

# Scottish Working People's History Trust

## Supporters' Newsletter, November 2022

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Dear Friends

Welcome to the 2022 edition of the Scottish Working People's History Trust (SWPHT) Supporters' Newsletter.

It's been a busy year for the Trust. Our January Trustees was held on-line as the Covid health pandemic continued its grip but thankfully by April concerns over holding in-person meetings had eased sufficiently for the inaugural Ian MacDougall Memorial Lecture to be held in person at the National Library of Scotland. You can read Dorothy Kidd's report of this event in the newsletter.

Our good friends and colleagues at the EERC, University of Edinburgh are continuing to make steady progress on the Peeblesshire textile workers Flashback publication. Trustees have also been busy compiling a full catalogue of all SWPHT recordings and papers, and developing policies to guide our work and ensure we meet our legal responsibilities.

Whilst the SWPHT is committed to continuing to publish books we know that digitisation and online publication will enable us to expand our reach and ensure the long term accessibility of material that is out of print. In 2017 the SWPHT commissioned Veronica Hartwich, an experienced social and industrial museum professional, to develop a plan for how best the Trust could enter the digital domain. The Trust holds sets of interviews from across fifteen different occupations – a collection of over 600 interviews in total. In this issue of the newsletter Veronica describes her work preparing SWPHT oral history interviews for website access.

Finally, we're enormously grateful to John Hume for sharing with us memories of his friend and colleague, Michael Stanley Moss, in a fascinating article describing how together they set about surveying, saving and securing a place for industrial records in archival collections throughout Scotland.

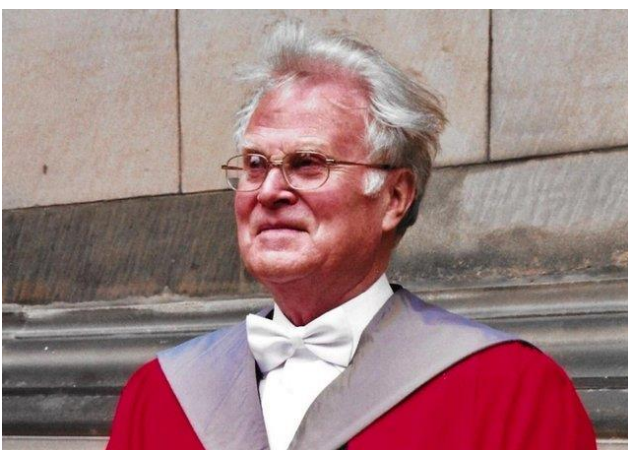
## Ian MacDougall inaugural memorial lecture, April 2022 presented by Professor Lynn Abrams

On Thursday 7 April 2022, sixty of Ian MacDougall's family, friends and colleagues gathered at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh to hear Lynn Abrams, Professor of Modern History at the University of Glasgow, speak on the theme **\*Listening to people speak: the value of oral histories of working people\***. This marked the inauguration of the annual Ian MacDougall Memorial Lecture and a further successful collaboration between the National Library of Scotland (NLS), the Scottish Labour History Society (SLHS) and the Scottish Working People's History Trust (SWPHT).

The event was opened by Christopher Cassells, NLS's Head of Archives and Manuscripts; tea, coffee and delicious biscuits (home-made by NLS' Dr Heidi Egginton) were served whilst people took their seats; and relevant films from the NLS' Moving Image collections were screened in the background. Stewart MacLennan, Chair of SLHS, then introduced Professor Abrams and announced the SLHS Ian MacDougall Essay Prize.

Professor Abrams covered the history of oral history in the United Kingdom in her talk, with examples of very early work undertaken in East Anglia by George Ewart Evans, and later examples from Shetland Archives and her own and her colleagues' work in Glasgow. She contrasted the way in which many people today are used to telling and retelling their own stories with the early use of oral history as a tool for exploring the lives and stories, both working and domestic, of those often under-represented in conventional historical sources. She concluded by acknowledging Ian MacDougall's immense legacy in leading and being central to the creation of an oral history archive of the past for future historians: "a window into how people made sense of their lives".

