaning. By shedding light on the not always apparent bond between individual experience and the wider processes of history, they can help us explore how we understand our lives on a personal level but also on broader social and cultural levels.
- Oral history can change what we think about the past because it can be used to document the lives of people often marginalized in 'authorised versions' of history - the working classes, women, and ethnic minorities, for example. In doing so, it can challenge elite and official definitions of what counts as 'conventional' or 'proper history'.
- Oral history can also contribute to wider social purposes - it is a collaborative effort, bringing together interviewers and interviewees, communities and the wider world.



'We did have some quite nice friends and supporters who would help, you know, and we had several men who would come to be linesmen for us...Hamstreet Ladies' football was quite respected in those days' - Jean Penfold

The Interview: Questions

- It helps to have an idea of the topics you want to cover. With some background research (or a preliminary conversation), you can gain a better understanding of the subject and will be able to ask more informed questions.
- Prepare an outline of topics rather than a list of questions. This will help to keep the interview feeling natural and avoid it turning into a stilted Q&A session.
- Start off with some basic information about the interviewee: their name and place and date of birth, for example. Think of this as labeling the interview.
- You could then structure the interview either 1) chronologically - starting with the person's childhood and working through their life and experiences. Or 2) thematically - by focusing on one particular event or theme, such as their experience of sport at school, or village cricket.
- Try to use 'open-ended' questions (Why was that? How did that make you feel? Was that typical?) and encourage the person to explore, evaluate, or to reflect on how they felt at the time and after.
- Ask for clarification and confirmation of specific details, such as dates and names, if these are not clear.
- In general, questions should be neutral in tone, but don't be frightened of raising difficult topics so long as they are dealt with carefully and sensitively.



'I mean the scene was a lot smaller than the people who windsurfed...but in terms of having it as a social thing as well, people did come and do it and go away again, but there were a few of us who became friends and ended up as a group of friends who thought we were surfers and, you know, you made sure you always drove your car around with the board on the roof, you know, just to let everyone know!' - Mark Steeple

The Interview: Some Tips

You only get what you ask for: Prepare for an interview where possible. Try looking at historical sources, other oral histories, or having a preliminary conversation with the interviewee. Think about the questions you want to ask and the topics you want to explore, but be open to any new angles, topics or experiences that may come up during the interview.

Be interested: Typically the people who you interview won't be used to being questioned about their lives. They may lack confidence or think their lives and experiences are just 'ordinary'. Demonstrate that you are really interested and encourage them to open up through eye contact and positive body language.

Listen and try not to interrupt: Let people tell their story. This is probably the most difficult thing to do. There might be points you want to clarify, or different topics you wish to explore, but try to wait until they have finished speaking. An oral history interview is not a conversation - you are there to gather their story, not for them to hear yours. That said, there'll be plenty of time for conversation when the recorder is turned off!

Be respectful: No matter how much research you've done, you won't know it all. Bill or Jean, Hilary or Sid's experience and way of seeing things is just that - their own experience and perspective. Of course, some people's memories are more vivid than others, and the passage of time does sometimes mean that people will make mistakes. However, you should always show the person you are interviewing that you have respect for them and for their memories.



'When I first played football, all these grown men were very supportive of us kids, and they helped us and I'm eternally grateful to them...Mixing with such nice people. And being treated so nicely. I can only look back on it as a wonderful time in my life really.' - Sid Gittens

Getting Organised

Preparation:

- Have you done some background research on the subject matter and historical context?
- Have you come up with a list of interview prompts to keep the conversation going?
- If this is your first interview, have you practiced interviewing a friend or family member?
- Have you organised a quiet place to carry out the interview?

Before you leave home, check you have the following items:

- Charged audio recorder and spare batteries.
- List of questions/interview prompts.
- Recording consent form.
- Information sheet to explain your project.
- Address and contact number of person you will be interviewing.
- Pen and paper.



'I think speed was one of my major assets. I had a style because back then it was part of the fashion – I used to box with very wide hands. Just wait, and move. When I become a senior, it wasn't working! So I tightened up, and then they hit you on the gloves maybe, and then you'll be able to counterpunch them, so yeah, speed was one of my best assets.' - Harry Slater

Reading and Resources

East Midlands Oral History Archive has produced a fantastic series of information sheets for people getting started in oral history:
<https://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/infosheet.html>

Manchester Histories has a great oral history toolkit, created by Dr Fiona Cosson:
<https://manchesterhistories.co.uk/getinvolved/toolkits>

The Oral History Society website contains lots of valuable information and resources for budding oral historians:
<https://www.ohs.org.uk/>

The Institute of Historical Research has a page dedicated to the history and development of oral history:
https://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/oral_history.html

An online guide to the oral history collections housed at the British Library: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-history>

British historian and sociologist Paul Thompson played a leading role in the creation of the Oral History Society and the international oral history movement. His seminal work, *The Voice of the Past*, explains how oral history has transformed both the content of history and the processes of writing history. A brilliant starting point and overview for students of oral history: Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).