Fixing a hole...

At the last Friends AGM in July this year the board agreed to fund a small oral history project.

Project proposal
To collect informal oral histories from ex-students of the Institute of Education, focussing on the subject of life as a student at the IOE.

The idea for this project stems from the donation of the papers of the IOE Students’ Union to the archives in 2013. The records donated, and others that the archives held previously, provide a patchy picture of the activities of the Union, but there is a lack of the voice of the student across the whole of the Institute’s archive. When the IOE became a school of UCL in 2014, the Students’ Union ceased to exist, therefore it seemed an appropriate time to gather records that give a picture of what being a student at the IOE as an autonomous body was like.

How the Friends can help
Are you IOE Alumni? Would you be interested in being interviewed for this project?

We are looking for people who studied at the IOE full or part time for a teaching qualification, Batchelor’s or Master’s degree, or PhD, but who did not work at the IOE while studying. Our focus is firmly on what life as a student at the IOE was like.

Perhaps you know someone who fits this criteria even if you don’t?

If you are eligible, and might be interested in being interviewed or taking part in recorded group discussion, please email Jessica Womack (j.womack@ucl.ac.uk) with a short description of yourself, what and when you studied at the IOE.

Why are we the “Newsam” Library and Archives?

Sir Peter Newsam was the Director of the IOE from 1989-1994. Newsam had several years experience of teaching in schools; but most of his career was spent as an educational administrator in the North and West Ridings of Yorkshire, and with the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), 1972-1982. He also served on numerous committees, and was Chairman on the Commission for Racial Equality 1981-1985.

Sir Peter remains a regular visitor to the library. I asked him how he felt when he comes to the library today;

“When visiting the library, I am always reminded of how nearly it did not get built. In 1989, the library was two roads away. We were paying rent of more that £110,000 a year for a converted building and the lease was shortly having to be renewed… So we decided to design and cost a new library. To avoid paying for a new lease for the library, the books had to be moved immediately into the three large subterranean halls. I still regard that move of thousands of books and their shelves as an astounding achievement by a small but experienced group of librarians. The number of students and others using the library went up sharply. The university contributed a million pounds. Then luck intervened. The Greater London Council (LCC) was being closed. John Bevan, who had been my Deputy at the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), was in charge of dealing with the dispersal of its property. That included its library. He wanted £400,000 for it. I explained that we would have to clear a floor of our building to house these books. That would cost, we decided, £400,000. So our librarians collected the books they wanted. Stephen Benn came across from County Hall to record their gift of £400,000. As it was the LCC established the London Day Training College (precursor to the IOE) in 1902; so that gift was a fitting end to what the Council had done for London’s teachers.”
‘Excavations’ in the IOE’s School Histories Collection

The Newsam Library at the Institute of Education has a large collection of education institutional histories. These form a discrete collection and provide a rich source of information on individual schools, colleges and universities and their communities across Britain. The books and pamphlets mainly date from the early twentieth century up to the present day. Older materials, dating mainly from the nineteenth century, are held in the History of Education Collection in the closed stacks.

In anticipation of the half-day symposium on writing institutional histories, jointly organised by ICHRE (International Centre for Historical Research in Education) and FNLA, we are happy to present to you this article by Dr. Barry Blades on his use of the IOE’s School Histories Collection to write his book, Roll of Honour.

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Until relatively recently, the School Histories Collection (SHC) at the UCL Institute of Education (IOE) resided deep in the storerooms of the Newsam Library, its individual volumes accessible only by request in advance. In the early days of collecting material for a commissioned trilogy of books entitled Schooling and the Great War I was looking for anything that might give clues as to the experience of individual schools and the impact of war on their communities. The IOE Library and Archives catalogue was brilliant but daunting, listing some 1,500 SHC titles. My first tentative, but manifestly over-ambitious, request was for all titles beginning with ‘A’. The stacked library trolley awaited my arrival on the designated day and the archaeological digging and sifting process began. By the time I was ready to examine the ‘M’s, the SHC had been moved en-masse to its own study room next to the IOE Archives Office. I can only assume that I was not the only researcher who had stumbled across this veritable treasure trove.

The School Histories Collection consists of hundreds of monographs of individual British schools, covering a range of institutions spanning the educational spectrum. The voluminous histories of elite public schools stand next to brief studies of charity schools for waifs and strays. Publications marking the centenaries of ancient grammar schools are shelved next to accounts of elementary schools which no longer exist or have been absorbed into other institutions. A school’s place in the hierarchy of schooling is generally mirrored by the status of the publishing house which was commissioned to tell its story. Many of these histories – the vast majority relating to English, Welsh and Scottish institutions – were written by alumni: former pupils, teachers (especially retired Deputy Headteachers) and governors determined to place on record the distinctive development and particular achievements of their alma mater.

