

original concentration on web access for the educational community will be broadened to full unrestricted access, assuming of course that these rights can be negotiated, which for some ASR content is far from straightforward.

Conclusion

We can no longer expect users to come to us: we must go to them. If we don't embrace web access to oral history we will be marginalising ourselves from funding and from a vital presence amongst the next generation. A survey of oral history web presence in the UK suggests we must better understand the web ourselves (through skills-acquisition and improved training), and it is clear we need to explore better ways of explaining online access to our interviewees as part of an assessment of the impact of the web on interview relationships, though generationally this will be arguably a diminishing concern (at least in the developed world). Our own experience at the British Library encourages us to recognise that the web can offer a myriad of modes of engagement, from showcasing to full access, all of which we can fruitfully explore, and that we should not be too precious about how users come at the material as long as user agreements and contextualising data are in place. We must also begin to reflect on the opportunities that digitisation and web access provide for creating new linkages and fresh ways of thinking.⁶⁰

The knowledge we gained through CollectBritain has led us to a more closely interpreted model of web production through two sites aimed primarily at schools, which have attracted very high numbers of online users.⁶¹ Food Stories drew on hundreds of interviews about Britain's food industry and culture to investigate how food relates to identity, cultural diversity, the environment, technology, farming, shopping and travel.⁶² Audio clips and transcripts are presented through a series of themes in animated settings, supported by historical context, 'go deeper' sections, glossaries and teachers' notes. Sounds Familiar, another learning web resource, built directly on the popularity and map-based functionality of the CollectBritain site to introduce students to UK accents and dialects.⁶³ Featuring 76 longer audio recordings and over 600 short clips, the site includes interpreted learning packages about language change, plus in-depth case studies focussing on three varieties of contemporary spoken English: received pronunciation (RP), Geordie dialect, and 'ethnic English'. An important new 'Web 2.0' experimental feature - 'Your Voices' - encourages schools to record and contribute their own recordings to the BL's collections. Whilst this is still being assessed it is clear that, as the web itself becomes an interactive multi-media archive of people's lives created by themselves, we will need to renegotiate our roles as archivists and guardians, to think beyond our own governing principles of artefact, provenance and discrete collection.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Frisch op.cit.

⁶¹ The *Sounds Familiar* site had 165,000 hits in its launch month.

⁶² <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/foodstories/index.html>

⁶³ <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/index.html>

⁶⁴ Rob Perks, "'Messiah with the microphone?': Oral historians, technology and sound archives", in Donald Ritchie (ed) *The Oxford Handbook to Oral History*, OUP, forthcoming 2009; J-P Wallot and N Fortier, 'Archival science and oral sources', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge, first edition, 1998; Ellen Swain, 'Oral History in the archives: Its documentary role in the twenty-first century', *American Archivist*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2003, pp.139-58; Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 79-84, 171-9 and 245-51; Rob Perks, 'Bringing new life to archives: oral history, sound archives and accessibility', *IASA Journal*, no.13 (July 1999), pp.21-26.

On the Trail of the Telegraphone

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Fact and fiction have tended to intermingle in accounts of “the oldest surviving magnetic recording in the world” (Daniel, Mee & Clark 1999: 20), which is today chiefly remembered for featuring the voice of Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria. We owe this sound document – which also happens to be the oldest of the three extant recordings of His Majesty’s voice (and can be listened to online at www.akustische-chronik.at) – to the so-called Telegraphone. Invented by the Danish engineer Valdemar Poulsen (1869-1942) in 1898, it was to become the forerunner of modern answering machines and tape recorders.

As is well known, the cylinder model of the Telegraphone was first presented to the general public on the occasion of the Paris Exhibition of 1900, where it won a Grand Prix and was described as one of the most spectacular items on show at the Palais de l’Electricité. Consequently, the date of the recording is invariably cited as 1900 in the literature, with some sources (both printed and online) erroneously insisting that it was also Paris where Franz Joseph’s words were immortalised on wire. More serious scholarship, however, has long realised that the recording took place somewhere in Vienna, while the Emperor visited a presentation of objects acquired by Austria at the Paris Exhibition. As much, indeed, can be gleaned from listening to the words added by the second speaker on the recording, Dr Wilhelm Exner, the general commissioner in charge of the Austrian displays in Paris. Still, although even in the latest excellent book on magnetic recording, the question of its exact venue is said to be as yet unsolved (Engel, Kuper & Bell 2008: 18), an unusually precise date – apparently based on Bruch (1983: 13) – is given instead: 20th September 1900. Earlier this year, Friedrich Engel solicited help from Dietrich Schüller in this matter, who has put the author on the case. Thanks to research in libraries and the Austrian State Archives, it is now possible to shed more light on the circumstances of this recording and summarise as follows.

While still in Paris, Wilhelm Exner, also long-time director of Vienna’s Technologisches Gewerbemuseum (‘Technological Trade Museum’), was thrilled by Poulsen’s invention and – on behalf of the ministry of trade – purchased one of his cylinder Telegraphones; this eventually ended up in the above-mentioned museum, where it can still be seen today. After the end of the Paris Exhibition on 12 November 1900, the idea was born to show this and other acquisitions to the (Viennese) public at large. Yet it was to take almost a year before this plan came to fruition. The venue that was finally chosen for this four-week exhibition was Gustav Pisko’s art gallery, located at Parkring 2 (part of the fashionable boulevard surrounding Vienna’s first district) and still known today for hosting the first public display of works by Egon Schiele’s “Neukunstgruppe” (‘New Art Group’). On 12 October 1901, one day prior to the general opening, a private viewing was arranged for the Emperor at 1 pm. Accompanied by the minister of trade and Wilhelm Exner, His Majesty was shown around the premises, at last arriving in the room devoted to the acquisitions from the realm of technology. It was there that he met Valdemar Poulsen himself, who had specially come from Copenhagen to demonstrate his invention to the Emperor, assisted by two representatives from Siemens & Halske, the company which had meanwhile “purchased the rights to produce Telegraphones in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia”; it may well be that Poulsen thus

“sought to emulate Alexander Graham Bell, who had induced the emperor of Brazil, Dom Pedro, to use his newly invented telephone” (Daniel, Mee & Clark 1999: 20ff.). After Poulsen recorded his own voice and replayed it to the Emperor, Franz Joseph himself condescended to say a sentence at Poulsen’s request: “Diese neue Erfindung hat mich sehr interessiert, und ich danke sehr für die Vorführung derselben” (‘This new invention has interested me very much, and I am very grateful for the demonstration of the same.’). The Emperor then wished to listen to the recording to make sure that both the wording and the timbre of his voice were rendered correctly. We are left in the dark as to whether he was amused or not ...

References

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