

“Feminist historians are still really influential, pushing the boundaries of what oral history can do...”

An Interview with Lynn Abrams

Lynn Abrams (*1960), is a professor of modern history in the School of Humanities, University of Glasgow, and also one of the leading figures in British oral history, who spoke with us at the Oral History Society’s Annual Conference in Glasgow in early June 2025. The conference’s theme, *Whose Voices?*, foregrounded critical questions of inclusion, power, and representation in historical narrative-making, subjectivity, formation of the self, and the role of trauma emotions in oral history narratives – all issues that Abrams has long explored through her scholarship and teaching. In this conversation, she reflects on her journey into the field of oral history, the theoretical shifts in the field, feminist contributions, and the tensions between academic work, activism, and evolving technologies. Marie Jiříčková spoke with Lynn Abrams in Glasgow on June 7, 2025.

MJ: Let’s begin with your entry point into oral history. Can you share the story of how you came to the oral history field?

LA: I started as a historian of 19th century Germany.¹ Then, I moved to the University of Glasgow in Scotland in 1995, looking for a new project and I decided to research the history of the child welfare system in Scotland, from the 19th through to the 20th century.² I found lots of archival sources, which were great, but I realised they did not tell me about the lived experience. Therefore, I turned to oral history, recruiting

¹ LYNN ABRAMS, *Workers’ Culture in Imperial Germany: Leisure and Recreation in the Rhineland and Westphalia*, London–New York 1992; LYNN ABRAMS, *Bismarck and the German Empire, 1871–1918*, London–New York 1995; LYNN ABRAMS, et al. *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency, and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, London 1996.

² LYNN ABRAMS, *The Orphan Country: Children of Scotland’s Broken Homes from 1845 to the Present Day*, Edinburgh 1998.

and interviewing people who had grown up in the care system, either in children's homes or foster care in Scotland. It allowed me to access a side of the story I could not reach otherwise. I travelled across Scotland, especially the north, interviewing elderly people in their 70s and 80s about experiences they had never spoken about, not even to family, and suddenly, they were telling me! The complex stories brought depth and meaning that the archives alone could not provide. The project would have been far less interesting and rich without those voices. That was my first serious engagement with the method, and it was tough. The last conference session recalled for me these stories.

MJ: I see. There was a story about an Irish woman dealing with the aftermath of an unmarried pregnancy and the loss of her son through a forced adoption. The interviewer presenting here said she stepped out of the scholarly role to say: "It was not your fault." Have you encountered similar situations, and what do you think about this situation in particular?

LA: Not exactly, but some of those I interviewed were in the process of researching their personal histories in order to find out why they were placed in care. They were keen to learn about how the system operated, which I could assist them with. But they all told me very personal and emotional stories; it was impossible to remain objective. And really, I have never tried to keep that distance. It's important to me to establish a relationship with my interviewee and to give them something in return for their memories. Ann Oakley writes about this in terms of "the gift."³

MJ: What came next after the childcare system in Scotland?

LA: I have moved projects quite a lot. Next, I worked in Shetland, in northern Scotland.⁴ As a historian of women and gender, I was interested in women's experiences in a place where, for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, they outnumbered men. I did not conduct many oral history interviews there, just a few, but it was fascinating. I went to the

³ ANN OAKLEY, *Interviewing Women Again: Power, Time and the Gift*, Sociology 50/2015, no. 1, pp. 195–213.

⁴ LYNN ABRAMS, *Myth and Materiality in a Woman's World: Shetland 1800–2000*, Manchester 2005.

archive, and people were coming in constantly doing family history research, some of whom I later interviewed. There was also a substantial collection of oral histories in the archive, which I used extensively. However, probably the most sophisticated oral history project I have done is my recent one on women of the post-war generation.⁵ I conducted 25 to 30 interviews, initially, a bit serendipitously, because I was preparing for a talk in Canada, and I thought I would interview a few people in my village, starting with my book group, as they were the right age. I gave the paper and realised there was a book in it! I expanded the research frame and used interviews to shape the project’s themes and arguments. It has probably been the most significant oral history work I have done.⁶ Most recently, I have led a project on knitted textiles in Scotland. We interviewed makers, designers, and factory workers mainly to find out how things were made and how machines worked. That was less about narrative, more about uncovering processes. That is my journey from around 1996–1997 to now. And somewhere in the middle, I wrote the *Oral History Theory* book.⁷

MJ: Not a small thing! Although no Czech translation exists, the book is quite influential in the Czech oral history community. What led you to write that book?

