Original citation:
Huxford, Grace and Wallace, Richard. (2016) Voices of the University : anniversary culture and oral histories of higher education. Oral History, 45 (1). pp. 79-90.

Permanent WRAP URL:
http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/87244

Copyright and reuse:

Publisher's statement:
Published version: http://www.ohs.org.uk/journal/journal-online-jstor/

A note on versions:
The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRAP URL' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

Grace Huxford and Richard Wallace

Abstract

This article uses the case study of the University of Warwick's 'Voices of the University: Memories of Warwick, 1965-2015' project to explore the politics and practicalities of institutional oral histories and anniversary culture. It sketches the project's aims and its position within the university's wider anniversary celebrations. We then explore how interviewees reflect on the University at fifty and argue that a significant portion of interviewees seek to use their interviews to tell an alternative institutional history. This article finishes with an exploration of student protest. Using interviews with students and staff, we reflect on how the highly-publicised protests in the 1970s have been remembered. Overall, this article argues that anniversary culture prompts individuals to consider who *owns* institutional memories.

Key words: university, higher education, oral history, communicative memory, institutional memory

Introduction

For many, the institutional history of the University of Warwick begins and ends with E.P. Thompson's critiques in the 1970 *New Society* article 'The Business University' and the controversial book *Warwick University Ltd* which was co-written with colleagues and published the following year.[1] In these publications, Thompson, the famous historian and author of *The Making of the English Working Class*, vehemently criticised the University of Warwick's links to industry and manufacturing.[2] Given such criticism and Warwick's enduring status as the 'business university', the celebration of its fiftieth anniversary in 2015 raised important questions over the institution's engagement with its past and its history-writing.[3]

The role of oral history is particularly revealing and has played a leading role in the recent anniversary culture of higher education institutions. The University of Warwick (hereafter Warwick) is one of several 'plateglass' universities founded in the 1960s that have commissioned oral histories to mark their fiftieth anniversaries.[4] Although the scope and methods of these projects have differed, oral history plays a leading role in current memory-making practices within universities. This article uses the case study of Warwick's oral history project, 'Voices of the University: Memories of Warwick, 1965-2015' (hereafter Voices of the University) to explore the politics and practicalities surrounding institutional oral histories and anniversary culture.

As Donald Ritchie has noted, institutional oral history is at once 'top-down' and 'bottom-up'.[5] The origins, methods and outcomes of the Voices of the University project substantiate

this point, given that this project, like other university oral history projects, stands on a middle ground; on the one hand, it forms part of officially-sanctioned history writing (and was often regarded as such by participants), yet it also represents a space for individuals to tell very different stories of the institution that challenge official narratives. There are inevitably some accounts that are critical of the institution, but these challenges to established narratives are often nuanced, with some respondents wishing to (re-)contextualise, re-frame or humanise highly political historical events. In doing so they pose a form of popular resistance to institution-controlled histories. As Jorma Kalela argues, oral history can help to 'draw a host of conclusions', not about a particular historical moment, but '*about history-making*' (emphasis as original).[6]

This article will sketch the position of the project as part of Warwick's history-making, the project's relationship with wider anniversary celebrations and the institution's engagement with other anniversaries during its fifty-year history. The position of the oral history project as institutional history will be also be explored: the project was in many ways both within and outside the university. The anniversary celebrations provided a helpful impetus, but also a thought-provoking moment in itself in which to analyse the significance of oral history. We will then explore how interviewees themselves reflect on their experiences of the university, and how they engage with (or object to) anniversary culture more generally. Crucially, this article argues that a number of interviewees seek to use their interviews to tell an alternative institutional history. In doing so they resist attempts to allow the university to speak for them, whilst also occluding the possibility that their interviews alone can speak for the institution.

This article will finish with a case study exploring how student protest in particular has been remembered. Using interviews with staff and students collected by the Voices of the University project, we will reflect on how the highly-publicised university protests of 1970 have been incorporated into people's memories of the institution. We argue that through analysing memories of this seminal event, we can see how interviewees offer alternative perspectives and micro narratives to both the mythic history of student protest and official history writing of the university. Returning to the occasion of Warwick's fiftieth anniversary celebration, this analysis will conclude by arguing that contemporary anniversary culture prompts individuals and groups to make public claims about the ownership of institutional memory and their own memories of an institution.

A brief note about the use of interviews is worth stating at this point. For the most part interview material is used in this article in an analytical and evidentiary way. The pressures of space preclude us from a detailed discussion of the rhetorical aspects, contradictions and processes of remembrance that may be found in the extracts that we present below. Such questions could certainly be the subject for a separate discussion and we invite the reader to engage with these questions when reading our analysis, but for the current enquiry, such issues will have to remain implicit.

Voices of the University

The Voices of the University project was established by Dr April Gallwey in 2012 in the Institute of Advanced Study (Warwick). It was subsequently led in turn by Dr RW and Dr GH (the authors) for the remaining two years of the project, ending in September 2015. The aim of the project was to use interviews to uncover the history of the university from a variety of perspectives, but also to explore the place of the university within participants' lives.

In total 268 interviews were conducted for the project between November 2013 and August 2015. Interviews were carried out by a team of twelve interviewers made up of: undergraduate, masters and doctoral students; postdoctoral researchers; and external volunteers. Participants were found through a dual process of self-selection and following up on recommendations. Calls for participants were made through alumni newsletters, through university newsletters, via the Retired Staff Association and through the project website. Requests for recommendations were made with current and former senior administrators and through department administrators. Interview choices were relatively indiscriminate, though as the project progressed effort was made to fill obvious gaps in the collection; at one point historians were far more numerous than physicists, for example.

