

Making sense of your collection: A case study in oral history



Subseries:
1 Fundraising
2 Donors

Subseries:
1 Directors
2 Trustees

Subseries:
1 Engineering
2 Biology
3 Architecture and
Construction

Series:
1 Senior Management
2 Alternative Technology
3 Site Maintenance
4 Visitor Services
5 Communications
6 Education
7 Dyfi Valley Community
8 Finance
9 Administration
10 History and Association

Subseries:
1 Site Family
2 Group Interviews

Fonds
CAT Oral History Project
Background, creation, extent.

Induction: The CAT Oral History Project

- ✎ The main objective of the CAT OHP was to prepare an accessible catalogue of 80 oral history .wav files ready for ingest into set repositories.
- ✎ There are 3 external stakeholders who directly influence the cataloguing project team:
 - The creator, the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT)
 - The National Library of Wales as the primary repository holding the CAT physical archives as part of a hybrid collection
 - The People's Collection Wales as a repository, increasing the accessibility of the CAT oral histories.

Background of Cat

- ✎ Environmental centre set up in 1973 on a disused slate quarry near Machynlleth.
- ✎ The brainchild of Gerard Morgan-Grenville, it was set up as an attempt to raise awareness of growing concerns of environmental issues at the time, and to develop technologies which embraced alternative energy.

✎ Why records were created

In order to record and preserve the history of the centre and contribute towards the 40th anniversary celebrations.

Oral history collection has been created and will collect and keep for prosperity the personal and collective memories of many of the people who have contributed to, and witnessed the development of CAT during its forty year existence.

volunteers, workers, site-community members, students, trustees, and members of the wider Dyfi Valley community.

Five Stage Focus Approach

- ∞ The project was planned to run through five stages:
 - ∞ Stage 1 Scope and Research
 - ∞ Stage 2 Item Level Descriptions
 - ∞ Stage 3 Arrangement, Fonds and File Level Descriptions
 - ∞ Stage 4 Integration
 - ∞ Stage 5 Evaluation
- ∞ Each stage had its own deadline though some overlapped one another.

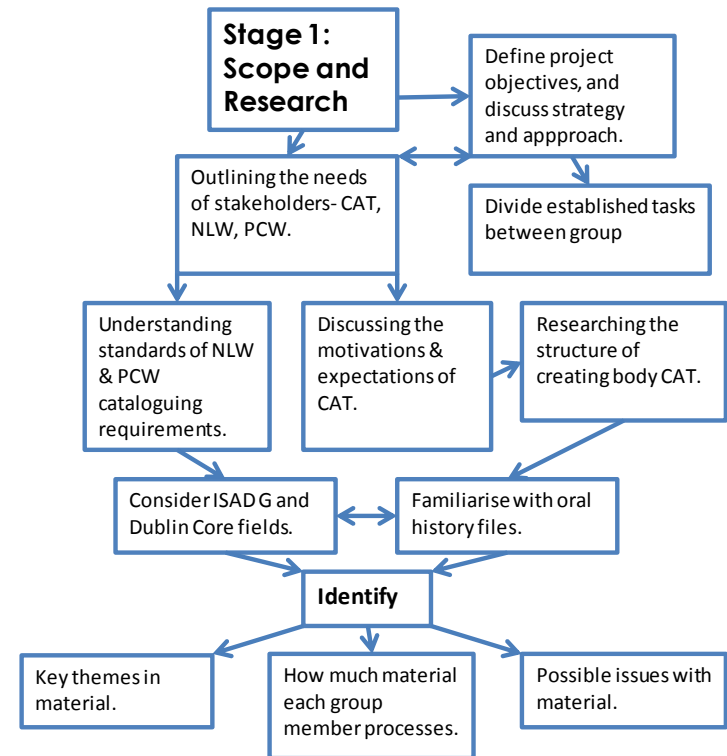
Table displaying time allocated to each project stage:

- Stage 1 Scope and Research 15%
- Stage 2 Item Level Descriptions 48%
- Stage 3 Arrangement, Fonds and File Level Descriptions 10%
- Stage 4 Integration 12%
- Stage 5 Evaluation 15%



Stage 1 Scope and research

This stage was vital to pre-processing the collection. It enabled a full understanding of the background, context and administrative history of CAT, in order to develop an informed methodology for handling the materials.



