

itself in the wall of his barn.' *Fieldwork* had its premier at the Borderlines Film Festival at the Courtyard, Hereford in April 2009. A booklet to accompany the *Fieldwork* DVD, illustrated with archive photographs, has also been produced.

● Details: the DVD is available for £10 from The Rural Media Company. Contact Natalie Preece on 01432 344039, email nataliep@ruralmedia.co.uk for information.

■ WOLVERHAMPTON

Helen Lloyd writes that she is currently recording an oral history of the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton, and also training local young people to record oral histories: 'The idea came from the theatre's Education Officer, Louise Bent, who applied for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Her first aim was to train members of the theatre's youth group, Get-In, to record the memories of theatre-goers, in the hope that this would strengthen their ties to the theatre and ensure a future generation of theatre-goers. She also planned to produce a book and a film of these memories.

'Even before she obtained the Heritage Lottery grant, she organised "Grand Memories" afternoons for mainly retired theatre-goers, who were given a talk on the history of the theatre, a tour of the theatre and a cup of tea! They were then invited to fill in forms to give their contact details, list their chief memories and say what they thought a history of the theatre should include. So by the time I began work on the project in January, many potential interviewees had already been identified.

'It had also become clear that theatre-goers would be interested in the memories of performers, directors, and theatre workers, both backstage and front-of-house. It was decided that I would record most of the longer interviews with those who had worked in the theatre, and train the young people (aged 9 to 18) to record most of the memories of the patrons. Some of these interviews would be filmed by local film-maker, Phil Brown, and some would be audio only. It turned out that the young people had the harder task, since patrons who have

only seen a production once or twice have only limited memories – even when shown programmes from the time – whereas those whose daily lives had been spent in the theatre needed little prompting and spoke at greater length.

'However, the cumulative effect of the young people's shorter interviews is very powerful, in that it shows how much the theatre has meant to its patrons, from the days of long "Rep" seasons to the recent years of touring professional companies and single night performances from comedians, with major contributions from local amateur companies throughout the theatre's history. They all express great affection for the theatre and though they only remember highlights of performances (or mishaps), they have detailed memories of repeated activities such as queuing outside for tickets, or travelling to the theatre in war-time and delighting in the contrast between the blacked-out streets and the brightly-lit auditorium. The first contact with the theatre for most patrons was through childhood visits to the pantomime, and an historian of pantomime would find a rich resource in the interviews with patrons, performers and theatre workers, including memories of making pantomime costumes from one 100-year-old former seamstress.

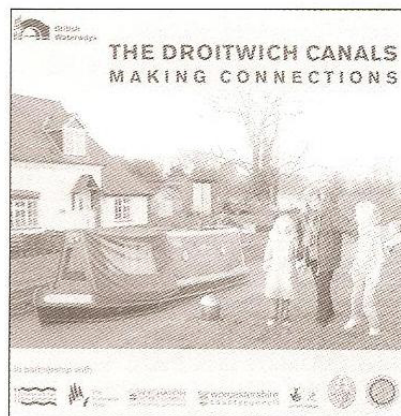
'The unedited interviews will be deposited in Wolverhampton Archives, and artefacts lent or donated by the interviewees will be displayed at the theatre. Many patrons have kept programmes, signed photos, tickets and – in a few cases – notes they made on performances. Performers and theatre-workers have also kept photos and even pay-slips! The theatre is one of the most distinguished buildings in the city centre. It was built by Victorian architect, Charles Phipps, and opened on 10 December 1894. Passionate enthusiasm is a characteristic of most of the interviews, and there are many memories of the fight by local people to re-open the theatre after it closed for two years in the early 1980s. The interviews provide compelling support for the preservation of live theatre.'

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■ WORCESTERSHIRE DROITWICH

In 2008 more than eighty people took part in the 'Community Mind Map Project', led by Dr Malcolm Dixon, to explore what the Droitwich Canals and their history mean to local people and visitors. This resulted in a CD, *Making Connections*, which includes photographs and film alongside extracts from their accounts. The complete recordings have been deposited at Worcestershire Archives.

One interviewee, Max Sinclair, who was a schoolboy in 1942, recalled that: 'there were the Italians (Prisoners of War) with their brown uniforms and yellow patches on the back and they were sitting up on the bank in the trees, and somehow we struck up a friendship. I would go along and eat their sandwiches and talk to them about England and Italy.' Another,



Oliver Barton, who was born in 1927, went swimming in the canal above the mill run by Bill Watts: 'and we used to play him up. He would take his revenge and open up all the sluice gates so we couldn't swim. But it was a two edged sword because the next day there wasn't enough water to do his milling!'

Julia Letts sends news of a second project, 'Our War: an oral history archive for Droitwich'. This has been developed by the Droitwich Area Forum for Older People, who wanted to encourage some of the more isolated members of the community to come along to its meetings: 'The group decided to focus on collecting wartime recollections and experiences, and was so impressed with the response from the community that it decided to create an oral recording project.