Of the 268 interviews conducted, two interviewees subsequently withdrew. All of the interviews were one-on-one interviews with four exceptions. Two were with pre-existing groups of people, the former Earned Income Group within the finance team, and the Coull Quartet string ensemble. The two remaining group interviews were with a husband and wife couple who had met as undergraduates in the late 1970s and two brothers who had lived on the site of the university when it was farmland.

Overall, the project aimed to represent a wide cross-section of the university community over time. Interviewees naturally included students and academic staff, but also administrative and support staff from across the campus, including cleaners, bar staff and gardeners. Local residents too added their voices to the collection. The 262 one-to-one interviews can be broken down in a number of different ways. 143 respondents were men, with 118 women taking part.[7] The youngest respondent was 19, the oldest 86 and the average age was 54. The breakdown of the respondents by their relationship with the university is also difficult given that many interviewees have multiple relationships with the institution. For example, one of the authors – who was also interviewed for the project – was a former undergraduate student, a former post-graduate student, an administrative assistant, a part-time DJ at the Students' Union and an academic researcher. In such instances multiple roles have been recorded. Thus the collection includes (at the time of the interview):

- 7 current undergraduates and 104 former undergraduates
- 11 current postgraduates and 44 former postgraduates

- 40 current academics and 30 former academics
- 59 current administrative, clerical and technical staff members 32 former administrative, clerical and technical staff members
- 6 current or former librarians
- 1 chaplain
- 3 local residents (who did not belong to any of the above groups)

Interviews typically followed a life history approach, first discussing participants' early lives before moving on to the nature of their connection with Warwick. Many participants had been associated with Warwick for a significant length of time (some had been there since it opened in 1965), whilst other interviewees had been working or studying at the university for only a few months. The interviews are archived in the Modern Records Centre on the university campus, with many full recordings available online through the archive and project websites.[8]

The interviews cover a wide range of topics relating directly to the history of the university. These include: campus development; changing student behaviour (including social activities, fashion, cooking and travel); teaching, learning and research; technological change; protest and political campaigning; important campus visits (including Queen Elizabeth II, Margaret Thatcher and President Bill Clinton); and interaction between the university and the local communities of Coventry, Kenilworth and Leamington Spa. They therefore provide a detailed overview of the entire history of this specific institution since 1965.

However, the interviews also testify to wider social, cultural and political changes affecting the lives of those involved in recounting the history of the university. At an institutional level, Warwick was one of seven 'plateglass' (or even utopian) universities created in the wake of the influential Robbins Report.[9] Frequently cited as the catalyst for an era of university expansion, Lord Lionel Robbins' report famously stated 'that courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so'.[10] A Penguin Education Special, published in 1969, noted that 'apart from electronics and natural gas, higher education has grown faster than any national enterprise in the 1960s'.[11] Warwick was granted its charter in 1965 and opened its doors to undergraduates in October of that year.

The changes in higher education since 1965, in post-war secondary education, and the impact that these changes had on those passing through the education system since 1950 are, perhaps unavoidably, detailed with great clarity in these interviews. John Gore, a student in the mid-1970s, described the sense of *newness* that pervaded the institution: '[Warwick] had this sense of modernity, and I don't know, a sense of democracy, and openness that, for all that I love the oak panelled offices, and there were surprisingly few of those here, this felt a lot more user friendly'.[12] Although beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that although these universities were seen as new by many people, they were also in many ways rather traditional: historian Stefan Collini notes that their size, selective intake, close connection between students and tutors and the importance of the liberal arts did not set them

apart from either Red Brick universities or Oxbridge.[13] Tracing the history of the global university from medieval times, Adam Nelson and Ian Wei also note how universities are historically conservative institutions, but at the same time this 'conservatism has a progressive side in that it eschews any and all constraints on human thought'.[14] Historically therefore, the new universities were the product of a mixed educational heritage: of traditional, well-established structures and approaches and of more self-consciously *new* outlooks. It is important to consider this unique institutional lineage when exploring the Voices of the University oral history interviews.

Broader social and cultural issues, relating to race, class, gender, technology and politics also define the interviews. Aware that these interviews were forming an institutional history, some respondents endeavoured to relate these broader changes to the university's history. For example, in describing the farmland that occupied the land before the university, brothers Reg and David Clayton testified to dramatic changes in agriculture in the mid-twentieth century.[15] Elsewhere, local councillor Michael Coker described the university's land as a safe haven from the bombing of Coventry in November 1940 and how residents in the area could see the glow from the burning city.[16] Brendan Cassidy, in describing his working life in the vicinity of the university (first as a local policeman and later managing Warwick's post room), traced the monumental change in Coventry's socio-economic fortunes: in 1965, he notes, 'Coventry was quite prosperous with the car factories and the industry. There was lots of different industries, bicycles, cars were the main thing, and also the people doing the construction work to the city'.[17] By the 1980s, the closure of Coventry's factories had grave social consequences. James Hunt, Finance Officer at the university in the 1990s, stated that 'unemployment had become a serious problem for the first time in a generation'.[18] Hunt then explored how this growing unemployment prompted the university to open its own science park, encouraging high-tech industry to locate to the city. Interviewees thus traced major social change using the university as a reference point.