Our Research

- Visit to Oral History Exhibition, Machynlleth
- Talk to interviewers and interviewees
- Visit to CAT for tour and conference
- Literature and websites







Stage 2: Item Level Description

Bottom-up approach



Developing templates

Reference code

Extent

Level

Title

Name of Creator

Date of Creation



Ref Code- CAT/8/1/3/1

Title- Interview with Audrey Beaumont concerning the Centre for Alternative Technology part 1 of 1

Date- 18/10/12

Extent and Medium- 1 wav. Audio Recording, duration 01:10:50

Name of Creator- Allan Sheppard on behalf of CAT Oral History Project

Language- English

Audrey Beaumont is the widow of former landlord John Beaumont. John Beaumont being the landlord of the land where CAT was established. File contains interview of 1 part.

During this interview Audrey Beaumont talks about how CAT was established on her land at the old quarry site. Talks about how the idea of CAT was formed and mentions the individuals who came to CAT. Also mentions the local perceptions of CAT, the quarry cafe is mentioned and the royal visits.

Breakdown of Interview-

00:00- 15:30- Starts with a short introduction of how she connects to CAT. And then goes on to describe her background before becoming connected with CAT, describes voyage out to Africa and purchasing a farm.

15:30-22:00- Talks about Gerard coming to her house and the idea of CAT forming. Mentions self-sufficiency. Asked what she thought of him. Names Diana Brass. Talks about what she and her husband thought of the idea. Starts talking about how CAT started. Asked for impression of Diana and her impression of the people with CAT when it started. Mentions the cottages. Describes how she helped set up CAT and talks about providing items for the cottages.

22:00- 29:00- Talks about people's reaction of CAT coming to the quarry. Mentions chapel goers and promiscuity. Talks about a petition, Betty Mills is mentioned. The need to get commercial and what she thought about that and her father-in-law's opinion.

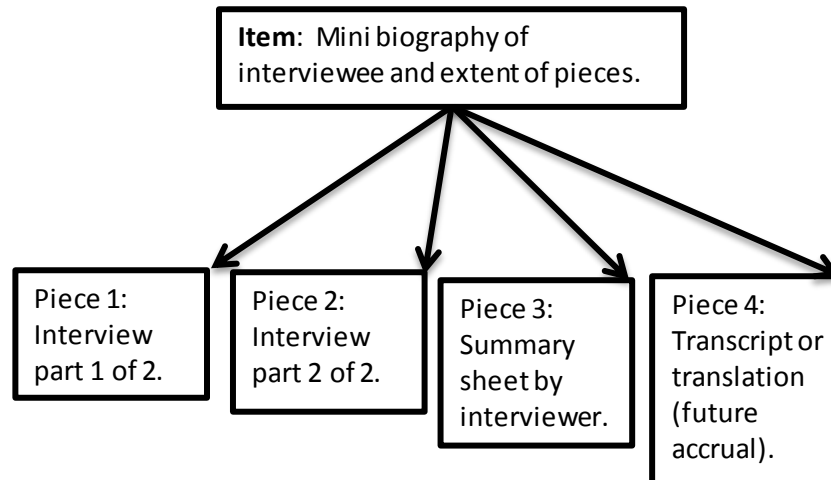
29:00-39:26- Talks about the conflict with some of the local residents. Betty and Martha mentioned. Mention the royal visits and discusses Prince Phillip's and Prince Charles' visit. Mentions the eco-cabins, sewage field and pond. Paul Reiff is mentioned and his farm house. Mentions Diana's death and refers to Roderick. Talks about the cliff railway getting set up and Roger Kelly is mentioned. Talks

Stage 3: Arrangement

- ✎ Arrangement was considered throughout the listening process.
- ✎ Arrangement was decided after item level descriptions were complete.
- ✎ The main consideration was to make the catalogue balanced, accessible and user-friendly.
- ✎ Thought was given to the amalgamation of future materials.
- ✎ Further standards were defined to ensure a consistency of data entry for dates and language.
- ✎ The first step was to group fragmented interviews and their related documents.

Item and Pieces

- Many interviews are split into sections or have summary sheets so the item levels act as a container holding all information about an individual interviewee. All segments of a particular interview and/or summary sheet are then added below the item as pieces.
- Each item description provides a short biography of around two to five lines summarising how the interviewee's job and how he/she is associated with CAT and from which years.