LA: I taught an undergraduate oral history course at the University of Glasgow. I realised there was not a suitable book. It was hard to get students to understand oral history theory without sending them off to read original, dense theoretical texts, which they would not do [laughs]. Therefore, I decided to dig into the theory and show how it is used in oral history. I enjoyed writing it. I drew on my own experience and interviews. The field was not as developed then, so if I were to write it now, I would probably do it differently.

⁵ LYNN ABRAMS, *Feminist Lives: Women, Feelings, and the Self in Post-War Britain*, Oxford 2023.

⁶ See LYNN ABRAMS, *Introduction: Creativity in Knitted Textiles in Historical Context*, *Textile* 21/2023, no. 4, pp. 812–818.

⁷ LYNN ABRAMS, *Oral History Theory*, London–New York 2010; LYNN ABRAMS, *Oral History Theory. 2nd Edition*, London–New York 2016.

MJ: In what way? How has oral history practice changed since you began?

LA: The most significant change has been ethics. Ethical approval is now much stricter. In the mid-1990s, when I did the child welfare project, my institution did not have a formal ethics process. I did use consent forms and ensured people could choose anonymity using the guidance of the Oral History Society, but my work was not overseen by my institution. If I did that project now, the ethical hurdles would be higher given the sensitivity of the subject matter. The man who gave me a list of names and addresses of people to contact, he could not do that now, due to GDPR and data protection. So, that has been a considerable change and has made researchers more careful and attentive to the potential consequences of their research practice, which is obviously a good thing. In other ways, though, oral history is still basically a conversation designed to elicit a memory story.

MJ: Did you initially change your approach to oral history?

LA: Yes. Initially, I wanted to learn about people's experiences in the system: children being separated from parents, sent to islands with foster parents who did not speak the same language; poor conditions in foster homes and orphanages; and many talked about abuse, physical and some sexual. But I quickly realised the interviews were about more than just the facts. They were about the act of telling. The way people told their stories was shaped by their current lives. A good example is that people who had gone on to build their own families often reflected on their childhoods very differently from those who had not. Having their own family gave them a framework to understand what they had missed or experienced. Those who had not built families found it more challenging to manage the emotional weight of the past.⁸ This got me thinking about theoretical approaches in oral history – not just *what* people say, but *how* and *why* they say it.

⁸ LYNN ABRAMS, *Blood is Thicker than Water: Family, Fantasy and Identity in the Lives of Scottish Foster Children*, in: *Child Welfare and Social Action in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: International Perspectives*, (eds.) Jon Lawrence, Pat Starkey, Liverpool 2001, pp. 195–215.

MJ: Who influenced your understanding of oral history, and which theoretical approaches were crucial for you?

LA: I was influenced by people like Penny Summerfield, whom I knew at Lancaster. She was already an important figure in feminist oral history and I read all her work. She brought a strong theoretical, social science-inflected perspective, which was rare among oral historians then. I also read Portelli, Frisch, and others like Daniel James. When I shifted into the Shetland project, focused on women’s and gender history, I also began engaging with feminist history and feminist approaches to oral history. Feminist historians transformed the field, and they are still really influential, pushing the boundaries of what oral history can do.

MJ: Could you elaborate on that a bit more? The term “feminist oral history” has been used recently in the field, but I wonder what it was at the beginning...

LA: I also teach a postgraduate course on personal testimony, and we are working with interviews, which are not always labelled as oral history. Some interviews are from the 1960s and 70s, conducted mainly by male social scientists. You can see the difference from what came just a bit later with Ann Oakley, who was the pivot. Although she would not call herself an oral historian, she was more of a social scientist. In the early 70s, she carried out a significant project on *Becoming a Mother*, in which she interviewed dozens of women four times each, before and after childbirth.⁹ Her famous article on interviewing women, published in a feminist research collection, was hugely influential.¹⁰ That sparked a shift. Feminist scholars, mainly sociologists at first, began developing ideas about subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and especially power dynamics: between interviewer and participant, academic and layperson. Feminist historians took that up and formulated new practices. The book *Women’s Words*, from a North American perspective, was also important.¹¹ That 1980s explosion of feminist oral history theory and practice was formative for

⁹ ANN OAKLEY, *Becoming a Mother*, New York 1979.

