North Sea Oil, its Narratives and its History: an Archive of Oral Documentation and the Making of Contemporary Britain

TERRY BROTHERSTONE AND HUGO MANSON[1]

> [A] very little man … began to walk up and down the steel gantry of the deck, moving his arms horizontally backwards and forwards and breathing deeply… [H]e stopped near the rail … and nodded brusquely at the shimmering lights spread around us in the darkness. 'You know what that is?' he said and did not pause for an answer. 'That's what keeps our country solvent.' He stretched his arms above his head and touched his toes six times… Then he turned smartly on his heels and marched back inside.[2]
>
> Al Alvarez, poet, reporter for the *New Yorker* magazine, on board the *Treasure Finder* flotel, Brent Field, 1983.

This article is about the future of North Sea oil – or, more precisely, the future of its past. Its subject is not the industry's prospects in the early decades of the twenty-first century,[3] but rather how its history is to be narrated and the significance of that history understood. We anticipate a new stage in the study of the origins and evolution of the North Sea oil and gas enterprise – one informed by, amongst other things, two major Aberdeen University-based projects. In 2008 the 'official history' of the industry, by Alex Kemp – Professor of Petroleum Economics at Aberdeen and a long-established academic commentator on the industry – is due to be published, making available and analysing government records, at least to the extent civil service vetters allow.[4] And, at the end of 2006, the present authors completed the main stages of the *Lives in the Oil Industry* [*LOI*] oral history project.[5] What follows is inspired by the resultant archive, which can be consulted both at the University of Aberdeen and at National Life Stories in The British Library in London.[6]

[1] Authors can be contacted at <t.brotherstone@abdn.ac.uk> and <h.manson@abdn.ac.uk>.

[2] A. Alvarez, *Offshore: a North Sea Journal* (London, 1986), p. 40. Alvarez went offshore in 1983 to research a series of articles for the *New Yorker*.

[3] On which, see A. G. Kemp and Linda Stephen, 'The Prospects for Activity in the UKCS to 2035: the 2007 Perspective' (North Sea Study Occasional Paper, 116, Department of Economics, University of Aberdeen, July 2007).

[4] A. G. Kemp, *The Official History of North Sea Oil and Gas* (London, forthcoming 2008).

[5] For details of the *Lives in the Oil Industry* [*LOI*] archive and its sponsorship, see Appendix, and footnotes 6, 24 and 25 below.

[6] The *LOI* archive is catalogued in the Aberdeen University Special Libraries and Archives (catalogue number MS3769) under the name of the interviewee. At British Library Sound Archive National Life Stories, each tape is catalogued under a number prefixed by 'F', and that is given in the references below. So, for example, the reference 'Frederic Hamilton interview

A major part of our purpose is to introduce the *LOI* archive. We argue that it is of considerable importance in itself and of even more significant potential. Our epigraph, from a story told by a distinguished poet reporting on the North Sea experience for the *New Yorker* magazine, although not drawn from the archive, exemplifies, in a few elegant sentences, one key point about it. It tells of a small incident, a very particular experience, of a sort that would normally be forgotten or at best recounted in pubs or at dinner parties. Yet the precision with which this very personal moment is recorded, and the nature of the fitness fanatic's perception of what working in the industry in 1983 meant to him, lead the reader to question the very offhand interpretation of its significance that appears in most of the history books. The *LOI* project has recorded many stories containing such potentially illuminating insights.

Oral documentation creates a record that would otherwise be lost, depriving historians of an important body of evidence – one that often includes subaltern experiences other sources marginalise or omit. Amidst all the often theoretically stimulating discussions about the methodological opportunities and pitfalls of oral history, this basic point is worth restating.[7] In his recent *A History of Modern Britain*, the political commentator Andrew Marr remarks on the failure of recent accounts of the UK since the 1960s to deal adequately, if at all, with North Sea oil. We return later to the more general significance of this, but note here Marr's point that this is 'unfortunate' because the 'roughnecks and roustabouts, the shuttle helicopter pilots landing in gale-force winds on postage-stamp-like platforms, and the divers taking horrible risks on the ocean bed, deserve a larger role in modern history.'[8] The *LOI* archive, amongst much else, helps to create the conditions for that deficiency to be rectified.

