

John Laing- Breaking New Ground

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Introduction

- *Breaking New Ground* is a partnership project between Historic England and John Laing Charitable Trust.
- 10,000 images from the Laing collection will be digitised, conserved catalogued and made available online.
- The final selection will include iconic Laing sites: the Barbican, Coventry Cathedral and British Library.



The Barbican



Coventry Cathedral



Bullring Shopping Centre



British Library

Oral histories

- Alongside the digitisation work, there will be a public engagement programme.
- Overarching aim: To discover the human stories behind the images and make these stories accessible to the public.
- We will :
 - A) Interview former Laing employees and create 2 films which will be uploaded onto HE's website, Vimeo and YouTube
 - B) Take former Laing employees into primary schools to talk to children about their work for Laing. Produce 1 film detailing these interactions.

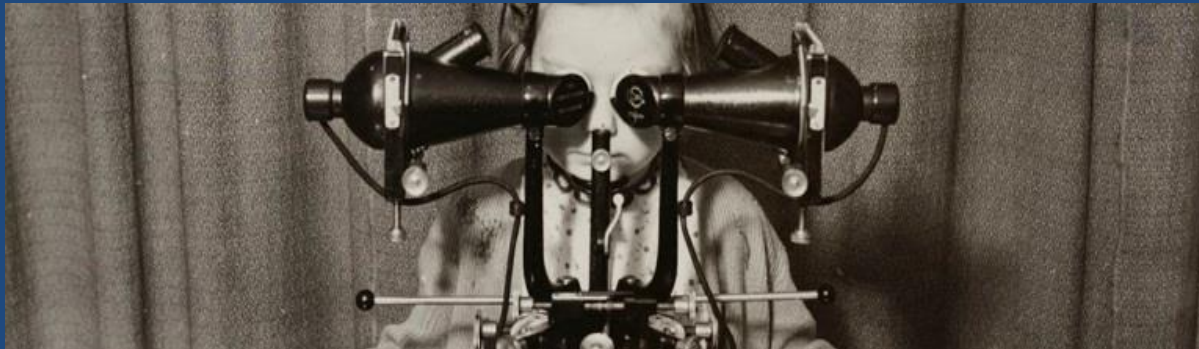
Previous work that has influenced this plan

- ‘Irish Heart, Coventry Home’
 - HLF funded partnership project between Coventry Irish Society and the Herbert Museum and Art Gallery
 - Celebrated contribution of Irish community in Coventry
 - 65 people were interviewed, testimony was used for an exhibition and [film](#)



HE's Topical Press Agency Medical Collection

- Partnership between HE and Wellcome Collection
 - Digitised images which documented health care from 1938 to 1943.
 - Produced a [webpage](#) and film where 4 nurses were interviewed about collection.



Lessons learnt

1- Adaptability-

- Need to fit around people's diaries.
- Easier to do local projects vs. national
- Have someone who is recognised as face of project. Easier for getting more interviewees.

2- Curation –

- So important for oral history- need some way of organising such a vast amount of material- whether that is a film, or clips on a webpage.
- I think HE's approach to Wellcome Collection is a good option.

3- Technical-

- How to ensure material is accessible in the future?
- Best to work with a larger organisation- Irish project- worked with Herbert who took the material- otherwise we wouldn't have been able to store it.
- Large organisation has different challenges- how to build corporate memory?

4- Managing expectations

- Always obtained consent before the interviews and always gave interviewees chance to withdraw.
- I gave all interviewees a copy of the final interview.
- Not all interviewees were happy with final cut- need to be very clear about outputs from the start.

How have these lessons influenced Breaking New Ground?

- 1- Important to build a large pool of interviewees.
- 2- Work towards clear outputs (using interviews for the films and launch of the collection)- this gives the interviews a clearer structure.
- 3- Use basic transcriptions.
- 4- Strong emphasis upon accessing content online and linking this to Archive.

Conclusion

- Great benefits from oral history.
- There are useful resources online such as the Oral History Society.
- Challenges:
 - Mixed messages about what copyright is needed after GDPR.
 - Technical preservation- how will things be preserved in future? MySpace is a cautionary example.