It is easy for the outsider to criticise the esoteric, celebratory and partisan nature of these histories. The great majority were intended primarily for the school community itself. Few beyond the immediate community would identify the school in question from headline titles such as Where the Fat Black Canons Dined, Further Up Stephen’s Brae, or Hyacinths and Haricot Beans. Subtitles were generally more informative. These histories were aimed predominantly at a readership already familiar with the institution, namely the ‘Old Boys’ or the ‘Old...
Girls'. An institutional history might cover hundreds of years, but in most there will be at least one section for the alumnus which refers to their particular period of attendance and school life as they experienced it. Headteachers inevitably dominate the story. The tenures of these deified — and very occasionally demonised — individuals commonly provide a chronological structure to a story of growth and development. Teachers, and especially those with nicknames deriving from their idiosyncratic mannerisms or behaviour, are fondly remembered. Heroic deeds on the playing field and battlefield are fixed in print and validate memories of achievement and loss. Narrative triumphs over analysis.

Yet, what may at first appear to be the greatest weaknesses of published school histories is, for the historian investigating the history of education more generally, their greatest strength. The rich detail, the human stories and the relatively obscure anecdotes contained therein tell us so much about the ethos, culture and formative traditions of individual institutions. These 'secondary' sources thus become a form of 'primary' material when the researcher asks questions relating to continuity and change and similarity and difference in any given period or aspect of schooling. Many of the histories were, of course, constructed using primary sources, their authors making full use of the archive material still retained by many institutions. School logbooks, magazines, headteachers’ annual reports, governors’ minutes, the records of alumni organisations, and ephemera including school photographs and fixture lists are the real archival treasures upon which these broader accounts are based.

Roll of Honour, the first book in the Schooling and the Great War trilogy, includes material from over one hundred such histories and drew ideas and inspiration from many more. Wherever possible I used extracts which were evidently drawn directly from the institutional archives. Other material was subjected to the usual tests of authenticity, accuracy and reliability. School histories vary considerably in their coverage of national events. This was particularly noticeable when searching for references to the Great War of 1914 to 1919. A few histories cover the wartime years in detail. In others, there is little or no reference at all to the impact of the war on the daily life of the school or even to the conflict in general. In many, the wartime experiences of alumni take centre stage. Taken collectively, however, these histories formed a major component of my research; an evidence base which could be cross-referenced and triangulated with material from other archival collections, official publications, newspapers, contemporary autobiographies, printed secondary works and digital resources.

For the researcher who wants to find out more about how different institutions created, developed and maintained their distinct cultures and particular identities, then dig deep into the School Histories Collection. For the researcher who wants to discover how institutional imperatives tempered directives from national and local authorities, or how schools responded to national and local economic and social circumstances, then test your hypotheses in the School Histories Collection. For those of you who are historians of the school curriculum, or teachers and teaching methods, or pupil origins and destinations — or indeed any given period or particular aspect of British schooling — I can assure you that delving into the School Histories Collection will be most rewarding.

Barry Blades

Writing Institutional History, will take place on Tuesday 12 December 2017, 2.00pm to 7.00pm. Material from the IOE Special Collections, selected by Nazlin Bhimani, will be on display. Venue: Library Teaching Room, Newsam Library, UCL Institute of Education. For more details and to book a place go to https://tinyurl.com/ybyzusmp

The IOE Archivists have been working with Mark Freeman (BA Education Studies) on a UCL Liberating the Curriculum funded project to redevelop the Archives and Oral History in Education module for the Autumn Term 17/18. The module has 24 students and each week they use original archive sources to learn about research methods and source interrogation. All students use original source material as part of their assessed coursework. We received £2000 which has funded conservation of delicate items used in classes, digitisation of audio cassettes and a student focus group to evaluate the 16/17 content of the module.

Miniature furniture from the archive of David and Mary Medd have been lent to the Architectural Association for their exhibition ‘Women in Architecture 1917-2017’ which runs from 7th October – 12th December.

We have received a number of additions to our British Families Education Service/Service Children’s Education Association archive. Many of these came from schools closed as the result of the withdrawal of British troops from Germany in 2015. However, we have also received items related to schools in Hong Kong, Cyprus, and other places. Walter Lewis, the Association’s Archivist is doing a wonderful job of hunting down material, you can see some of the work he does with it online at http://www.bfes-scea-association.org/.

Become a Friend...
and support the future development of the Newsam Library and Archives as a unique resource for research in education, and especially its role as a national centre for archives and special collections. By becoming a Friend, you will enjoy the benefits of membership which include a programme of meetings and visits, a bi-annual newsletter, discounted membership of the Newsam Library and Archives and the opportunity to contribute to preserving the UK’s educational heritage.

Please update us!
We are updating our membership records. If you would like to occasionally hear from us by email, please send an up-to-date email address to k.hannan@ucl.ac.uk, FNLA Secretary, so we can keep in touch about our activities.

And finally, we’d like to take the chance to thank you for your ongoing support and to say;

Happy Christmas and best wishes for a peaceful New Year

From all the staff at the Newsam Library and Archives

(Image from the Brenda Francis archive)

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