In our first section we marry another type of transcribed oral evidence, the diary of Tony Benn, with extracts from our archive, to revisit a seminal episode in the history of

with Hugo Manson, 10 October 2001: *LOI* archive, F14471, would, in Aberdeen, be *LOI* archive, MS3769: 'Frederic Hamilton interview'. Requests for access to the interviews, to ensure availability, should be made in advance.

[7] There is a large literature on these topics. For developments in oral history and examples of its variety and engagement with historical scholarship, memory-theory and the public consciousness of history, see the most recent editions of Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past* (London, 3rd ed., 2002) and of Robert Perks and Al Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (London, 2nd ed., 2006). For the most stimulating recent exemplification of the progressive use of oral history on a particular historical topic, see Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (English ed., London, 2003).

[8] Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (London, 2007), p. 440. Marr makes his point into an ironic aside, claiming that the people thus ignored, particularly by Baroness Thatcher in her political memoir *The Downing Street Years*, were actually 'model Thatcherites'. But Thatcherism was not just about risk-taking and enterprise; and many enterprising risk-takers were not Thatcherites. The evidence in an oral history archive can get us closer to what people were really thinking and what their motives were.

North Sea oil – its first landing on mainland Britain in the summer of 1975. This reinforces the argument about the significance of Alvarez's story by taking an incident, a clash between two individuals in this case, as a micro-moment containing a major theme awaiting disclosure. Section II – the core of the article – introduces a small sample of the interviewees whose self-told stories are now available in the *LOI* archive. In section III we make some points about the nascent historiography of the subject; the importance of ensuring that the story of North Sea Oil acquires a central place in the interpretation of contemporary British history, both in scholarly discourse and in public debate; and the significance of certain lacunae in the memoirs of Margaret Thatcher and other leading politicians – gaps, we argue, where an assessment of the relevance of the offshore industry to their own political stories ought to be. Our conclusion alludes to some of the important questions we are not able to cover here, and summarises some of the main points we do make, more in the form of questions for future research and contestation than of cut-and-dried answers. It is a premise of this article that we are dealing with a subject of great historical importance and scholarly potential, the discussion of which is very much in its infancy.

I

'To Tower Pier on the Thames with Caroline for the first landing of North Sea Oil', reads an entry in Tony Benn's diary for Wednesday 18 June 1975. Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Energy recorded 'a bright, hot day' when 'even the Isle of Grain, the most ravaged, desolate, industrial landscape in the Medway, looked quite beautiful.'[9]

A week earlier, Benn had been 'shuffled' by Prime Minister Harold Wilson: on 10 June 1975, after some hesitation, the effectively sacked Secretary of State for Industry decided to remain in the cabinet with responsibility for the Department of Energy.[10] The move was designed to reassure business and the City that a line was being drawn under the period of governmental accommodation to worker militancy, which had followed the defeat of Edward Heath's Tory government in February 1974 substantially as a consequence of a national miners' strike. Wilson's opportunity came after a referendum, which had been Benn's idea, to confirm or rescind Britain's membership of the European Economic Community (then 'the Common Market', now the European Union). Benn had campaigned for withdrawal, but the result was an overwhelming majority for staying in.[11] Just over a year on from his return to the premiership, and

[9] Tony Benn, *Against the Tide: Diaries 1973-76* (London, 1990; first published 1989), p. 403.

[10] '… it is possible that if I had refused Energy, he [Wilson] might have kept me in Industry … [but] I heard that he had said that if I had refused to go to Energy, he would have taken over the Department of Industry himself … Anyway, I accepted the job. I think he was quite surprised. I walked out and banged the door.' Benn, *Against the Tide*, p. 395.