The Voices of the University project was not, however, alone in conducting an anniversary oral history project. Many plateglass universities of the 1960s and post-1992 universities have recently commissioned oral histories to mark their fiftieth anniversaries. Several institutions, including York and Sussex, focused on key individuals in their university's history, particularly the 'founding fathers', the men (on the whole) who served as the institution's first administrators and academics.[19] Others, such as the University of Essex project led by Paul Thompson, used pre-recorded archival material to produce themed podcasts or else used oral histories alongside archival material, as with Laura Schwartz's study of St Hugh's College, Oxford or Brian Harrison's exploration of the lives of college servants at Corpus Christi, Oxford.[20] Like the Voices of the University project, other larger-scale projects put out more general calls for participants, including the University of East Anglia and the University of Winchester.[21] Hilary Young explains how the oral history of the Open University, conducted to coincide with its fortieth anniversary, used a matrix of three criteria (time, role and place) to select its interviewees.[22] As with many of these projects, the Winchester oral history project explored the changing landscape of higher education in the UK as reflected by the evolving function of their institution, from an education college to

university. Collections made by the universities of Westminster and Keele also add to the ever-growing number of university oral histories.[23]

Why might universities, particularly those founded in the 1960s, be so keen to use oral history in their anniversary celebration? A simple answer is that fifty years is an ideal period to gather oral histories, as it is within living memory and interviewees can be found whose experiences span the entire period. Historian and psychologist Nigel Hunt also notes that once people are retired they are more willing and able (in terms of time) to recount and engage with past experiences, so interviewees may be more willing to come forward to discuss their experiences than at earlier points in their lives.[24] Fifty-year oral histories also fit with the two main agendas underpinning institutional histories – those of the institution and of the researcher. For the institution, fifty years stands as a suitably rounded milestone which can be used to celebrate and promote its successes (particularly for institutions wishing to attract prospective customers, an outlook which increasingly applies to universities). Oral history projects are also, perhaps, popular with institutions as they can be seen to be publically engaging with their own history without the potential insecurity that might accompany the research and publication of a high-profile book.

Yet fifty years is also significant to researchers, as it comes at a crucial moment in the construction of memory within institutions. Memory scholar Jan Assmann, aiming to break down historians' rather uncritical use of the term 'collective memory', has noted that the first eighty years after an event are characterised by communicative memory - a more 'everyday form of collective memory'.[25] This kind of memory is exemplified by oral history: memories are changeable, fluid and under constant revision. As Assmann argues, communicative memory involves 'thematic instability and disorganization': in short, it is characterised by debate over the significance and meaning of events.[26] Assmann argues that after eighty years this type of memory gradually declines, as the conversations and everyday interaction at its core diminish, as people grow old and die. After this period of transition, 'collective' or 'cultural' memory becomes more entrenched and less subject to debate (although disagreements and shocks to that collective memory can still occur). This collective or cultural memory is closely linked to identity and is 'characterized by sharp distinctions made between those who belong to it and those who do not', refining Maurice Halbwachs' argument that collective memory is inexorably linked to social context.[27] Collective memory becomes embedded in societies and institutions around this point, adjusting when necessary, but necessarily built on a core set of ideas and identities. Communicative memory according to Assmann is more changeable and, crucially, more negotiable (both within the individual interview setting and within an institution as whole) than its more stolid counterpart, collective or cultural memory. Overall then, oral history as a methodology potentially fits with the communicative type of memory at play within universities celebrating fifty-year anniversaries and offers researchers an exciting chance to access and capture this memory.

But Assmann's theorization of communicative and collective memory also raises questions for university oral histories. First, does the eighty-year divide between communicative and collective memory apply to universities (and institutions more generally)? Given that the

typical stay of an undergraduate student is three years, accompanied by regular personnel change among academic and administrative staff, one might argue that communicative memory is in fact constant within such institutions. It is not a passing stage in memory building; it is the main way that memories are transferred in an institution with a rapid turnover of individuals. Conversely, one might even argue that this turnover encourages not only communicative memory, but also a process of *forgetting.* In this regard, the institution can arguably forget its own past once those who experienced it have left and taken those memories elsewhere. This differs significantly from the memories of a family (where each member remains part of it for their whole lives, even if estranged) or a government (which operates in public and leaves behind substantial archives). Oral histories thus perhaps emerge in response to a unique challenge faced by universities due to their largely transitory members.

But what happens when the institution wishes to stabilise and homogenise its history, to provide one over-arching, collective narrative? As this article will demonstrate, communicative and collective memory do not necessarily follow on from one another sequentially: they often occur simultaneously and challenge one another. We note that underneath the clash between official and unofficial accounts of historical events, there is undoubtedly a collision between communicative and collective memory too.

Institutional oral histories and anniversary culture

We have suggested that anniversaries are the main motivation for carrying out university-based oral history projects. As such, analysing anniversary culture in further detail is helpful to our understanding the nature of memory within institutions. Anniversary culture is not new to Warwick. To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary, Professor Michael Shattock, the university's longest standing registrar, produced a book entitled *Making a University: a Celebration of Warwick's First 25 Years.*[28] The publication contained many photographs from the university's archive, as well as a short summary of discussions that led to the establishment of the university on the Coventry-Warwickshire border. Shattock's detailed and well-researched account of these early negotiations remains one of the few written accounts of its origins.[29] The availability of the internet meant that for the university's fortieth anniversary, the form of the celebrations was somewhat different, though the material content changed little from Shattock's *Making a University*. The anniversary was marked with a gala concert, a website featuring many similar images to Shattock's book,[30] and a cross-faculty research project and exhibition led by Dr Cath Lambert called *The Idea of a University*.[31]

Milestones undoubtedly have a significant place within the construction of collective memory. As noted above, rounded narratives are undoubtedly helpful in promoting and celebrating an institution. Deciding on a clear start point can, however, be difficult. In the case of Warwick, 1965 is in fact just one of many possible founding dates: the government

approved the founding of the university in 1962, its first vice-chancellor began his work in 1963 and the first graduate students were admitted as early as 1964. In imposing one start date, institutions impose order on unclear or long drawn-out beginnings and in doing so set the stage for the celebration of future anniversaries. The establishment of a clear start date also demonstrates a more abstract dimension to anniversary celebration. Pierre Nora famously argued that anniversaries could be seen as *lieux de mémoire* (realms of memory). When more traditional forms of memory, *mileux de mémoire* (social environments of memory) subsided, modern societies have created memorials, civic rituals and the marking of anniversaries.[32] He notes that we use these to 'buttress' our identity, to protect our memory from history and its ability to transform and to question.[33] Unlike the communicative memory that Assmann details, *lieux de mémoire* are an attempt to bring stability and coherence through binding, shared rituals and cultural outputs. Analysing anniversaries is not therefore simply an arbitrary way of tracing change over time. As television scholar Matt Hills has noted, 'anniversaries do not merely record, empty, calendrical "multiples" of time', but also testify to different meanings and practices associated with the anniversary itself over time.[34] So when institutions set one unambiguous date for its foundation, we see the creation of *lieux de mémoire* in action.