¹⁰ ANN OAKLEY, *Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms*, in: *Doing Feminist Research*, (ed.) Helen Roberts, London 1981, pp. 30–61.

¹¹ SHERNA BERGER GLUCK, DAPHNE PATAI, *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, London–New York 2016.

many of us. Since then, feminist oral history has been at the forefront of developing approaches to indigenous oral history, histories of sexuality, and so on. The follow up to *Women's Words, Beyond Women's Words* is a good example of this.¹²

MJ: You mention social science as a significant influence, at least on British feminist oral history. However, what is the difference between oral history and the qualitative approach in sociology?

LA: Back in the early days there was probably more of a difference than there is now. If we compare some of the early oral history, such as those wonderful interviews conducted by George Ewart Evans in the East Anglian countryside or even Paul Thompson's *Edwardians* project interviews, with the social science projects which utilised the interview, such as Goldthorpe and Lockwood's *Affluent Worker* study, then these are chalk and cheese. The former were interested in people's lives and the stories they could tell. The latter were aiming to answer quite specific questions to inform a hypothesis. I'm simplifying obviously. But the feminist approach in the 60s and 70s was in many ways more akin to oral history as practiced by historians. Ann Oakley and Hannah Gavron, as well as Marie Corbin who conducted some wonderful interviews for a sociology project on *Managers and their Wives* led by Ray Pahl, all gave women space to tell their stories, were attentive to intersubjectivity and to the ways in which women used the opportunity of the interview to express themselves authentically.¹³ And I think it is important to give these feminist researchers more credit. When the history of oral history is written, so often the significant actors are men. But women social scientists were just as influential in developing our practice and theory.

MJ: On another topic, I think there is a turn toward emotions and embodiment. Would you see that as part of feminist practice?

LA: Yes, I think you are right. The turn to emotion is relatively new, and we are still figuring out what it means for oral history. It is partly

¹² KATRINA SRIGLEY, STACEY ZEMBRZYCKI, FRANCA IACOVETTA, *Beyond Women's Words*, London 2018.

¹³ JANICE MARY PAHL, RAYMOND EDWARD PAHL, *Managers and Their Wives: A Study of Career and Family Relationships in the Middle Class*. London 1971.

a writing challenge, we know emotions appear in interviews, but how do you write about them? Penny Summerfield again wrote about being human in interviews, even about bodies. I remember her telling me about interviewing a woman while she was visibly pregnant. She felt sure her pregnancy influenced how the woman spoke about her experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. But it is still tricky. Emotions are complex to write about and interpret. Researchers are still working through that.

MJ: The *Feminist Lives* book is subtitled “Women, Feelings, and the Self in Post-War Britain.” What is the connection between feelings and the self? Have you discovered some way to write about emotions and feelings?

LA: For me, or at least drawing on my own interviews and others undertaken in the 1960s and 70s, the expression of feelings was and is a feminist enterprise (turning Sarah Ahmed’s quotation on its head: for her feminism is an emotional response to the world. I argue that emotion is a feminist response to the world.) Women who found the space in which to articulate how they felt about their lives in the 1960s and 70s (through the pages of magazines, in voluntary organisations with other women, and even in oral history interviews with social scientists) were simultaneously finding themselves. What I say in the book is that the post-war generation of women in Britain liberated their feelings, which means they took them seriously, made them visible, and acted upon them. And in so doing, they constituted a new kind of self, a self for which emotions are essential rather than peripheral, things to think, work, and act with, rather than to suppress – as had been the dominant mode amongst their mothers’ generation.

MJ: From a methodological perspective, embodied knowledge in interviewing is an interesting topic. For instance, how do oral historians who do not transcribe their interviews, and do not listen to the interviewees repeatedly, influence the outcome themselves?

LA: I am quite old-fashioned; my practice has always been to do the interviews myself. And ideally, I want to transcribe them myself, too. But I have paid people to do it, although it is not ideal. I think, during transcribing, the words imprint themselves on your brain when you listen back to the interview and transcribe it slowly. You begin some of the

analysis during the transcription process. I have also done projects where research assistants conducted the interviews, and I hate it, because I do not know those people. I did not do the interview, so I could not hold them in my head, they were just a transcript on paper. They can be incredibly enlightening and moving, but I would still rather go through the process myself. But I know that is not how things are going, because getting funding for oral history research is challenging and expensive. And now AI is being used for transcription.