A lively discussion followed, with questions on the differences between men and women as interviewees, who oral historians might want to interview next, what the interviewees get out of being recorded, and the the use of oral history techniques in schools and universities.



The event concluded with lovely reminiscences from Ian's widow, Sandra, and elder brother, George. George spoke of their childhood and the different influences of their parents. He concluded with: "he was a great man, a great family man and I salute his memory".

Sandra then thanked all those who had helped organise the event, her family and friends and spoke of Ian's modesty, politeness and persistence which could persuade people to do things they hadn't expected! Of how full of 'good ideas' he was, of his sense of humour and of their long marriage. She went on to talk of Ian's resistance to technology and ended with telling us about Ian's system for creating indexes for his books, with her final words: "I miss him greatly but I do not miss his indexes!".

## Professor Jim Phillips to present the 2023 Ian MacDougall Memorial Lecture

The NLS, SLHS and SWPHT is delighted to announce that Professor Jim Phillips will present the second Ian MacDougall Memorial Lecture, scheduled for April 2023. His presentation will explore related themes of oral history and social equity.



Jim Phillips is Professor of Economic and Social History at the University of Glasgow, joint editor of Scottish Labour History Journal and a member of the executive committees of the Scottish Labour History Society and the Society for the Study of Labour History.

His most recent book, 'Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy in Scotland since 1955', co-authored with Professor Jim Tomlinson and Dr Valerie Wright, was published in 2021, preceded by 'Scottish Coal Miners in the Twentieth Century' (2019), 'Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984-85' (2012) and 'The Industrial Politics of Devolution: Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s' (2008), among other titles.

Jim Phillips is described as having been "of invaluable assistance" in the Final Report of the Independent Review on the Impact on Communities of the Policing of the Miners' Strike 1984-85, and his next book, 'Justice, Memory and the Miners' Strike in Scotland' will document the campaign for restorative justice.

This will be an in-person event with possible live streaming. Booking will be through an Eventbrite page (normally released on the NLS website six weeks before the date of the lecture) and there will be tickets reserved this year for SWPHT supporters.

## Peeblesshire textile workers interviews to be published

The SWPHT's next publication will showcase the collection of recordings Ian MacDougall made with Peeblesshire textile workers (1996-97 and 2004). SWPHT is enormously grateful to our colleagues Caroline Milligan and Mark Mulhern at the EERC, University of Edinburgh, who are preparing the interviews for publication via the University's Flashback Series. The volume will also include a chapter celebrating the important and lasting contribution Ian has made to the discipline of oral history.

[Flashbacks | The University of Edinburgh](#)

## Preparing oral histories for website access by Veronica Hartwich

In 2017 the SWPHT asked me to assist them to improve public knowledge of their oral history collection. My first task was to consult with Scran who were keen to add more oral history content to their website. Part of Historic Environment Scotland (HES), Scran hosts images, movies and sounds from museums, galleries, archives and the media and is one of the largest educational online services in the UK supporting thousands of schools, libraries, colleges and universities.

We looked at interviews which had not already been published in book form by the Tuckwell Press. These included Ian MacDougall's 1997 interviews with people who had worked for Henry Robb shipbuilders in Leith. Two interviews were selected. By the time they were uploaded to Scran, I had learned what I needed to know about preparing oral history for a website.

Two years later, the Trust asked me to work on another project. This one was the Onion Johnnies, who travelled to the British Isles to sell the onions grown in their home region in Brittany. In 1999, Ian MacDougall traced nine individuals, who had been (or in the case of one man who at that date still was) earning a living selling Breton onions in Scotland. A tenth interviewee was the wife of one Onion Johnnie. Her brief interview tells what life was like for the women who stayed at home to raise their families.

