



Dean Heritage Centre, Camp Mill, Soudley,  
GL14 2UB  
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[www.deanheritagecentre.com](http://www.deanheritagecentre.com)

## Dean Heritage Centre Forest Oral Histories Information

### Forester's Forest

The Dean Heritage Centre Oral History project is part of the NLHF funded Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership Programme formed from an association of local organisations and community groups within the Forest of Dean. The aim is to raise awareness and participation in the built, natural and cultural heritage of the Forest. This 5 year project runs until March 2022.

### DHC Oral History Project

The Forest Oral Histories project is to digitise and catalogue our unique collection of around 170 audio cassette tapes from the 1980s to 2000s. Digitising them will not only preserve the audio recordings but also enable access to a wide range of people. The recordings are interviews of Foresters talking about various aspects of their lives in the Forest of Dean. They are fascinating to listen to and reveal what life was like in the Forest fifty to a hundred years ago. People talk about their experiences in mining, forestry, various industries, childhood, schools, growing up, shopping, towns and villages, Forest dialect and much more.

The collection was begun by Elsie Olivey, a founder of Dean Heritage Museum, who could see Forest life rapidly changing and decided to preserve people's memories by recording them. In an interview on Radio Severn Sound in 1984 Elsie describes why she is doing the interviews:

*'We go out and talk to old people in the Forest. We are trying to get the old ones first because that's the generation that is fast disappearing. We talk to....men ...on mining...and women ...domestic service... ....things on tape you get never read in the history books because you are getting the thoughts of the people themselves'.*

Collections Officer Nicola Wynn 'Much has been written about the history of the Forest of Dean, but the recorded interviews further enrich this history by recording the unique personal experiences and memories of people. They really bring history to life and allow us to connect with people's lives. The recordings reveal the heart and soul of daily life and are by turns fascinating, poignant and moving.'

The legacy of this project will be an oral history archive of nearly 200 recordings spanning the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An important social history archive for the Forest which will be a valuable resource to historians and people interested in Forest history. Look out on our website, Facebook page and newsletters for further updates and events.

### Help wanted

Dean Heritage Centre is trying to contact interviewers and interviewees to ask their permission to use the recordings. Sadly, many of the people interviewed will have died by now so we must then try to contact relatives. We would greatly appreciate help from the public in tracing the relatives of the people interviewed. Please have a look and if you are a relative or friend or you have any information for us please contact us.

Contact us if you would like to volunteer to help on the Oral History project.



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**Content** The interviews cover a wide variety of topics:

**Industry & Work** - Coal mining (free mines & large collieries), saw mills, iron mining, brickworks, nail making, tin plate, transport, farming, forestry, fishing, haulage, teaching, armed services, Rank Xerox

**Home & family life** – cottages, furnishings, washing, bathing, toilets, gardening, clothing, lighting, cooking, keeping animals

**Towns & villages** – descriptions, shops, events, cinema

**School** – various school experiences, teachers, walking to school, games played

**Domestic service** – experiences of various women in what was the most common work by women

**Religion** – church, chapel, Sunday school, Temperance, outings & treats

**War** – both WW1 & WW2, life in armed services and on the home front, Americans in the Forest

**Poverty & hard times** – living through 1920s, 1930s and war years, living with little money

**Strikes/Unions** – General strike of 1926, lockout 1921, Speech House demonstrations

**Sheep** – many miners running sheep

**Health** – before the welfare state, doctors, the Dilke hospital, home remedies, illnesses & accidents

**Dialect** – many examples of strong Forest dialect

**Leisure/culture** – choirs, cinema, songs, sport, fairs, days out, walks, social gatherings, events

**Camp Mill (now Dean Heritage Centre)** – saw mill, people living in cottages, children playing

**Migration** – moving in or out of the Forest for work

**Miscellaneous** – gypsies, old customs, humour, courtship

### Accessing the recordings

Full recordings – can be accessed by visiting DHC

Excerpts – a few can be listened to on the DHC website and more can be accessed at DHC

DHC database - this searchable database holding all catalogued records is available at DHC

Please contact the Collections Officer to make an appointment to visit DHC

### Batch 1

This is the Elsie Olivey collection, the original collection and the oldest recordings. The interviews were carried out in the early 1980s with people who grew up from the 1890s to the 1930s. A rich source of information and interest for early 20<sup>th</sup> century life in the Forest. Includes many detailed recollections of mining.

### Batch 2

12 recordings of interviews arranged by Elsie Olivey through The Forge Centre in Cinderford early 2000s plus various other recordings of interviews of Foresters from the 1990s up to 2000. Also includes the song The Jovial Forester, Forest choirs and radio programmes on free miners and fishing on the Severn.

### Batch 3

Various interviews recorded in the early 2000s. Interviews of Foresters from early to mid-1900s. Includes several interviews with local farmer Eric Freeman.

### Batch 4

Has been digitised but not yet catalogued. By the end of 2021 we will add information on this batch to this website.

**For all Oral history enquiries please contact Collections Officer Nicola Wynn by email**

**[Nicola@deanheritagecentre.com](mailto:Nicola@deanheritagecentre.com) or tel 01594 822170.**