MJ: In your book, I noticed that you also work with interviews from archival collections that you have not conducted yourself. Do you have any protocols for those interviews or ways to transfer this intersubjective process?

LA: Although I probably prefer to conduct my own interviews, I must say that it is essential to use other people's interviews, because interviewing yourself is incredibly time-consuming, and you can get some new perspectives from other people's projects. For instance, I used interviews from a project on heterosexual relationships in Britain.¹⁴ All the material and interviews are available online, anonymised. I selected the interviews that fit within my age cohort. And then I just read them, and the interviews speak to you, and I thought: "Wow, that's something I could not have got." In part this was because the project accessed interviewees across the social classes (my own interviewees were predominantly middle class) but also because of the skill of the interviewer who conducted interviews covering a range of quite intimate topics. In this case, the interviewer clearly developed a rapport with her interviewees. And you know yourself that some interviews are just better than others; they are incredibly rich. Immediately, I read these and realised that they told me something I did not know before or gave me a different entry point into what I was thinking about.

¹⁴ JENNY HOCKEY, VICTORIA ROBINSON, ANGELA MEAH, *Cross-Generational Investigation of the Making of Heterosexual Relationships, 1912–2003*, Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive, October 2005. SN: 5190, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5190-1>.

MJ: Do you have any specific examples of interviews used in other projects?

LA: My best example is an interview transcript and recording with a woman archived in the Shetland archive. The woman, Mary Manson, had been interviewed about twenty years earlier by a local man. And she did this very long interview over maybe two or three occasions, about life in the islands, what life was like when she was young, who owned the fields, what crops were grown, and so on. And then in the middle of the interview, he says to her: “Well, what was that story about your mother?” And then she starts to tell this story about her mother and a cousin, who go on a journey to visit a wise woman to get a remedy for a sick relative. And it is a long story, almost like a fairytale. And it is just amazing, and it took me to a completely different place. I had done a few interviews and read a few interviews about women in Shetland, but this one gave me a whole new perspective on how I was thinking about women in Shetland. So sometimes that happens, I guess. It was not typical, but it did not matter. You know, it was like a light bulb moment for me. My husband will continually remind me that he found the interview first [laughs].¹⁵

MJ: In your view, does British oral history have particular characteristics or defining features? And how would you describe the current state of oral history practice in the UK?

LA: I think oral history in Britain has become quite normalised, particularly within academia. Perhaps I am privileged, but at a university like Glasgow, no one would question a PhD student doing an oral history project, it is entirely acceptable. That was not necessarily the case twenty years ago. Looking around this conference, you can see how vibrant and diverse the field has become. The participants represent just a fraction of those engaged in oral history work. While I cannot make meaningful comparisons with other countries – I am not that well informed about current developments elsewhere – I would say that the

¹⁵ LYNN ABRAMS, *Story-telling, Women’s Authority and the ‘Old Wife’s Tale’: ‘The Story of the Bottle of Medicine’*, *History Workshop Journal* 73/2012, no. 1, pp. 95–117; LYNN ABRAMS, *Myth and Materiality in a Woman’s World: Shetland 1800–2000*, Manchester 2005.

practice has always been strong in the UK. There is a well-established social history tradition here: history from below, histories of marginalised groups, and those left out of dominant historical narratives. Currently, a lot of research focuses on the post-war period, particularly post-1945. In that context, oral history is very much part of the agenda. If you do not include interviews in your research, you are often asked why not. Of course, there may be valid reasons for leaving them out, but the expectation is there, which I think reflects how embedded oral history has become.

MJ: Do you feel that oral history's growing acceptance within academia has made it easier for researchers to secure resources and institutional support?

LA: Higher education in the UK is under strain, and financing for oral history, like most research funding, is highly competitive. Organisations like the Heritage Lottery Fund will support oral history projects, but usually only if they are community-based or deliver a clear community benefit. Academics cannot typically apply for that funding independently; we need to form partnerships with community groups. For example, a successful project involving the Glasgow Women's Library and Women's Aid, alongside academic researchers, received Heritage Lottery funding to research the history of Scottish Women's Aid. But again, collaboration was key. There are also new concerns emerging. Given the availability of digital tools and online resources, I have spoken with colleagues who feel that even the value of in-person interviewing is being questioned. Technologies like online interviews and AI transcription are more accessible than ever, but they change the nature of the work, raising important questions. Regarding international comparisons, I have some insight into oral history practice in Finland. I am involved in a funding application to establish a centre focused on marginalised voices, including LGBTQ+ people and ethnic minorities. While the work there is promising, it does seem to be at an earlier stage than what we have been doing in the UK. Overall, I think oral history in Britain is in a healthy state. It is well represented across institutions and history departments and continues evolving in response to social, academic, and technological change.