The Onion Johnnies' stories had been published by Tuckwell. Luckily, the Trust could send a copy of the book to me. Shortly before I began work, the country entered pandemic lockdown and Edinburgh University's School of Scottish Studies Archive, where the recordings and transcripts are held was closed. Without the book my attempts to start work would have been stymied.

While the first two interviews from the Trust collection were uploaded whole, a Scran decision, I concluded that the Onion Johnnies interviews were less suitable for this approach. Most are lengthy and, following Ian's question plan, contain similar material. This meets the needs of scholarly research but not those of an online public resource. I decided to choose around five extracts or clips from each interview, to provide facts about onion selling and details from the interviewees' personal stories.

So then, what does preparing interviews for Scran involve? This is what is known as website content writing. My first step was to gather some basic facts about the original interviewing project, who was the interviewer (Ian MacDougall), who was interviewed (Onion Johnnies) and when (1999) and write a brief introduction. I followed by doing the same for each of the interviewees. Choosing the stories and suitable clips comes next, as above. Each clip must itself be introduced – a sentence or two saying what it is about (in other words why have I, the researcher chosen it). These introductions will go on-line with the clip and are all part of the metadata, which search engines explore. In addition there will be a list of metadata keywords (or tags or index terms) and which must include the name of the contributor, the Trust. All this will be put together with the audio clips, the extracts from the transcriptions, and, where the interview was made in the French language, extracts from the translations. My introductory texts, metadata and content

summaries will also be sent to the School of Scottish Studies Archive, where I hope they will make a useful addition to the collection records.

I have found the interviews to be a fascinating introduction to the world of these migrant workers. Their stories all emphasise arduous work. The onion sellers on their rounds had to sell everything before they returned, which could mean very long days. When not selling they strung onions for sale. There was little time for leisure. Someone asked me if there were marriages between the onion sellers and Scottish women. That is an interesting question but these interviews offer no evidence.

There's more than just details of work. Here is youthful excitement, companionship and pride in effort. And sorrow. I found the stories poignant, where death and loss of opportunity stepped in. It is appealing to find how well the Johnnies got on with their customers and how, when they faced the decision to retire, they expressed sadness at parting from their customers, who were saddened in return. The Johnnies were philosophical about their lives, accepting the need to work hard far from home and getting the most out of it.

The interviews are rich in social history. These were lives which covered most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest person was born in 1913 and arrived in Scotland for the first time at the age of eight. The youngest was born in 1945 and in 1999 was still selling onions in Edinburgh, seeing in himself the last of the Onion Johnnies. None were old enough to have experienced the First World War but they knew its effect on their families; all but the youngest lived through the Second World War years when France was occupied. And always in the background is rural poverty. Then, not only do these interviews depict the lives of the speakers but they also illustrate contemporary life in Scotland, with details of the places they lived, where and to whom they sold their onions, and of changes they saw happen. The Johnnies make good witnesses.

HES is currently working on a major revision of their information websites, including scan, aiming to streamline them and create an improved resource. The SWPHT will be sending HES some good new material soon.

## **Do you shop on Amazon? Did you know that you can support the SWPHT at the same time?**

Many of us shop to some extent on Amazon. AmazonSmile is an app that enables customers to nominate a charity that they would like to support. Amazon will give 0.5% of the net purchase price (excluding VAT and other shipping fees) of eligible AmazonSmile purchases to the charitable organisation selected.

If you wish to help the Trust when you are making purchases then there are two things you need to do:

- Firstly, log on to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), sign into to your Amazon account and select SWPHT as the charity you wish to receive your donation
- Once this is done and when you are shopping on Amazon in the future you will need to purchase your items through [smile.amazon.co.uk](https://smile.amazon.co.uk) rather than the main Amazon site. Only purchases made through [smile.amazon.co.uk](https://smile.amazon.co.uk) are eligible for the donation.