How then do oral histories relate to anniversaries specifically? Do they, as history, 'besiege' memory in the way Nora describes? Warwick's case is instructive here. The Voices of the University project was simultaneously within and outside the university's celebrations of its fiftieth anniversary. The project was commissioned, partially funded and continually supported throughout by university administration (and through the university's dedicated fiftieth anniversary committee), is featured on the anniversary website, and the output stored in the Modern Records Centre, which is also the official repository of the university's archive.[35] The research design, scope and data of the project were at no point compromised by these official associations and were often enriched by such connections. At the same time, the project did fall somewhat outside the remit of the university's fiftieth anniversary celebrations, which adopted the forward-looking tag-line 'Imagining the Future' and included the future-facing 'Festival of the Imagination' as the pinnacle of its anniversary celebrations in October 2015 (a marked change from earlier backwards-facing celebrations).[36] Nevertheless, a brochure showcasing some of the interviews from the project proved popular during the 'Festival of the Imagination' weekend, when many alumni returned to the university.[37] Such tension did not necessarily constrict the project. For instance, Rob Perks points out that despite the assumption that corporate histories are internally rigged and 'fatally flawed' from their inception, there is near consensus from among business historians that *commissioned* projects are on the whole given a 'free rein', at least at the research stage.[38] The Voices of the University project operated freely, but overall occupied an ambiguous position within a much broader anniversary celebration.

Interviewees and anniversaries

The wider tension over the Voices of the University project's status as an anniversary artefact is evident at a micro level within the interviews themselves; in explicit comments made by respondents within the interviews, as well as in off-the-record discussions before and after recording. Some interviewees approached their contributions to the project and its links with the anniversary through a process of negotiation similar to that of the project team itself. At the most fundamental level, the linking of the oral history project to the fiftieth anniversary created a sampling issue. Those who had happy, successful or longstanding associations with the university were far more likely to contribute their stories, especially given that the project was internally run. Even though we were determined to offer as wide a range of views as possible, the association with an anniversary, may have caused some of those whose views and experiences of the university were less than favourable to turn down invitations to participate. Those who have a dispute with the institution were less likely to go on the record, or were more suspicious about how the material would be treated.

Some respondents were willing to take part in the project, but were keenly aware that its association with an anniversary (and accompanying celebrations) meant that extracts from their interviews could find their way into promotional material. In this respect some participants were wary of allowing the project team (and the university) to use their voices to *speak for* the university. One respondent made it a condition that although they were quite happy for their interview to be made readily available for researchers and other interested parties, no part of it could be used within promotional material for the university.

Another interviewee – a historian in an interview with one of the authors – addressed such a tension between the integrity of a legitimate historical enquiry and the use of such material in a celebratory way when they noted before the interview that they would not answer questions that seemed deliberately designed to encourage pro-Warwick 'soundbites'. At one point in the interview, during a discussion about the impact of the university on the local area the following exchange took place:

> *Do you think there are useful links between the university and the, kind of, wider communities of Coventry and Kenilworth and Leamington?*
>
> Now we're talking about publicity… I mean this a kind of publicity question that we're not doing, right? I mean…
>
> *But I suppose I… either academically, or do you… Do you think you could lift the university out… out of where it is and dump it anywhere else in the country, or do you think it is…?*
>
> Well, that's a very difficult question, it was dumped here in a sense.[39]

The question was not intended as a 'publicity question'. Having already put forward some aspects of the university's impact on the town of Leamington Spa, the question was intended to provide the respondent with the opportunity to comment on the university's (positive or negative) impact on the local area more widely. However, although not intentional, the interviewer's somewhat careless use of the word 'useful' could be seen to be encouraging a positive answer. Another interviewee might have let such a question go unchallenged. For a respondent sensitive to such manoeuvres, and acutely aware of how their interview could be utilised as part of Warwick's 'publicity machine', the word 'useful' becomes a sticking point. In the event, the respondent went on, almost defiantly, to suggest that official links between the university and the local area 'are probably poor and should be much better'; an honest response that the project was entirely happy to record and indeed is an answer entirely in keeping with the question as it was intended.

Such moments demonstrate the kind of negotiation that can take place within the interview situation, if it is perceived – accurately or not – to be compromised in any way. Although the project team never intended to produce a purely celebratory oral history archive – and we would argue that has not been done – that does not mean that respondents had a similar understanding of the purpose and tone of the project (even once it had been explained to them). This led some to be overly positive, and others to be suspicious of any apparently leading question, however unintentional. The position of the interviewers was also important. As the above examples attest, the suspicion with which some respondents treated the project was in part spurred on by the possibility that this was the university interrogating itself and so lacked a sense of independence and objectivity. Perks has stated that interviewing internally cuts both ways. On the one hand, he notes how the archivist at Barclays Bank feels that 'subjects can speak with the knowledge that it is all being kept "in the family" and that he or she is not divulging state secrets to an outsider'.[40] On the other hand, an insider might come with a lack of perspective or the inability to offer an objective view and ask probing questions.'[41]

For the authors of this article, our internal positioning was complicated by the project's relationship to the anniversary. However, it remained the case that we were encouraged by the senior management to interview without restriction. We were given guidance on who was viewed as significant, but we were left to devise the sample for ourselves, without intervention. In part this managerial approach might have something to do with the formulation of the outputs of the project. As Perks notes, public outcomes tend inevitably to be 'subject to more scrutiny and debate than lengthy archived interviews,'[42] and as such it is possible that a view was taken that any controversial material would remain in the archive, and thus be accessed by relatively few people.