A Sample Piece Description

| Catalog | Conservation | Loans |
|--|--|-------|
| - Catalog 35th of 224 | | |
| IDENTITY | | |
| Level | Piece | |
| Repository | Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru National Libr | |
| Ref_No | CAT/7/1/1 | |
| AccNo | | |
| Extent | 1 wav. audio recording. duration 41:59 | |
| Title | Hew Jones interview part 1 of 1 | |
| Date | 19/11/2012 | |
| CONTENT | | |
| Description | During this interview Hew begins by giving an account of farming in the Dyfi Valley for the past fifty years. He then discusses the beginning of CAT and how the local community responded to CAT. | |
| Breakdown of interview: | | |
| 00:00 - 6:17 Introduction. Hew is prompted to discuss his life in the Dyfi Valley, his time in the RAF and his family vocation as a farmer. He entered into several business enterprises but remained a farmer. He mentions his children, and describes his future hopes for the farm. | | |
| 6:18 - 10:48 Further description of Hew's farming ethos and forestry policy. Tree and hedge growing practices and philosophy are examined along with his view on conservation. | | |
| 10:49 - 15:47 Hew discusses CAT. He was part of the council when the application for building CAT came to Machynlleth. Hew discusses his views to alternative technology from the 1970's to present. He gives opinions on wind and nuclear power. | | |
| 15:48 - 16:44 Hew moves on to talk about Dulas engineering and the solar fridge that Dulas engineering developed. | | |
| 16:45 - 19:11 Hew explains that the council gave permission to CAT and describes a visit to CAT. He talks about CAT using only local timber and encounters with some CAT staff. CAT staff took Welsh lessons from local teachers. | | |
| 19:12 - 22:42 Recalls providing services for CAT. Hew describes the building and materials used of the water powered cliff railway. He describes slate quarry railway systems. | | |
| 22:43 - 26:33 Hew discusses CAT's influence on the Dyfi Valley and the local community's reaction to CAT. He mentions Bow Street houses made using earth walls. He further recalls CAT's integration into the local community and believes that there is a future for CAT. | | |
| 26:34 - 28:45 Conversation moves to anti-nuclear opinions. Hew discusses an organization attempting to bury nuclear waste in Wales. He mentions an earthquake in the Cambrian Valley. | | |
| 28:46 - 31:33 Provides thoughts on how CAT has engaged with the community. He talks about local farmers used the blacksmith at CAT. Also he mentions an old timber school building that was given to CAT close to the founding of the | | |

Brief summary of interview.
3 to 7 lines average.

Breakdown of interview.
Sections divided by times in
00:00-00:00 format.
New paragraph for each time
section.

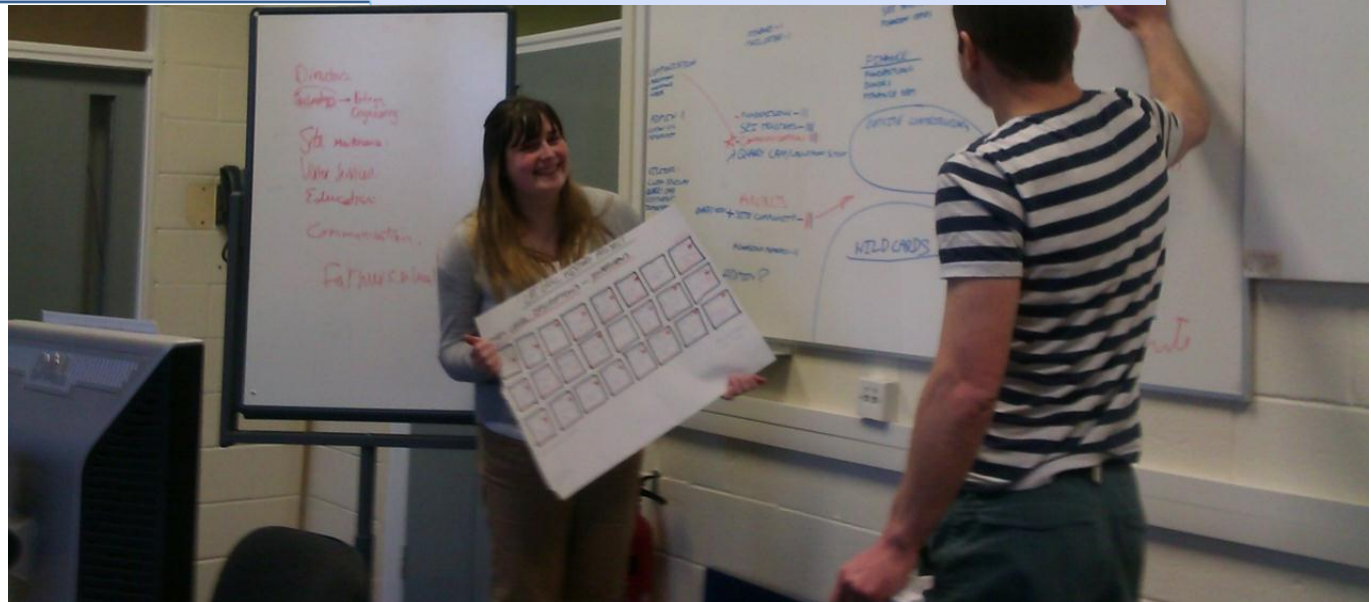
Choosing the Series and Sub-series

CONTENT

Description Visitor services contains interviews from CAT employees who worked in the visitor centre, the bookshop, restaurant, the quarry shop and café and cliff railway.