MJ: Oral history has strong roots in activism, as you say, it is often about amplifying marginalised voices and offering communi-

ties tools to record their histories. This is very present here at the conference, and you mentioned some funds required for community benefits. Since you work in academia, how do you see your role in this context? Do you see yourself as an activist or as a scholar? How do you navigate that relationship?

LA: I have never seen myself as an activist, I have always seen myself as a scholar. That is how it has always been for me. Of course, engaging with communities matters and can be extremely rewarding, but it is not easy. There are practical limitations, especially time – we all live hectic lives. In the projects I have led with a team, we have always tried to find ways to give something back to the communities we have worked with. For example, in our project on high-rise housing in Glasgow, my research assistant Valerie Wright conducted many of the interviews and then worked with participants to select extracts they found meaningful, which we published on a website.¹⁶ So, there was an element of engagement there. However, the oral history community generally focuses on gathering stories that have not been heard before, which is incredibly valuable. Still, academics are expected to go further: to analyse, interpret, and write critically. That creates a tension. Some people bridge that divide very well, but I find it challenging. For example, I recall I attended a session recently about recording the experiences of ethnic minority communities in Glasgow. Much of that work is celebratory, focusing on successful integration. But we know that is not the whole picture. Scotland, like many predominantly white societies, has deep issues with racism, and those stories often go untold. As an academic, you are responsible for asking why those stories are not being voiced or writing about their absence. But that can be uncomfortable. You build relationships through interviews and then interpret those stories, which is a complicated and sometimes uneasy position.

MJ: I was thinking about what happens after completing a research project. Do you stay in touch with the people you interview? You

¹⁶ *Housing, Everyday Life and Wellbeing over the Long Term. Glasgow 1950–1975*, <https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/research/historyresearch/research/projects/housingandwellbeing/> (accessed on 11 November 2025).

mentioned in your book that you held a focus group with some narrators.

LA: There are two different cases to consider. In the child welfare project, I remained in contact with some participants. After the book was published, a few reached out to me. They were pleased to see their stories contextualised, to have their experiences explained within a broader framework. Often, all they had known was their own experience. Through the research, they could understand the policies and systems behind it, and the exchange of information was valuable. In my most recent project on *Feminist Lives*, the situation was different. I did not have a choice about sharing material with some interviewees. I began by interviewing women from my village, including members of my book group; they are thoughtful, wise women, and naturally curious. They often asked how the project was going, so I chose to share parts of it with them. A few moments were somewhat tricky, not because they disagreed with my interpretation, but because of the dynamics of friendship and familiarity. They were entirely comfortable with me interpreting their stories through an academic lens, even when they did not fully agree with my conclusions. They understood what academic research involves. Later, I invited about five local women to read draft chapters. They came over for a drink and gave feedback. They were comfortable with what I had written. It was a friendly, informal exchange rather than a deeply reflective moment of shared authority, but it was still meaningful. I do not perceive it as a profound moment of shared authority. They came to my book launch, and it was nice to be able to do that and celebrate their stories in that way.

MJ: You often combine archival research with oral history and other personal accounts. How do you approach that process in practice? How do you move between the archive and the interview, primarily when the archival sources sometimes reflect dominant or patriarchal structures?