## In memory of Michael Stanley Moss - a tribute by his friend and colleague, John Hume

Michael Stanley Moss was appointed Survey Officer of the Western Survey of the National Register of Archives of the Scottish Record Office in 1970, a few months after the Western Survey had been established as part of a series of regional archival surveys. For each of these there was an Advisory Committee, with members drawn from local universities. The Chair of the Western Survey Advisory Committee was Professor AAM Duncan of Glasgow University's Department of Scottish History. At that time I was a lecturer in the Department of Economic History in the University of Strathclyde, whose head of department, Professor SGE Lythe was also a member of the Advisory Committee. Because of my research interest in West of Scotland industry I was soon co-opted on to the Committee. Soon after his appointment Michael came to see me and we discussed possible surveys of the records of industrial firms.



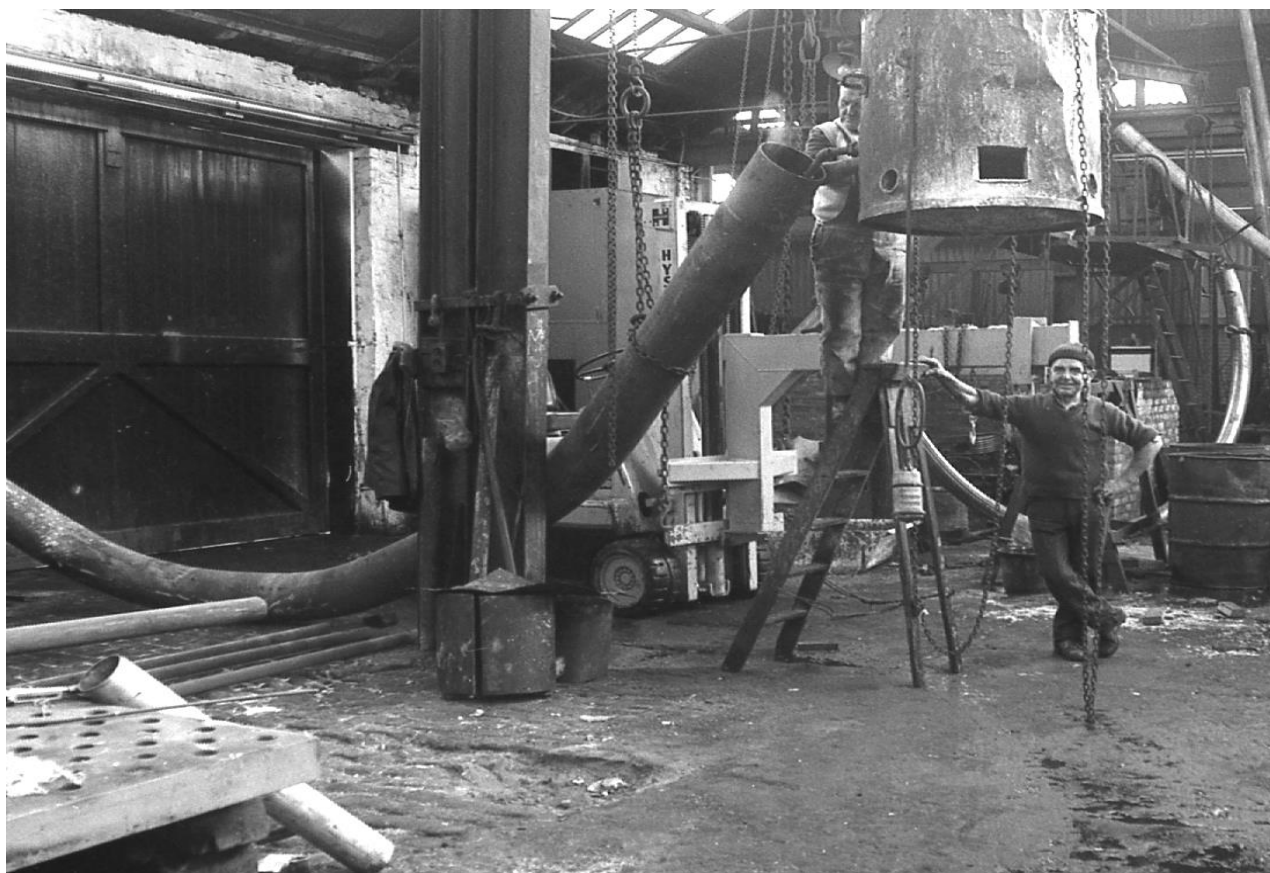
Earlier Peter Payne, of the University of Glasgow, had started to survey business records in the area, but had been primarily concerned with financial and administrative records. My interest was not at all in businesses as ways of making money, but rather in what they did and how they did it, not only as expressed in their records, but also as evident in their premises, plant and work practices. Michael was happy with this expansion of the concept of business records, and we agreed that we would begin a systematic survey of the Scottish iron-founding industry. There was a handbook to the industry which listed all the companies involved in this industry, with a summary of their specializations.