The visitor services at CAT have vastly developed from having a visitor centre opened on site in 1975 to include an on-site bookshop and restaurant. The quarry café and shop were opened on 1st March 1979 in the town of Machynlleth to support integration into the local community. With the site becoming an increasing popular tourist attraction in the area the cliff railway was opened in 1992. It has also produced many displays and exhibitions that have also sparked much interest amongst visitors.

Topics discussed concerning the visitor services are: the relationship between CAT and the local residents, tourism and its changes, the changes in the site's visitor services and public reaction to this. Interviews also give details of what CAT have been able to offer visitors over the years as well as the staff's perception of the visitors to CAT.



Fonds

IDENTITY

Level

Repository

Ref_No

Extent

Title

Date

Style

Alt_Ref_No

CONTEXT

Creator_Name

Admin_History

It initially operated as on-site community made up of volunteers who embraced communal living and self-sustainability. In the early years CAT workers often lived in challenging conditions due to the remote location and living off the grid. The community was focused on developing new technology to support their alternative lifestyle choices as well as making a wider contribution to sustainable technology.

In 1975, the decision was taken to open the site to the general public in order to showcase the work which was being carried out at CAT, create further interest in alternative living, and to help fund this work. At its peak, the visitor centre attracted around 65,000 visitors per year.

Since the early days, the CAT site has been significantly transformed, with the introduction of the cliff railway and the WISE building as notable achievements.

CAT has birthed offshoot companies such as Dulas Engineering and Aber Instruments. Alongside Cat, these organisations have made notable technological achievements such as developing a solar fridge for use in conflict zones. They have pioneered renewable energy solutions in wind power, solar power and biogas and formulated the Zero Carbon Britain Report which is impacting on Welsh Government Policy.

In recent times the Education department at CAT has flourished, which has included many visits from primary and secondary schools, as well as the creation of the Graduate School. Communication of the message of CAT is supported by the Publications, Media and Marketing and the Website Development Departments.

At the time that the interviews were collected CAT has undergone a period of transformation, which had resulted in much re-structuring and some redundancies. The result of these changes and the uncertain future of CAT was one of the motivations for collecting CAT oral histories in 2012-2013..

Oral History Project

As part of their 40th anniversary celebrations, CAT has organised a project collecting oral histories as an attempt to preserve the history and both personal and collective memories of CAT. Partly funded by the legacy of founding member Gerard Morgan-Grenville, the interviews have been conducted with volunteers, workers, site-community members, students, trustees, and members of the wider Dyfi Valley community.

Custodial_History

Arch_Note

CONTENT

Centre for Alternative Technology consists of oral history interviews conducted on the site of the interviews with volunteers, workers, site-community members, students, trustees, and members of the wider Dyfi Valley community ask for their views, and experiences with CAT.