Concerns as to what and how the interview material would be used within fiftieth anniversary publicity material was, therefore, not restricted to the interview process. As successive project co-ordinators we were both acutely aware of how the historical imperatives of the project, and its integrity as a rigorous historical resource, rubbed up against its secondary function as an anniversary artefact or *lieux de mémoire*.[43] The requirement to produce visible

outputs to tie into the anniversary meant that another series of negotiations was taking place in order to produce materials – podcasts, presentations, a brochure – which could act as a showcase for the project's historical rigour, whilst also proving satisfactory as tie-in materials for the fiftieth anniversary celebrations. Understanding that these outputs were likely to have more exposure than the interviews themselves, we were keen not to produce a sanitised version of the university's history in these outputs, but one that offered a multiplicity of possible histories, and demonstrated the integrity and objectivity of the project by confronting some of the more turbulent aspects of Warwick's past as part of the promotional material.

The brochure produced for the October 2015 Festival of the Imagination celebrations can be seen as an example. Our aim was to offer a mix of viewpoints on the university's history and it was pleasing to note the number of attendees who had read the publication and approved of the tone. Indeed, one noted in particular that ours was the only fiftieth anniversary-related item to make any mention of highly-publicised student protests that took place in February 1970. We did not include accounts of the events to be controversial, rather, we felt that since these events played an important part in shaping Warwick, as it is today, to not include them would be to project a lack of integrity.

Case study: remembering student protest, Warwick sit-in, February 1970

In the final section of this article, we will briefly explore the way in which the project as a whole – rather than the publicity surrounding it – has addressed the 1970 student protests, because it provides an enlightening case study of the value of institutional oral history. This is in no way a definitive history of the sit-ins that took place in February 1970 at Warwick. Neither do we wish to simply point the reader in the direction of E.P. Thompsons's account of the events, which, although vivid, is also notoriously polemical.[44] Rather, we would like to explore some of the ways in which the Voices of the University project might help us to construct a history of such events, and how oral history practices can help change our understanding of established histories.

The broad facts of the 1970s sit-ins are: the protest came about because (among a number of similar student-facing issues) of the continued reluctance of the university to grant the student body autonomous control of a Students' Union building; students occupied the registry building on two occasions in February 1970; during the second sit-in, administrative files were opened and papers found which suggested that surveillance was being carried out against certain members of university staff, and that political profiling of prospective students was taking place.[45] The sit-in became national news, resulted in a number of students being injuncted, and paved the way for an autonomous Students' Union building, which eventually opened in 1975. The more general administrative consequences are still disputed, as can be seen in the testimony in the Voices of the University collection.

There are two competing established accounts of the events of February 1970. *Warwick University Ltd*, which 'was written in a week' by the protestors or those sympathetic to them,

is the most well-known.[46] In contrast to this is the University administration, represented most clearly by the lengthy and detailed oral history interview given to the Voices of the University project by Professor Michael Shattock, Deputy Registrar at the time of the sit-in.[47] Shattock acknowledges in his interview that 'it was a troubled time' and that the debates that emerged in response to the sit-ins and the discovery of the files – about surveillance, the university's relationship with business, its admissions procedures, the future direction of the university, its relationship with its students, its openness – could be seen as 'a university tearing itself apart'. However, he also suggests that though it took a long time to regain trust, university life did eventually return to normal and that Sir Jack Butterworth, the Vice-Chancellor, remained the key driving force behind the university's success:

> One of the results […] was the creation of the steering committee, which is still in existence, which was a committee set up to, as it were... well, as they thought, to run the university behind the back of the vice-chancellor […] Of course what happened was, Jack... because Jack was chairman of the Senate, he was chairman of all senate committees, Jack chaired it and because he was a very smart and very able person, he soon was driving the committee.

Perhaps understandably, then, the university's administration continues to play down the significance of the events of 1970. By way of an example, though a large portion of Shattock's interview is taken up discussing the causes, unfolding and aftermath of the sit-ins, his most recent book, which was released as part of the fiftieth anniversary and assesses the relationship between the university and the local area and its impact on the higher education sector in general, makes no mention of the protests or their part in the debate about the ongoing development of the university.[48]

In Shattock's various accounts, then, he claims that after a period of unrest the situation returned to normal. However, other interviewees suggest that the very creation of the steering committee was a fundamental change in the university management structure, and that the ultimate existence of a Students' Union building proves that a radical change in direction, or at least in attitude, occurred, given that Sir Jack Butterworth had famously declared to a number of those interviewed that there would not be a Students' Union building at Warwick in his lifetime.[49]

The Voices of the University collection allows for a detailed articulation of different viewpoints concerning the impact of the protests in 1970. Taken together they offer a dynamic debate, almost fifty years after the fact, about the role that they played in shaping Warwick's early development. The fact that there is still disagreement as to how impactful the events were, shows that to some extent it is still a *live*, if dormant, issue that has not yet made the transition from communicative to collective memory. The two types of memory vie with one another, rather than communicative, changeable memory simply flowing into a more coherent collective memory. Certain interviewees were keen to highlight the important role that accounts of the 1970 sit-ins might play in contemporary debates about the marketization of higher education, the relationship between universities and corporations and

the rights of students to protest on university campuses. As Will Fitzgerald – Secretary of the Students' Union during the sit-ins and President from 1970 to1971 – notes in his interview: 'The university are missing a trick, if they don't play up the fact that there were student problems here […] there's a little growing volatility amongst young people about wanting to be respected and wanting to question.[50] He goes on to say:

> I think Warwick's mature enough to celebrate its sometimes fractious creative past […] I inherited it in '68 […] And certainly you know that there was the time which should be celebrated of questioning, on the macro level, what is Warwick for? The only thing that comes through is Edward Thompson's work with *Warwick University Ltd*, which is denigrated or praised or whatever, but there's very little else proper stuff being written about that, I think, quite formative time. So it shouldn't be air brushed from the official histories of the university, it should be celebrated because the university is now strong enough.