[11] A Benn ally thought that '[t]he Left has played its trump card and been soundly defeated. This is the moment to fade out …', leading him to consider that he should 'get out and work on the sidelines'; but he was soon dissuaded. Benn, *Against the Tide*, p. 386ff.

following a narrow endorsement by voters in the second 1974 general election in November, Wilson, already apparently contemplating a limit on his own final term in office,[12] was determined to signal that Britain – which some were already suggesting might have become ungovernable[13] – once again had an authoritative government, attuned to the norms of capitalist economy. Dependent on the support of trade-union leaders, however, he felt the need to conciliate the left; and Benn's demotion was partially concealed by stress being placed on the importance of his now being politically responsible for Britain's nascent offshore industry.[14]

Oil from the North Sea represented the opportunity for the 'modernisation' of the British economy beyond the 'desolate industrial landscape' it already looked in danger of becoming – and not only at the Isle of Grain. The issue still to be resolved was: what sort of modernisation was post-industrial Britain to undergo? Arguments about the significance of North Sea oil and gas were to be entwined with that broader question. Benn was, of course, well aware of the opportunities offered by the North Sea windfall to a cash-strapped country, which the Labour governments of the 1960s had failed to transform into a post-imperial, technologically efficient, modern social democracy.[15] But – at least in the published version of his diary – the impressions Benn recorded of the day Britain's oil first flowed are dominated by his reflections on what was later to be routinely called 'globalisation', and the people who controlled it. He was disgusted at the 'complete cross-section of the international capitalist and British Tory establishment and their wives' he encountered on the hydrofoil taking the party to the Isle of Grain. He was 'so glad Caroline [his wife] was there to talk to.'[16]

[12] Wilson's resignation in 1976 has been the subject of conspiracy theories and much speculation as to his motives, but the evidence seems to support the current consensus that, following Heath's unexpected defeat in the general election of 28 February 1974 and Wilson's re-appointment to the premiership in early March, the Labour leader never intended to serve more than two further years, until his sixtieth birthday, during which time he presumably hoped to acquire a reputation for re-establishing economic and social stability. See, for example, Philip Ziegler, *Wilson: the Authorised Life* (London, 1993), p. 490.

[13] Terry Brotherstone, Anna Clark and Kevin Whelan, 'Rethinking the Trajectory of Modern British History: an Ireland-Scotland Approach', in Brotherstone, Clark and Whelan (eds.), *These Fissured Isles: Ireland, Scotland and the Making of Modern Britain 1798-1848* (Edinburgh, 2005), pp. 4-6, refers to the historiographical significance of this moment in contemporary British history.

[14] A cartoon in the Conservative *Daily Express* played along with this emphasis by depicting Benn as an Arab sheik sitting on an oil rig over the slogan 'Minister for Britain's last hope – North Sea oil', with Benn himself saying, 'Harold! Next time you give me a "demotion," I shall require you to "demote" me to the job of Prime Minister', while right-wingers, Roy Jenkins and James Callaghan, aboard the 'S.S. Moderation' sinking below the waves, comment, 'With "defeats" like this, what need has Benn for victories?' *Daily Express* 12 June 1975, reproduced in Benn, *Against the Tide*, p. 393.

[15] The argument is expanded in Brotherstone et al., 'Rethinking the Trajectory …', pp. 4ff.

[16] Benn, *Against the Tide*, p. 403.

Perhaps the emphasis in Benn's reflections was influenced by Caroline's presence. She certainly made her own mark on the way one international capitalist, the American Frederic Hamilton, remembered the occasion, when he participated in a *LOI* archival interview.[17] Hamilton Brothers was the small Denver-based firm that had had to argue its case for being granted an exploration licence at all, and then had beaten the majors to bring the first North Sea oil ashore.[18] Hamilton accompanied Benn in turning a valve, which meant, as Benn put it, that 'the oil allegedly went on shore.' He had a discussion with Mrs Benn, which he remembered well as he summarised his relationship with the Energy Secretary:

> I think [Tony Benn] finally realised that it was important to Britain what we were doing and what we were up to. He was very much union orientated, but we had to get along with him – and the only thing I remember specifically was the day we brought the first oil ashore. We all went up to the captain's cabin on this tanker. His wife was an American girl. We were up there and he was saying; 'Isn't this a remarkable thing? This has been the salvation of England. We've got our own oil supplies now; we don't have to rely on the Middle East. This is the greatest thing that has happened to Britain!'… Everybody was very positive about it…

