

## Reading Sheffield Annual Report October 2011-October 2012

- 1. Change of Officers:** Kate McCullough has stepped down as Treasurer during the year and Loveday Herridge has taken her place. Sue Roe has been Secretary throughout the year and sent regular minutes of each meeting to all participants.
- 2. Accounts:** Currently the account stands at £168 credit. Income this year has come from 8 x £5 subscriptions from members. There is an application for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for forthcoming projects, see 3(e) and 4 below, and we await the outcome. There has been no expenditure on the Project from the Reading Sheffield account.

### **3. Reading Sheffield 1945-1965**

The aim of this project was to collect, record and deposit the oral histories of post-war reading from 50 residents of Sheffield, now over 70. We aimed to complete the project in twelve months. We have collected all the interviews, placed them on CDs or DVDs as requested by Sheffield City Archives. We have transcribed just under half of the interviews .

**a) Training and equipment:** Following the award of £3,420 from The Sheffield Town Trust on 2011, we were able to buy 5 HP Zoom digital audio recorder and to pay for training as oral historians from Vox Pop, a professional training organisation in August and September of 2011. We have paid for volunteers' CRB check from our subscriptions.

**b) Recruitment:** We have built on our initial recruitment through the Sheffield Libraries' Readers Day on 10th October 2010 and during 2011 and 2012 have recruited 52 potential interviewees, 50 of whom have now been interviewed. We recruited interviewees from

- The Mobile and Housebound Library Services who took out our leaflets and did much to encourage appropriate users to take part in our project. We are very grateful to them for this encouragement which has resulted in some invaluable oral histories.
- We have visited various clubs for the elderly including Greenhill Methodist's Meeting Place, Wadsley's Slightly Spritely Club and City Library book groups. We have also recruited through U3A, various lunch clubs and the Rotary Club. We broadcast an appeal for interviewees on Radio Sheffield.

The greatest number of our interviewees came through the library services. We trained 15 interviewers and 12 conducted interviews.

**c) The interviews:**

- Some of our interviewees preferred to have their interviews summarised rather than recorded so in total we have had 42 recorded interviews and the rest have been summarised.
- 11 of the 50 interviewees are men.
- In addition to the interviews conducted in Sheffield we have conducted interviews in Cumbria and Wetherby from Sheffield residents who have moved away.

d) **Celebrating the contribution of our interviewees.** Thanks to the funding of Sheffield Hallam University (one of the two repositories of our histories), we were able to hold a celebratory event for our interviewees. 25 of our 50 interviewees were able to come. It was held at Sheffield Quaker Meeting House. A mid-day meal was provided. One of our interviewees was publicly interviewed by one of our interviewers, Trish Cooper, a journalist from Radio Sheffield. This was followed by group discussions of shared tastes for books in groups defined by which libraries were used by participants. In the afternoon we showed the film *A Book in Hand* made by Sheffield Libraries in 1956. This was followed by a quiz derived from the data in the interviews we have collected. We had displays of books enjoyed by participants, libraries used and a map showing the distribution of our interviews. The day was hugely enjoyed by all as demonstrated by the numerous letters and phone calls we have received from participants.

e) **Film of the Celebratory Day**

We are very grateful to Sheffield Hallam University for funding the filming of the day by the professional documentary film-maker, Michael Watts. They hope to find more funding to turn the footage into a 10 minute documentary of the project.

f) **Transcriptions of interviews**

During the year Rebecca Arnott, a Museum Studies postgraduate approached Reading Sheffield and offered the transcribing skills of herself and a group of fellow postgraduate students to transcribe our interviews. They have done nine transcriptions for no payment. Sheffield Hallam University then kindly offered to pay for another six to be done. In addition, interviewers and another volunteer have transcribed another six so we have transcribed 22 of the 42 audio records.

g) **Analysing the contribution of our interviewees:**

- Though it is too early to report back on analysis of the data collected, Mary Grover is giving a talk on what the interviews reveal about library use at the Off the Shelf festival in Sheffield's Ecclesall Library on Oct 19<sup>th</sup>.
- A research subgroup has been formed to explore a history of reading in Sheffield in the twentieth century using the data collected by the project.

Sylvia Dunkley, (recently Lord Maryor of Sheffield) whose PhD was based on oral histories of domestic workers in Sheffield has joined this group in the last year.

#### **4. Reading Sheffield cross-generational oral history project in schools**

Rebecca Arnott (see 4.d) has joined the Reading Sheffield group. She and Mary Grover are constructing funding bids to conduct an oral history project in Sheffield schools. This project will encourage children to interview their parents and grandparents about their reading. The interviews will be recorded on video. This is in the planning process. Two schools have already expressed interest in being involved in this project.

#### **5. Links with the History Dept of Sheffield Hallam University**

Rebecca Arnott and Mary Grover are working to foster these.

- Alison Twells, from the History Dept of Sheffield Hallam University, has offered us the opportunity to have a web page on the website that she is setting up as a result of a Community Heritage grant for putting local history resources on line.
- Third years history students are being given the option to work with the families of those already interviewed to trace connections between the reading of three different generations within the same family.

### **Conclusions**

We would not have been able to conduct our project without the financial support of both Sheffield Hallam University and The Sheffield Town Trust. We are grateful for this support and for the professional skills of Vox Pop.

The group of interviewers have kept in constant touch through regular meetings (roughly one every six weeks). We have learned a great deal by comparing our interviewing experiences and helping each other with the technical difficulties that occasionally arise. The range of skills amongst our interviewing team has been immensely fruitful.

The ways in which our project has enriched the lives of those interviewed has been one of the great rewards of the project. Many of our readers are very isolated people. Their enthusiasm for the celebratory day and their awareness of the riches produced by the project show how great a need there is for the intelligence of the elderly to be stimulated and for communities to be brought into being which enable the elderly to share their interests. There was also a high degree of pleasure given to these elderly participants that their lives have value to the community of Sheffield as a whole, and will have for generations to come as a result of the archive we are creating.

As a group we have immensely enjoyed participating in this project and witnessing the value of the project in the lives of the people who have been involved.