Bringing the institution's past history to bear on its present and future development can, therefore, be seen as a potentially important role of oral history projects such as this, where the past is being excavated of an institution that is still evolving, growing and changing.

The Voices of the University collection also allows us to offer up not just contesting viewpoints of the legacy of such moments, but to offer alternative perspectives and micro-narratives of student protest. As an example, the terms of the debate about the 1970 sit-ins is often formulated – perhaps as a result of the processes of institutional memory described above – as being the opposition between left-wing radical students and academics (epitomised by Thompson), and the business interests of the university, its leaders and Coventry's business community.

However, the interviews suggest that there are other ways in which we might think about the conflict. Fitzgerald, (who was President during the smoothing over period following the protests) can be considered a key figure of the initial sit-in. He was particularly concerned about the university administration's dismissive attitude towards the students' requests for proper representation on the various planning committees and working parties that had a direct impact on the future development of the university. For Fitzgerald, the university's lack of commitment to an autonomous Students' Union building was a symbolic gesture of their unwillingness to provide a space where student issues could be discussed and made concrete. As he notes, he and the previous president Alan Phillips were:

> patronised beyond belief by the... vice-chancellor and by other people at the top of the administration, because we were after having more say and more say in the running of the university and its future planning […] Alan tried all the constitutional ways ever so politely and we were getting absolutely bloody nowhere.[51]

Given this context, it was perhaps felt that a show of strength through a short, peaceful protest might lever attention towards a serious discussion about plans for the building.

The interview implies that the whole purpose of the protest was simply to improve the daily lives of Warwick students and to improve relations between the student body and administration. Events overtook his intentions and although the creation of a Students' Union building can be seen as a direct product of the sit-ins, it became a sidebar to a larger debate that had less significance to the actual daily lives of the students that he represented.

The view painted by history is that the protest was a radical left-wing charge designed to oppose the commercialism of the 'business university'. Fitzgerald, as one of its leaders, characterises it as an initiative to improve student conditions in the face of obstinate university management, whilst also tempering calls from a radical left who did not believe that a 'twenty-four hour tea-party in the Registry' would make any difference,[52] for more direct and extreme action to wider political issues:

> something about the way we were treated brought out what I would now say is my working class resistance to the bastards above you […] "Don't worry, we'll look after it for you, you don't worry your pretty little heads about that sort of thing." And that really got up my nose […] That was all tinged with fighting also a strong left politically within the student union, who had other views of what a student union should be and wanted to broaden the whole struggle away from a struggle about the price of chips in the cafeteria.[53]

Fitzgerald was keen to take part in the Voices of the University project because he wanted to put his experiences on record and add a grass-roots dimension that he felt was missing from the public accounts. In a sense Fitzgerald is atypical of those we interviewed in that he approached the interview with this particular purpose in mind, whereas for the most part our interviewees arrived with few preconceptions as to what they would be asked to talk about. That is not to say, however, that his views are unrepresentative. Many accounts of those involved in the sit-ins stress the frustration felt by the student body. Another student Ivor Gaber, notes that one source of the disruption came from the discrepancy between the promise of a voice in the way that the new university was to be run, and its actual status as a 'quasi-democratic organisation' that was run 'as very much a hierarchical, top-down organisation with Butterworth taking a very strong hand on the tiller'. This feeling led to antagonism and frustration.[54]

In his interview Fitzgerald also debates the long-term effects on the administration, but acknowledges that in terms of the Students' Union building it was a success and paved the way for Warwick's current standing:

> Personally I think if I'd been sitting talking to you in '68/'69, '69/'70 and asking, what do I hope to achieve? It wouldn't have been far short of what was actually being created. Now that's not just the Students' Union, that's the university, it's the vision that Butterworth had, it's the vision that Shattock had, it's the vision that the university had.[55]

As one of the architects of the sit-ins Fitzgerald's view appears entirely at odds with what we might expect. Re-framed as a grass-roots debate about the relationship between students and administration at this individual university, the interview reveals that the initial protest was not, in fact, in direct political opposition to the wider aspirations of the administration, but a response to a particular impasse that took on a greater (and unintended) significance upon its enactment, and following its co-option by other politically motivated parties.

By re-inserting the voices of those who took part in the protest, we can reframe the events in a number of different ways, recognise it as addressing a more nuanced series of debates than is perhaps publicly known, and offer up a series of different coherent histories. It also brings us closer to the events themselves. As well as the contributions of Shattock and Fitzgerald, the collection also includes (amongst several others) Cal and Barbara Winslow's separate exhilarating accounts of reproducing and distributing the exhumed papers to the wider world.[56] More amusingly, the interview with Ivor Gaber (a participant in the first sit-in and a contributor to *Warwick University Ltd*) includes his recollections of accidentally making a profit as the sit-in's nominated catering manager.[57]

The historical shadow of the sit-ins also has the potential to present the protests as an all-encompassing point of interest that involved everyone who lived, studied or worked on campus at the time, turning daily life on its head. Shattock notes that 'the administration of the university came to a standstill' due to the occupation of the administration building, but elsewhere in the collection we find views that provide a wider perspective on this and other protests. Sandra Beaufoy, an administrator during a later protest in 1975, notes how the only inconvenience was not being able to replenish supplies of postage stamps, stored at Senate house.[58] Elsewhere, Valda Reid, the administrator in the History Department – Thompson's department – during the 1970 sit-ins has mixed views about her involvement in the sit-ins:

> Well they talk about staff and students and the sit-ins and everything else, but at the end of the day there were the groups of us, like secretaries, who still had to answer the phones and do the photocopying […] So you… I had a bit of a foot in with what was going on, but only one foot because the other foot was engaged in doing everything else, so it's… it was… it's interesting there was such a vibe in the air […] And then, of course, the… particularly when the sit-ins happened, the newspapers would be ringing me and erm, I would have to trot downstairs, find Edward [Thompson] and just say, you know, "It's the *Daily Mail* or the *Daily Express*, have you got any comments?" And he either had or hadn't. […] Erm, so that side was interesting. And I did go to some of the meetings in Rootes Hall, but [sighs] if I'm really honest [sighs again], and I hate to say this, I don't know whether I…I was bothered. Because, again, it's going back to, 'I have a job, to earn the money to keep the mortgage going' […]but you know, I didn't really understand all the politics and the, and [*Warwick University Ltd*] came out in '70 and it wasn't really 'til I read the book at that time that I think I understood.[59]

So although aware of the political issues 'in the air' it did not have a significant impact on Reid's daily routine, and indeed, her views of the events appear to stem from reading *Warwick University Ltd* as much as they do from any particular direct experiences. Reid's interview once again reinforces how communicative memory characterises oral history interviews and how such memories can be used to counter any attempts to provide a more over-arching collective history.

Conclusion

In this brief exploration of student protest at Warwick, we have demonstrated that the collection of a wide range of experiences about such events can help us to challenge established institutional histories of such events. Whether this is the reframing of the debate enabled by the inclusion of previously unheard voices (Fitzgerald), the addition of amusing anecdotes that add texture to the wider narratives (Gaber), or to unmagnify the event within the wider context of daily life (Reid), these contributions all add to our understanding of the historical position, impact and meaning of the events in question. Moreover, university oral histories show how more everyday, communicative memories of events can be used to counter attempts (by both sides of the protest movement) to provide *the* definitive, collective account of protest at Warwick.

As we have argued, university oral histories are also intimately bound up with anniversary culture: they are the main motivation for conducting university oral histories and themselves form focal points or *lieux de memoire* for institutions. Anniversaries are also highly selective events, their celebration radically changing over time. More broadly, institutional anniversaries and people's responses to them also demonstrate, as Ritchie notes, that institutions do indeed *matter* to people: 'the lives of everyone, regardless of status, are influenced by some form of institution whether church or state or university […] and the history of an age cannot to be recorded without grappling with its major institutions'.[60] Such an argument might even question the stark dichotomy between public and personal history: as Kalela argues, 'public events are often remembered and perceived as personal'.[61] Institutional history illuminates this overlap and thus extends far beyond the realms of the structures and internal workings of an organisation. One of the fascinations of oral history is its ability to capture those moments when institutional memory appears to contradict personal histories of public events, producing an eruption of subjective testimony that is at once personal and public in its subject matter. Writing about a recent oral history of curators at the V&A, Linda Sandino argues that individuals attempted to use interviews to regain the agency they had lost working for such a large institution.[62] In a similar way, contemporary anniversary culture prompts individuals and groups to voice their claims about who 'owns' the memories of an institution.

Acknowledgements

16

The authors would like to thank all the interviewees who participated in this project and the Institute for Advanced Study (Warwick) for their funding and support. Sincere thanks also to Professor Richard Aldrich, Professor Carolyn Steedman and attendees at the Warwick Oral History Network 'University Oral Histories' workshop in June 2015 for their comments.

Article word count (excluding abstract and acknowledgements): 7,950

1 E.P. Thompson, 'The Business University', *New Society*, no 386, 19 February 1970, pp 301-4. E.P. Thompson (ed), *Warwick University Ltd: Industry, Management and the Universities*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.

2 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Gollancz, 1963.

3 Thompson, 1970.

4 Michael Beloff, *The Plateglass Universities*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1969, pp 11-2.

5 Donald Ritchie, 'Top down/bottom up: using oral history to re-examine government institutions', *Oral History* vol 41, no 1, 2014, p 49.

6 Jorma Kalela, *Making History: the Historian and Uses of the Past,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p 31.

7 It should be recognised that this data has been determined by a number of criteria including designated title, first name and sex, rather than from a self-declaration of gender.

8 Warwick Digital Collections: Voices of the University: Memories of Warwick, 1965-2015 [web page]. Accessed online at <http://contentm.warwick.ac.uk/cdm/landingpage/collection/warwick>, 11 December 2015.

9 Committee on Higher Education, *Higher education: report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961-63*, London: HMSO, 1963; Institute of Historical Research Winter Conference, 'The Utopian Universities: A Fifty Year Retrospective' (23-24 October 2014), organised by Professor Miles Taylor.

10 Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p 8.

11 Richard Layard, John King and Claus Moser, *The Impact of Robbins: Expansion in Higher Education*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, p 13.

12 Interview with John Gore, born April 1956; recorded by Anna Douglas, 23 October 2014.

13 Stefan Collini, *What are Universities For?*, London: Penguin, 2012, pp 28-9.

14 Adam R Nelson and Ian P Wei, 'Conclusion: Lessons from the Past, Considerations for the Future', in Adam R Nelson and Ian P Wei (eds), *The Global University: Past, Present and Future Perspectives*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p 261.

15 Interview with Reg Clayton and David Clayton, born November 1941 and October 1937; recorded by Richard Wallace, 4 August 2015.