Everybody that is (according to Hamilton) except Caroline Benn:

> She was sitting there and she said: 'Mr Hamilton,' she said, 'I don't care about all that,' she said. 'That isn't important,' she said. 'How many lives were lost to get this first barrel of oil ashore?' And I looked at her and I said: 'Is this your only comment?' She said, 'That's what I want to know. That's all I care about.' So I said: 'Well, I don't have any idea; but it pales into insignificance compared to what this'll do for the economy of Great Britain and the rest of the world.' But that was the only thing she was focused on, and I thought, 'Boy, maybe that's why Tony Benn is such a –; as difficult as he is, he's got a wife who was just an absolute –; and she was an *American*!'[19]

In Hamilton's account, and in his tone of voice, which can only be hinted at on the printed page, much is disclosed to the critical eye and ear. At this moment of beginning, and in a single exchange, a window is opened on the whole story of Britain's offshore industry, and thereby on the importance of an oral archive that makes such an insight possible. A few years later, Tim Halford, personal assistant to another American, Occidental Oil's Armand Hammer, walked with his boss on the Piper Alpha platform, 160 miles north-east of Aberdeen. Some years ago, contributing to the Channel 4 TV programme *Wasted Windfall*, Halford (with whom there is also a life-story interview in the *LOI* archive) recalled walking with Hammer on the vibrating deck and his boss's

[17] Frederic Hamilton interview with Hugo Manson, 10 October 2001: *LOI* archive, F14471. All the *LOI* interviews cited in this article are with Manson, unless otherwise stated.

[18] Hamilton's version of the whole story is in his *LOI* archive interview.

[19] Hamilton interview: *LOI* archive, F14471/B.

comment: '"You can just feel those dollars flowing underneath!"'[20] To others the vibrations meant potential danger. Some years later, on 6 July 1988, Piper Alpha was to explode in the industry's most spectacular disaster, in which 167 workers and rescue-vessel personnel died. By then North Sea oil had already made its mark on the British economy. In 1975 Frederic Hamilton had invited Caroline Benn to set aside her humanist instincts and simply to celebrate the idea that that mark would be a decisive one, but on 6 July 1988, the significance of their tense exchange at the Isle of Grain was shown up in a new light. The argument was retrospectively revealed, more clearly than ever before, as a seminal moment in defining one of the major contradictions running through the industry's whole history.

II

The *Lives in the Oil Industry* archive – the outcome of more than five years of systematic interviewing and creating search aids[21] – will disclose many more such moments of contradiction, or intersection. And, while it includes evidence from the better-known players in the overall story, its primary importance lies in the way it allows researchers to access the evidence of many who would otherwise not be on the record at all.

This is not just a matter of adding 'colour' – though there will no doubt be those who will use the archive to do that. As the history of North Sea oil and gas comes to be structured into a definite narrative frame, it should not be allowed to become imprisoned in the categories which early attempts to tell the story – for example, in television and radio programmes – have tended to create for it.[22] This is, to be sure, a story of the coming into being of a new industry; the excitement, adventure and danger of discovery; the arrival of unexpected populations (notably Aberdeen's Americans) in unfamiliar and sometimes remote places; of social disruption in those places (notably the housing crisis in Aberdeen and the disruption of social mores at Sullom Voe in Shetland);[23] of Shetland's semi-independent relationship to the oil majors; of boom and slump; of danger and disaster; of recovery; and of safety reforms co-existing uneasily with cost-cutting imperatives. The *LOI* archive contains much that fills out that story, but that is only part of its value. As we argue below, the story of North Sea oil is one of as yet underestimated significance for interpreting late twentieth-century Britain and its

[20] The three-part series, *Wasted Windfall* was broadcast on Channel 4 in 1996; and see Tim Halford interview, 22 November 2000: *LOI* archive, F11285-F11287.