LA: It is an iterative process. The way I work, archival research and oral history often inform one another. Let me give you an example from my most recent book. I did much archival research, mostly on organisations, organisational histories, meeting minutes, and internal publications. I used a key collection at the Women's Library in London. I came across

material from the National Housewives Register, an organisation founded in the 1960s. They had kept minutes of meetings, correspondence, magazines, a fascinating range of sources. I had not interviewed anyone from that organisation initially, but the archive included women's names on the national committee. I wrote down the names and started searching for them online, and I found several, some even living near Glasgow. I reached out, and they were all pleased to speak. No one had ever asked them about their involvement before. Those interviews taught me something important about methodology. I had initially approached them by saying: "I would like to speak to you about your involvement in the National Housewives Register." But that organisation was only one part of their life, often somewhere in the middle of their personal story. Starting there was not ideal. I realised I needed to begin much earlier, with their childhood and background, and let the conversation flow toward the organisation more naturally. In the end, many of the interviews followed that circular pattern, we would begin with the Register but then come back to their upbringing to make sense of how they arrived there. Interestingly, in this case, some of the most significant insights came not from the interviews but from the archive. In the archival material, particularly in the correspondence, I first saw how these women used letter-writing and meetings to express their feelings going back to an earlier point we discussed. That was the key to understanding the whole project. It was not just about organising or domestic issues but about emotion. That moment in the late 1960s gave a generation of women a space to speak openly and legitimately about how they felt and these organisations like the National Housewives Register and the Pre-School Playgroups Association gave their feelings legitimacy. Some of that emotional expression did come through in the oral histories, but not as clearly. It was the archive that brought that dimension to light.

MJ: I can relate to what you mentioned earlier. When narrators already know the topic of my project (in my case, the textile industry) they often jump straight into it and skip over the more personal background. I also made the mistake of starting interviews with questions like – "When did you arrive?" – as a kind of small talk. But that made it difficult to return to their earlier life or have more

profound reflections later. It is hard to shift the narrative once that starting point is set.

LA: Yes, it is. I still believe it is much easier, especially for people in the global North, to tell their life stories broadly chronologically, linearly. Most people are more comfortable starting at the beginning and moving forward. Of course, people do jump around, and we as researchers can work with that. However, beginning in the middle with a question that places them at a specific point later in life can feel disjointed. The narrative loses its natural flow, and the interviewer and interviewee are left asking, “Why are we starting here?”

MJ: The conference is titled *Whose Voices?*. This raises an important question: whose voices have you recorded in your work? And perhaps also, whose voices do you think may not have been heard?

LA: There are always voices that are excluded, that is inevitable. Oral history is, by nature, selective and never representative. In the early social science projects of the 1960s, people tried hard to build representative samples, but I have never done that. I think it is a pointless exercise in this kind of work. I have always followed the project’s direction, listening to the people who come forward and are willing to speak. That means you are not hearing from those more hesitant people who do not think their story matters or do not want to share private aspects of their lives. And that is perfectly fine. It is their right not to participate. But it does mean the voices we record are shaped by who is willing, available, and open. In the *Feminist Lives* project, for example, I am very open about the fact that all the women I interviewed were white. By the time I spoke with them, most were middle class, though some had working-class backgrounds and moved socially over time. I also intended to include interviews with black women, but COVID made access to the archive impossible. Therefore, I acknowledge that limitation. In that book, I consciously tried to take a grassroots approach: to listen closely to what mattered to the women themselves and let themes emerge from their narratives rather than imposing a theoretical framework. Of course, you always begin with some kind of framing, but it was important to me that their concerns and reflections guided the direction of the work. The key for me is to be honest about the scope of your material, to be clear

about what stories you are telling, and whose. In the end, your voice is in there, too, as the researcher shapes the project.

MJ: As a final question, one thing I love about the oral history community is that behind the scenes, people often share stories about unexpected moments in interviews: the failed technology, conversations that took a surprising turn, or the unique intersubjective dynamics that emerged. Do you have a favourite story “from the field,” a memorable moment from your interviewing experience?

LA: Oh, I definitely have failed technology experiences! I once drove miles to an interview on the west coast of Scotland and realised as I arrived that I didn’t have a blank cassette tape (in the days of cassette tape recorders!). Luckily, I had a music tape in my car, so I used that. And there have been occasions of operator error when I just haven’t switched the recorder on. More recently, I have really enjoyed the interviews I conducted for *Feminist Lives* and discovered some shared interests with some of my interviewees: knitting, gardening... Yes, oral history is social research methodology, isn’t it? It doesn’t suit everyone, and I love spending time in an archive as much as the next historian, but holding a conversation with another person, learning about their life, encouraging them to reflect on that life, is quite a privilege.

Lynn ABRAMS

University of Glasgow, School of Humanities
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9886-4872>
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Marie JIŘIČKOVÁ

Charles University, Faculty of Humanities
<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2359-5987>
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