We began with the Lion Foundry in Kirkintilloch on 1 February 1971, and over the next few months surveyed nearly forty concerns, as far south as Langholm and Annan in Dumfriesshire. Other surveys were undertaken with the survey officers in the east and north-east. Though some firms were unwilling to cooperate most were very helpful. We built up a fairly comprehensive picture not only of the industry itself, but also of its links within the Scottish economy as a whole. We were also able to look in some detail of the techniques involved and of the kinds of records likely to be found. The results were summarised in our book [The Workshop of the British Empire](#), which was published by Heinemann Educational Books in 1978.

In April 1972 the Society of Archivists held their annual meeting in Glasgow, and Michael and I put together an exhibition, largely based on what we had found during our survey (my own and archive photographs, drawings and artefacts). This was held in the assembly hall of the University of Strathclyde, and was very well received.

Looking back to 1971, however, a much larger project developed as a result of the liquidation of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS). The Liquidator appointed was Robert Courtney Smith at the time the Chairman of the Business Archives Council for Scotland. Through his good offices Michael and I, with substantial help from a variety of sources,

were able to survey the records of UCS and its constituent companies. On the basis of that survey the Glasgow and Clydebank local authorities and the Glasgow universities were able, jointly with the Scottish Record Office, to bid successfully to acquire these records, including large collections of photographs and of ship and engineering drawings. I was also able to photograph the Clydebank and Scotstoun yards in some detail, including the last launches from the Clydebank yard.



Fabricating copper piping in the workshops of Morrison and Macdonald (Paisley) Ltd, plumbers and brassfounders, 5 Murray Street, Paisley, 18 October 1971

Before this acquisition Michael and I mounted an exhibition in the then new Collins gallery in the University of Strathclyde, in association with the curator of the gallery, Stephen Elson. Entitled 'Pride in Your Work' it was intended to raise the public profile of the West of Scotland's heavy industries, and hopefully to support the case for establishing a Museum of Industry in Glasgow. It drew extensively on the material discovered during the Western Survey, but was also generously supported by many of the companies whose records had been surveyed, and by Glasgow Museums and Archives. The UCS Liquidator very kindly allowed us to make prints for photographs in the UCS collections, and Scott-Lithgow (1969) Ltd provided the same facility for their collections. We also benefitted from considerable work by students in the University of Glasgow. The exhibition was well received, but a press strike at the time limited its impact.

