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BRITISH ENTERTAINMENT HISTORY PROJECT

Bulletin no 10

August 2021

Dear all

The Board of Management with support from David Sharp (who has so much knowledge about the history of the History Project and its relationship with the BFI) is still zooming and getting on with work behind the scenes of digitising, transcribing and checking/correcting our records. Our meeting was postponed for various reasons, hence this bulletin is dated July, not June

Update by Chair.

Mike Dick reported that by chance he had a useful encounter with a retired accountant who had worked for charities and was willing to give accountancy support to the BEHP. This was good news!

He and Sue had had a most enlightening meeting with Alban Webb of the BBC /University of Sussex archive project which planned to launch the next phase of the project website, "Entertaining the Nation", on 12 July.

<https://connectedhistoriesofthebbc.org>

We agreed that we would share the Entertainment roles/job titles taxonomy devised by Sue and Elaine for the BEHP with the Sussex project who had also produced a taxonomy, but this was limited to BBC roles. Nevertheless, we have a lot in common.

They had agreed to share the transcript for the Dennis Main Wilson interview (produced by the BBC's KALDI speech to text software) with Mike so that he could compare the qualities of the system with Otter transcription service currently used by BEHP. If favourable we could request that the BBC consider transcribing all the BEHP interviews relevant to the BBC.

Sue has produced a list of all BBC relevant interviews with a note re transcript status and shared these with Robert Seatter of the BBC History and Alban Webb of Sussex. All these thoughts to be followed up at the BBC/Sussex PAB meeting scheduled for September.

On another important matter of membership and raising awareness of the BEHP, Mike is planning to give talks to the appropriate divisions of BECTU/Prospect about the BEHP to encourage new membership.

Transcripts

Update and use of OTTER – Mike reported that the 21 sided Phillip Donnellan interview transcript had at last been completed – a great achievement by Emma Feather - many thanks, Emma

Mike advocated getting our interview with Allan Prior transcribed as soon as possible and recommended to BBC/Sussex project as he is a very significant figure in BBC Entertainment. Emma Feather is going to be asked to do this one. Ros Cranston has finished her first batch and will now do Margaret Thomson's interview; A new volunteer – Helen Hawken, an Executive Producer and writer who has worked mainly in broadcast television – may also do some proof reading.

David Sharp had made contact with Sarah Currant at Reubens library and this had turned up a few missing transcripts - 3 hard copy transcripts from the BFI. David will scan them for upload in due course:

34 John Taylor

49 Ron Craigen

204 Dennis Main Wilson

Furthermore he has uploaded transcripts for :

76 Cyril Crowhurst

87 Geoffrey Conway

309 Aubrey Singer (pdf)

410 Joe Busuttil and postcards of Joe's art

Photos for:

71 Peter Handford

180 Rudolph Cartier and an article.

442/474 Beddow family photo

445 Arthur Wooster

Credits and other information for:

554 Tony Sloman credits

727 Stanley Watkins: context document.

406 Henry Lewes article

David is waiting ideas as to where to locate the transcript 132 Frances Cockburn and 152 John Halas which has an uploading fault but is ready to go.

Finance - Current situation

£17112 in account.

MD reported that the 2019 – 20 accounts had been requested by Companies House.

Shooting new interviews – the revised list

In order to make the list more manageable and to set achievable targets it was decided to divide the list into 2 parts - **Priority** (based on our agreed interview criteria) and **Potential**.

Quality of digitised copies of interviews

MD had expressed concern re the audio quality of some of the digitised interviews we held. All had agreed to do random checking and report back their assessment of the quality – all reported no problems, but Nick Gilbey wrote:

I did a little demo about use of audio tracks when conducting interviews. One of the distractions, when listening to the recordings on the website, is the excessive amount of echo. This can be caused by the surroundings - don't interview someone in the bathroom. Usually- I suspect - it is the fact that both personal mikes are kept open and are digitised/uploaded with the volume of both tracks at the same level -even when only one person is speaking.

I am not suggesting that we should go back to the original recordings now but we should work out the best way to record and upload to the website.

Here is the link to the demo using an interview I did with Paul Fox last year.

Not ideal recording conditions as I did the I/V in his conservatory which can be echoey. (Importance of close-miking) It wasn't an ideal place but it seemed the better than outdoors - Covid wise.

<https://vimeo.com/567407179/117d37218b>

Nick has agreed to write “best practice guidelines for recording and digitising interviews for the Project

MD commented that in general the quality of the original recordings that we have inherited is very good. He agreed it would be useful to check with the two main digitisers about their equipment

BBC/Sussex project partnership

As a follow up from the meeting with Alban Webb Sue Malden and Mike Dick had a meeting with Ben Jackson of Sussex University. He was most generous with his advice re database management and metadata.

Honorary member

We were very pleased that Sir Sydney Samuelson has agreed to be the BEHP's first honorary member

Hard drives

Not a lot to report. MD was continuing to add Hard drive numbers to interview information on the database. All the hard drives were currently with Mike so he is the only one who can check and upload this vital information. Once completed we will need to implement our archive security plans and make 2 copies to be stored in different locations, but the interview numbering

Theatre Museum oral history collection

Sue has heard from V&A Theatre & Performance Enquiry Service

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/t/theatre-and-performance/> with the good news that these interviews with people who worked in the Theatre are searchable on the National Art Library catalogue: <https://nal-vam.on.worldcat.org/discovery> and they will continue to be held in the Theatre and Performance collection and will be accessible at our new premises in Stratford, East London in 2023. BEHP has interviews that relate to this collection – For example they hold the Wendy Toye archive, BEHP has an interview with herv

Sue responded by suggesting some cross promotion in the future

Database/Website

September (when the support for DRUPAL 7 is due to end) is drawing close. So we need discussions to finalise our database requirements with Alison of Redport to take place soon.

ACTT Films

Mike is planning to research into ACT Films to see how many of the HP interviewees worked on these films. Any information from members is most welcome.

BBC centenary/marketing of the archive

We need to decide what we want to do with our collection to mark the 100th anniversary of the BBC – all suggestions are welcome. We have begun preparation by identifying all the BBC related interviews we hold and prioritise them for transcription so that they will be more readily accessible as projects are developed to celebrate the BBC's centenary in 2022.

Other Projects

We have been approached by another oral history project exploring the working lives of London's film projectionists.

After 2-3 delays due to Covid this Lottery Heritage Funded project is finally set to go ahead starting in September 2021 at the British Film Institute. The team from *digital-works* are looking for any projectionists who worked in London who would be willing to come and talk about their working lives as projectionists. For those that have not come forward already this is your chance to share your history so we hope you do get in touch. They are looking for people who worked across the range of film screenings from the big central London cinemas to small fringe events.

They would welcome African, diaspora Caribbean and projectionists from the Indian subcontinent, as well as anyone involved in LGBT screenings.

To find out more please visit..

<https://www.reelstories.org.uk>

Or contact Matthew Rosenberg on

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Mike and Sue Aug 2021