



Willow Court Farmhouse, formerly known as Boycot Farm. Photo: courtesy of Belinda and Jane Terry.

sixteenth century. However, in the late 1960s the farm went under a compulsory purchase order, and its land was developed into housing for the Birmingham “overspill” (a post-war national scheme to move people out of overcrowded slum housing in city centres).

‘Whilst the extensive restoration and conversion work got underway on Willow Court Farmhouse, a Grade II listed building, a simultaneous oral history project began, with the aim of engaging the local community and creating an awareness of such a historic building in their midst. This was a great opportunity to record the last people to live in the farmhouse and gather stories from the earliest residents of the Westlands estate, many of whom still live in the houses they moved to in 1969/1970.’

Julia supported the project as a mentor and led oral history training for the team of volunteers, who went on to record twenty oral histories. Julia continues: ‘The volunteers ran a highly successful “Memory Collecting Morning” at the start of the project and held an exhibition in the community hall on the estate in September 2025. Other project outcomes include a 3D interactive model of the farmhouse through time, developed by architect Chris Hamill (www.cyanotype-media.com) using historic documents, images

and the oral histories of two women who grew up in the farmhouse in the 1950s. The project team is also working with Year 12 geography students at Droitwich High School who are currently doing oral history interviews for their A level “local place” study. Volunteers and residents are helping with the creation of a heritage walk around the estate, with several stopping points on benches with QR codes linked to oral histories.

‘This has been a highly successful Lottery-funded project with many skills learned, confidence gained and an abundance of intangible heritage uncovered and shared. The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust has been working in partnership with Wychavon District Council and Platform Housing.’

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YORKSHIRE

■ SOUTH YORKSHIRE PEAK TRACKS

Sam Smith describes a creative soundscape project, ‘Peak Tracks’: ‘Alongside my oral history work I am also a member of Polyhymns, a music group based in Sheffield.

This year we created a soundscape: “The Peak Tracks Hope Valley Train Line”. Each stop is represented by a combination of improvised music, field recordings and oral history clips from people who have lived and worked along the line. People interviewed included a train driver, signal person, railway workers, commuters and farmers.

‘We were awarded a Developing Your Creative Practice grant from Arts Council England to explore how the mediums of oral history, music and field recording could be combined. As the main public route from Sheffield to Manchester, the Hope Valley train line through the Peak District is a beautiful journey that has always been close to our hearts, and so it felt like the perfect way to bring all those elements together, as well as articulate the change from the urban to the countryside. A major reason people settle in Sheffield is because of the countryside on our doorstep, and it has also led to the city rebranding itself as the “outdoors city”, moving away from its post-industrial identity.

‘The soundscape is quadraphonic (using four speakers) and set in real time to video footage from the train driver’s point of view of the journey. We worked closely with the friends of train station groups along the journey to find people to interview and to better understand the history of the journey and surrounding places.

‘The soundscape premiered at the Millennium Gallery, Sheffield as a highlight of Sensoria Festival in October 2025. It was then installed in Edale Village Hall in November 2025. Across both sites it attracted nearly 1,000 visitors. Extracts from the soundscape also featured on The Verb on BBC Radio 4 as well as BBC Radio Sheffield.’

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■ WEST YORKSHIRE MUSIC LEEDS US

‘Music Leeds Us’ is an exhibition currently on display at Leeds City Museum. Elysha Clay introduces the research and production work



The 'Music Leeds Us' oral history jukebox. Photo: © Vicky Matthers.

behind the project, from searching the archives at Leeds Conservatoire to oral history recordings and newly pressed vinyl:

“Music Leeds Us” is a special exhibition marking sixty years of Leeds Conservatoire, produced in collaboration with Leeds City Museum. The exhibition celebrates the people, places and moments that have shaped the city’s musical identity. Beginning in 1965, visitors can discover major musical milestones across multiple scenes, plus an insight into influential Leeds artists including Utah Saints, Corinne Bailey Rae and English Teacher.

‘As summarised by project volunteer Michelle Regan: “From legendary gigs and local heroes to



The 'Music Leeds Us' banner, Leeds City Museum. Photo: © Vicky Matthers.

grassroots movements and global sounds, this is a celebration of the voices, venues and vibrant genres that make up Leeds’s powerful, proud – and often overlooked – musical legacy. But this isn’t just about history – it’s about feeling. That song that takes you back. That gig that changed your life. The posters on your bedroom walls. That new record purchase.”

‘In early 2025 a heritage project began at the conservatoire to support the exhibition. The project aims were to collect, preserve and share stories spanning six decades. A group of dedicated conservatoire staff and archivists eagerly undertook the challenge of wading through the worn scrapbooks stored in the archives. Inside lay a blend of reviews, vibrant articles, gig programmes, class photos, unreleased scores and ticket stubs, helping to develop a timeline from 1965 to the late 1990s. Despite the abundant content, personal accounts were few and far between. And so began the oral history exploration.

‘As a music producer, Leeds Conservatoire graduate and now staff member, I was keen to get involved and contribute to this rapidly developing project. By collecting oral histories, we hoped the conservatoire’s story would become more richly dynamic with the tales and perspectives of those who studied here, worked here or were connected to the institution. I had the privilege of speaking with individuals aged nine to ninety-six, exploring close to a century of experiences in the arts. Each creative offered insight into their era, a window to view the world through their eyes. From studious artists, renowned promoters, devoted teaching staff, local celebrities and pillars of the community, I was fortunate to hear it all.