The photographs assembled for this exhibition, however, formed the basis for our first joint publication Clyde Shipbuilding from Old Photographs (BT Batsford, 1975) and the subsequent Workshop of the British Empire, mentioned above. The success of these publications in providing well-illustrated and informatively-captioned accounts of West of Scotland industry (at a time when academic economic historians eschewed illustration) led

to us being commissioned to write a series of substantial books on major firms and industries – Beardmore: History of a Scottish Industrial Giant; The Making of Scotch Whisky; and Shipbuilders to the World (Harland and Wolff), all of which were lavishly illustrated. For The Making of Scotch Whisky we were awarded the Andre Simon Memorial Prize for the best book on drink published in 1981, and Kingsley Amis, then a noted writer, chose it as his book of the Year in The Times, commenting that it was ‘magnificently and variously illustrated’.

During most of the period when Michael and I worked most closely together, sitting side by side in writing these books, I was lecturing in economic and industrial history at Strathclyde University. In 1984, however, I was asked to go over ‘on assignment’ for three years to the Ancient Monuments Division of the Scottish Office, as an Inspector of Ancient Monuments. The three years turned into fifteen, and it was with some difficulty that I was able to complete my contribution to the Harland and Wolff book, in 1986. Thereafter my professional collaboration with Michael became very slight, but the bonds of friendship and shared interests remained strong. When I retired from what had become Historic Scotland in 1999 Michael was one of the prime movers in producing a book of essays about my career, an entirely unexpected and deeply humbling honour.

It would I believe be very fair to say that our collaboration between 1971 and 1986 was not only deeply enriching for both of us, but also important for changing perceptions of Scottish economic and industrial history, especially regarding the impact of the First World War. The credibility we earned through our joint work also underpinned the creation of the Scottish Maritime Museum at Irvine, the Scottish Mining Museum at Newtongrange, and the Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life. Thanks to our joint work we were also able to ensure that between 1975 and 1996 the provision of archival services was a Regional rather than a District responsibility, and to secure a place for ‘our’ type of industrial records in archival collections throughout Scotland. The international status of the Glasgow University Business History Collection is also largely due to our work.

Readers of this piece may feel that it emphasises our joint work rather than Michael’s own contribution, but there is a very real sense in which the joint work I have described was so integrated that this is the only way in which I can write. The way in which Michael integrated me into his family, and the many wonderful experiences which we shared - such as signing 1500 copies of the Harland and Wolff book at one sitting, after a candle-lit dinner with the Directors of the company; the parties on Islay to celebrate the launch of The Making of Scotch Whisky; and being threatened with violence by an ironfounder – remain with me. But perhaps my favourite Michael memories are of being in the Secretary’s safe (a large secure room) in John Brown’s yard at Clydebank, and the Company Secretary coming in and saying ‘Have you seen the current cash-book? It looks like this’, and of Michael, then very trendily dressed, being taken for a member of the ‘Underground Press’ in a Glasgow engineering works.

Michael was a remarkable man, remarkable for his breadth of vision, his enthusiasm, his sense of the ridiculous, but most of all for being a thoroughly good person, a person who lit up the lives of so many people.



## Flooring the World: exploring the linoleum industry in Fife project is well underway



This exciting new project is now well underway. Run by OnFife and funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Collections Fund, the Flooring the World project has been engaging with former and current linoleum workers. At one time Kirkcaldy employed around 4000 people in the manufacture of floorcoverings and was the largest producer of linoleum in the world. The industry remains important in Fife to this day as Kirkcaldy has the UK's only remaining linoleum factory, which is run by Forbo.

Lily Barnes, OnFife's Engagement Curator, has been carrying out oral history interviews with former linoleum workers and is planning an exhibition on the subject to be held later in 2023 in Kirkcaldy Galleries.

Through the project OnFife's significant linoleum collection has been further enhanced by the donation of archives, pattern books and linoleum samples from Forbo. Tours of the Glenrothes Collections Centre are being held, to give people an opportunity to view this fascinating collection.

If anyone would like to find out more or get involved, please contact Lily Barnes by emailing [lino@onfife.com](mailto:lino@onfife.com)

**The Scottish Working People's History Trust, 2022**

<http://www.swpht.org.uk/index.php/contact-us>