16 Interview with Michael Coker, born June 1935; recorded by Andrew Hammond, 29 April 2013.

17 Interview with Brendan Cassidy, born September 1949; recorded by Grace Huxford, 28 October 2014.

18 Interview with James Hunt, born July 1949; recorded by Grace Huxford, 16 June 2014.

19 University of Sussex; fifty years; fifty voices, fifty faces [web page]. Accessed online at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/fiftyyears/50voices50faces>, 11 December 2015. University of York: 50th anniversary; oral history [web page]. Accessed online at <https://www.york.ac.uk/50/history/oral-history>, 11 December 2015.

20 University of Essex: creating a university podcast series [web page]. Accessed online at <http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/university/fifty/memories/podcasts.aspx>, 11 December 2015. Laura Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour: Gender, Education and Community at St Hugh's, 1886-2011*, London: Profile Books, 2011; Brian Harrison, 'College servants in an Oxford college forty years ago', *Oral History,* vol 40, no 2, 2012, pp 40-53.

21 Fifty years of the University of East Anglia: UEA oral histories [web page]. Accessed online at <https://www.uea.ac.uk/50years/oral-histories>, 11 December 2015. Stephanie Spencer, Andrea Jacobs, Camilla Leach (eds.), *Alumni Voices: The Changing Experience of Higher Education*, Winchester: University of Winchester Press, 2015.

22 Hilary Young, 'Whose story counts? Constructing an oral history of the Open University', *Oral History,* vol 39, no 2, 2011, p 98.

23 University of Westminster: our heritage: oral history [web page]. Accessed online at <http://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-heritage/oral-history>, 11 December 2015. Keele University: the

Keele oral history project [web page] Accessed online at <http://www.keele.ac.uk/thekeeleoralhistoryproject> 11 December 2015.

[24] Nigel Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p 140.

[25] Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective memory and cultural identity', *New German Critique*, no 65, 1995, p 127.

[26] Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995, p 126.

[27] Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995, p 130; Maurice Halbwachs (ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser), *On Collective Memory*, Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1992.

[28] Michael Shattock, *Making a University: a Celebration of Warwick's First 25 Years*, Coventry: University of Warwick, 1991.

[29] One of the few other texts is Henry Rees, *A University is Born: the Story of the Foundation of the University of Warwick*, Coventry: Avalon Books, 1989.

[30] Warwick: 40 years of innovation [web page]. Accessed online at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/40>, 14 December 2015.

[31] The Idea of a University [web page]. Accessed online at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/cetl/filmspublications/ideaofauniversity>, 14 December 2015.

[32] In Nora's research, *lieux de mémoire* refer to constructed 'realms' or spaces of memory, whereas *milieux de mémoire* refer to social environments where the transfer of memory between generations is more ingrained.

[33] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations,* no 26, 1989, p 12.

[34] Matt Hills, 'Anniversary Adventures in Space and Time: the Changing Face of *Doctor Who*'s Commemoration' in Matt Hills (ed.), *New Dimensions of Doctor Who: Adventures in Space, Time and Television*, London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013, p 217.

[35] Warwick: Imaging the future [web page]. Accessed online at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/warwick50>, on 05 January 2015.

[36] Imaging the future [web page].

[37] Institute of Advanced Study, *Voices of the University: Memories of Warwick, 1965-2015*, Coventry: University of Warwick, 2015.

[38] Rob Perks, 'Corporations are people too!': business and corporate oral history in Britain', *Oral History,* vol 38, no 1, 2010, p 46.

[39] Interview with Voices participant, born March 1964; recorded by Richard Wallace, 29 January 2014.

[40] Perks, 2010, p 48.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] It should be noted that as historians, the anniversary artefacts were a secondary concern to us after the interviews themselves. However this may not be true of the institution, where the visible outputs might have taken priority.

[44] Thompson, 1970.

[45] Most infamously, a letter concerning the political activities of an applicant to the School of Molecular Sciences has the words 'Reject This Man' written in the margin, as well as the signature of the then vice-chancellor Jack Butterworth. See Thompson, 1970, p 111.

[46] Thompson, 1970, p 9.

[47] Interview with Michael Shattock, born April 1939; recorded by April Gallwey, 29 November 2012; 04 December 2012; 10 January 2013; 28 January 2013; 14 March 2013.

[48] The opening of the Students' Union building is also omitted from his timeline of the history of the university. Michael Shattock, *The impact of a university on its environment: the University of Warwick after fifty years*, Coventry: University of Warwick, 2015.

[49] Interview with Will Fitzgerald, born June 1950; recorded by Richard Wallace, 15 April 2013. Interview with Alan Phillips, born April 1947; recorded by Richard Wallace, January 2014.

[50] Interview with Will Fitzgerald, born June 1950; recorded by Richard Wallace, 16 April 2013.

[51] Interview with Will Fitzgerald, born June 1950; recorded by Richard Wallace, 15 April 2013.

[52] Thompson, 1971, p 48.

[53] Interview with Will Fitzgerald, born June 1950; recorded by Richard Wallace, 15 April 2013.

[54] Interview with Ivor Gaber, born November 1946; recorded by Richard Wallace, 13 August 2013.

[55] Interview with Will Fitzgerald, born June 1950; recorded by Richard Wallace, 15 April 2013.

[56] Interview with Barbara Winslow, born April 1945; recorded by Richard Wallace, 20 June 2014. Interview with Cal Winslow, born June 1943; recorded by Richard Wallace, 23 August 2014.

[57] Interview with Ivor Gaber, born November 1946; recorded by Richard Wallace, 13 August 2013.

[58] Interview with Sandra Beaufoy, born January 1958; recorded by Grace Huxford, 14 March 2014.

[59] Interview with Valda Reid, born April 1948; recorded by Richard Wallace, 10 April 2013.

[60] Ritchie, 'Top down/bottom up', p 49.

[61] Kalela, 2012, p 116.

[62] Linda Sandino, 'For the Record:[un] official voices at the V&A', *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies,* 2009. Accessed online at <http://www.jcms-journal.com/articles/10.5334/jcms.1011208/>, 22 December 2015.