Mgt_Group

Abstract

Accruals

Arrangement

Subject/2

ACCESS

Location

Access_Conditions

Copyright

Access_Status

Physical_Description

Physical_Description/2

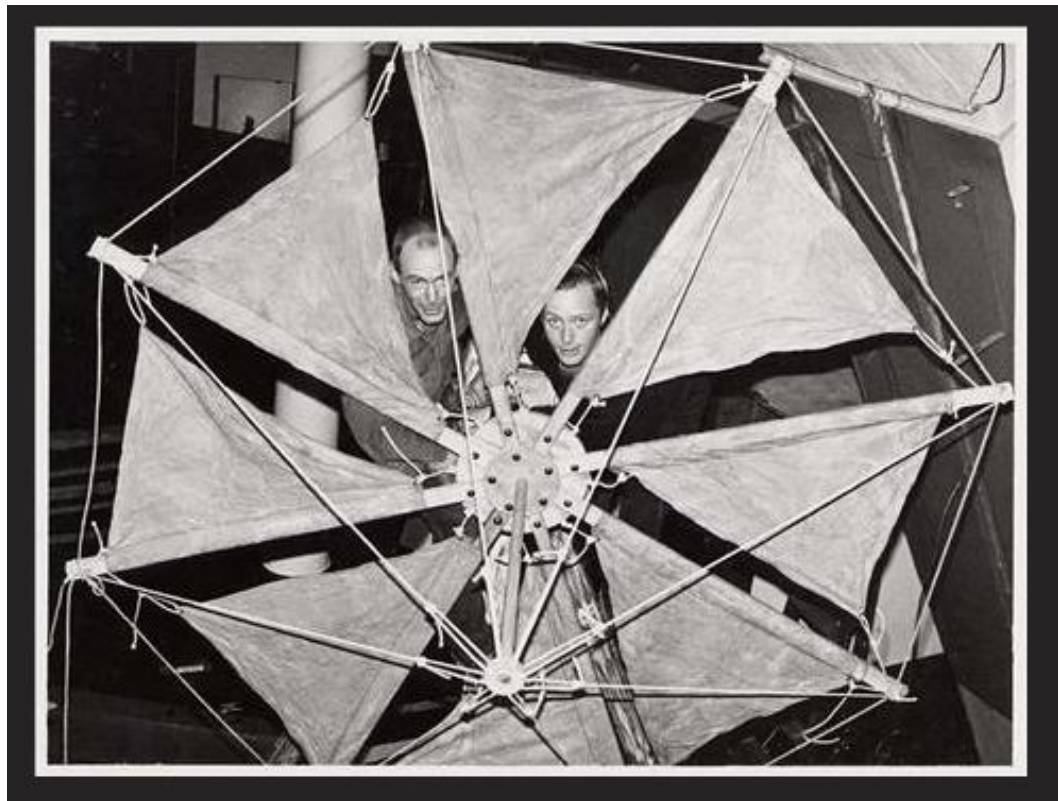
ALLIED_MATERIALS

Related_Material

Stage 4: Integration

- ✎ The integration stage comprises of the essential work that went after the completion of the CALM catalogue to meet the requirements of host repositories.
- ✎ This stage included extracting an EAD report from CALM then editing this EAD to conform to ISO standards.
- ✎ It also involved copying over descriptions to the People's Collection Wales mass uploader.
- ✎ It was the most complex technology section.

- Item Access
- Completing the database
- Adding TAGS



Casgliad y Werin Cymru

People's Collection Wales

Items

Collections

Groups

What's On

Trails

Stories

Items are individual objects that have been added to the site by people like you.



Centre for Alternative Technology, Machynlleth

By [RCAHMW](#)



Added 30/12/2009



The vegetable plot at the Centre of Alternative Technology

By [GatheringTheJewels](#)



Added 05/08/2011



Wind technology at the Centre for Alternative Technology

By [GatheringTheJewels](#)



Added 08/08/2011



The Centre for Alternative Technology, Corris

By [GatheringTheJewels](#)



Added 05/08/2011



Mealtime at the Centre for Alternative Technology

By [GatheringTheJewels](#)



Added 05/08/2011



The Centre for Alternative Technology van

By [GatheringTheJewels](#)



Added 05/08/2011



Engineers from the Centre for Alternative Technology install a Cretan Windmill

By [GatheringTheJewels](#)



Added 05/08/2011



Community Centre

By [CommunityArchivesWales](#)



Added 08/02/2012



Evaluation

- ✎ What was achieved
- ✎ Full digital catalogue completed to deadline
- ✎ A successful template for cataloguing future oral history materials
- ✎ Dual database created for People's Collection
- ✎ Accessibility and engagement encouraged for the local community
- ✎ What we would have done differently
- ✎ The longer interviews could have been divided up in order to prevent excessive descriptions
- ✎ Listening process conducted earlier
- ✎ Descriptions could have been less detailed to save time

Recommendations

Avoiding obscurity? The main issue with the oral history recordings is that they could face digital obscurity. The materials require to be migrated or refreshed and have duplicates stored in hard and digital copies.

Community archives used for community integration.

The reason for recording voices is so they may be heard, or rather are heard; therefore integration goes beyond allowing access to actually inviting access.

Recommendations

- ✎ The CAT archive currently being interlinked between formats.
- ✎ The collection is suitable for being involved in CAT outreach and education programmes.
- ✎ Welsh interviews are to be translated.
- ✎ The oral histories have already been harnessed to generate radio promotion of CAT and the collection. They can be further disseminated through social media, exhibition and as part of the 40th anniversary CAT events.

Thanks for listening!

Feel free to tweet us:

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Kerry: @kee9

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