‘Between March and November 2025 I recorded and mixed over thirty sessions, collaborating with Rare Tone Mastering to press the edits to vinyl. Navigating forty-plus hours of content, a small batch was selected to represent the

conservatoire alongside the museum’s own histories at the “Music Leeds Us” exhibition. The records can be played through jukeboxes generously donated by Leeds-based Sound Leisure, the world’s leading jukebox manufacturer, so that visiting audiences can experience the oral accounts through this delightful medium. Due to the evolving nature of this project we are continually adding to the archives and recording new sessions. The aim is to achieve a full jukebox come June 2026.

‘Wholly nostalgic, our contributors reminisced, be it their first day of study, memorable tutors, life-changing seminars, adventures on tour or unique insight behind the scenes. Traversing sixty years of friendship, community and unbridled creativity, each participant left with a smile and more stories than they realised. Charles Martin was one of the first eight students to attend “the college” in the 1960s. In his oral history interview recorded in July 2025 he spoke fondly about his studies, affectionately recounting his tutors, peers and events of the time. The influence of this first generation of the conservatoire is still evident today, with societies remaining a key part of the student experience. I look back on my own days as a student dearly and it was a pleasure to realise that this sentiment was seemingly shared by Mr Martin, who attended fifty-four years ago: “It became like a family and [...] I suppose I’ll always be grateful for the fact that it gave me a chance to become what I am today”.

‘This project honours the legacy of the conservatoire, its staff, students, alumni and audiences, and looks ahead to the future. By extension, we hope the oral histories will be held as a part of Leeds’s musical identity for many years to come. If you’d like to learn about Leeds, its music scene and the conservatoire’s impact, I highly recommend making the trip to Leeds City Museum to find out more.’

The exhibition ‘Music Leeds Us’ is on show at Leeds City Museum

from 10 October 2025 to 28 June 2026.

● Further information: email 60thCelebrations@leedsconservatoire.ac.uk, website www.leedsconservatoire.ac.uk and <https://tinyurl.com/music-leeds-us-exhibition>

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ BELFAST VOICES OF '74

Ulster Museum launched the online oral history exhibition, 'Voices of '74' in October 2024 as part of their 'Troubles and Beyond' programme. From the press release:

"Voices of '74" is a collaboration between National Museums NI and Nottingham Trent University which presents varied memories, experiences and perspectives from a diverse group of contributors, surrounding the Sunningdale Agreement and Ulster Workers' Council Strike of 1974. Importantly, the project examines the period around 1974 in a broad context, incorporating a range of perspectives from across the social and political spectrum.

'More than thirty individuals contributed to the project, sharing their reflections on 1974 from the perspective of their lives both then and now. The diverse range of voices include people who were, at that time, an author and television reporter, a teenage loyalist political prisoner, a civil rights activist and Queen's University Belfast Students' Union president, a nurse and civil rights activist, and an internee and Sinn Féin activist. Together, their stories provide a powerful and compelling glimpse into life during a pivotal year in Northern Ireland's history.

'The "Voices of '74" oral history project builds on the foundations and learnings from "Voices of '68" – a project delivered in 2018 also in partnership with Nottingham Trent University. "Voices of '68" focussed on the civil rights movement and the events of 1968, a year that is widely viewed as a turning point in Northern Ireland's history. The turbulent period



Left to right: Professor Chris Reynolds, professor of Contemporary European History and Memory Studies at Nottingham Trent University, and William Blair, director of collections at National Museums NI, at the launch of 'Voices of '74' in October 2024. Photo: Voices of '74.

surrounding 1974 was specifically selected as it offers another important prism to consider the Troubles within its evolving social, economic and political context.'

William Blair, director of collections at National Museums NI, describes the aims for the exhibition and the 'Troubles and Beyond' programme:

'We have a shared history, but we don't have a shared memory. The events of 1974 are acknowledged as another defining moment in Northern Ireland's history, but are often perceived as belonging to one side of the political divide. For this project our goal was to harness the power of oral history and bring diverse voices and perspectives together to show how this period of time affected the people and communities within Northern Ireland, and beyond, in different ways.

'Our museums offer the opportunity for dialogue and promoting shared understanding and can make a positive contribution to peacebuilding. We are actively harnessing our collections to encourage discussion and debate, challenge perceptions and stereotypes and build greater empathy and understanding across all communities. We all have the truth of our own lived experience, and that has to be respected.

"Voices of '74" is a significant part of a new online exhibition "Troubles and Beyond" which is now available on the Ulster

Museum's website. It allows people to explore the collections and deeper layers of content associated with this period in our history, offering a comprehensive look at the decades spanning conflict to peace.

'Along with the oral testimonies, the "Voices of '74" project is enhanced with a digital collection of objects that reflect the polarisation and tensions of the time. [...] The wider impact of the conflict on society is also illustrated through evocative photographs and archive film, drawn from a range of sources.'

Professor Chris Reynolds, professor of Contemporary European History and Memory Studies at Nottingham Trent University, describes the target audience:

'While "Voices of '74" will undoubtedly become a useful resource for researchers and academics, our target audience goes far beyond that. One of our main goals with this project is to engage young people. We're confident that they'll be valuable for bringing this period of history to life in classrooms across Northern Ireland. We believe that oral history has the power to engage young people in a way that more traditional approaches to history sometimes can't.

'Oral history projects like this play a crucial role in giving voice to everyone who lived through this turbulent time, ensuring that the