[21] See Appendix, below.

[22] Notably *Wasted Windfall*, and a radio documentary series produced for BBC Radio Scotland by Simon Cousins in 1999. Both were, in their own ways, excellent; but naturally rested on the sort of conventional narrative structure indicated below. Neither unfortunately is easily accessible.

[23] There is considerable information on Sullom Voe and its development in the *LOI* archive, for example in the interviews with Marabelle Jack (*LOI* archive, F10562-F10564) and John Robertson (*LOI* archive, F10216-F10218).

place in the world. The oral evidence of 'unofficial' participants in the story should, we want to insist, be amongst the most important of the sources that play their part, not only in supplying detail, but also in defining the essential structure, content and meaning of the larger story.

In this introductory article it is possible only to provide some examples from an archive that contains many voices. For each of the interviewees, the story of offshore oil is *their* story. The exploitation of North Sea oil and gas – at least to some extent and sometimes almost completely – has shaped, driven, perhaps distorted or even destroyed their lives and those of their families. Collectively these individuals can help us to grasp the significance, in human terms, of a history punctuated by unlikely encounter, by conflict and adaptation, by cultural incongruities and collisions. There are, in their accounts, many interpretatively significant points of intersection between the domestic and personal on the one hand, and the world of work and global economy on the other.

The extracts reproduced here are necessarily transcribed texts, which thereby lack the crucial context of the voice that spoke the words, and the variations of the tone of voice – its pace, its reflection of feelings of enthusiasm, irony, anger, affront, amusement, confusion, excitement, boredom, desperation, resignation. The voice is the articulated sound-imprint of the speaker, and we would like to see it becoming accepted practice in oral history for recorded sound to accompany texts such as this, so that the words as they were spoken can be listened to while the transcription is read.[24] It is important also to be aware that these extracts are minute segments, taken from interviews that are usually several hours long. The interviewees' fuller stories, to which we can only allude here, provide an important context for what the extracts themselves disclose.[25]

We have selected moments in the interviews at which, we argue, several types of evidence can be heard in, and read from, the voices. There is evidence of personal experience; of technical developments; and of social and economic change in the places that became (sometimes very temporarily) homes to the oil industry. And, most crucially for the oral historian, there is the evidence of 'junction-points'. By that we mean moments at which the overall narrative of an archetypal global industry and the personal narratives of individuals, operating in their private spaces as they play their part in that industry, meet, collide, become part of a contradiction that, instinctively perhaps, has to be articulated – thereby alerting the historian to the way in which the general is expressed in, and is more richly understood through, the particular.

[24] Access to the recorded material is through summaries of the contents of each interview. The summaries are designed to act as guides and to encourage researchers to listen to the interviews themselves rather than relying on a written transcription, which inevitably takes an important element in the interview away from the ownership of the interviewee and imposes on it the authority of the transcriber.

[25] My approach as an oral historian to documentation and archiving is to keep intact and unedited the recordings made with interviewees. When I worked as a broadcasting journalist, we used only fragments of interviews, leaving the bulk of the recorded material on the cutting-room floor. I used to look at it and think, 'That's the real story.' – HM.

First, Kevin Topham. He is an Englishman, unexpectedly sent offshore to the Sea Gem drilling rig, which, late in 1965, had made the first discovery of North Sea gas in the UK sector. Only weeks later this hastily put-together barge-cum-rig was to become the British offshore industry's first major disaster. Topham was in his cabin when the rig leg collapsed:

> … the shelf which was above me fell down with a load of books and stuff on my head and, well, I knew there was something wrong, so I immediately got my lifejacket which were under the bed and I put that just round me without tying it around the back. I thought I'll go and see what's happening first. So I went out and it was just a sign of this chaos. The legs were floating in the sea, which had cracked off; the derrick had gone, that had shorn off from the boats, and that was under the water. Never saw that again. And the lifeboat was going merrily out on its own in the waves. The radio cabin had gone. That was under water … there were some in the lower accommodation cabins. They were trapped in. They never did get out. They were just drowned in there because the doors, the doorframes, were all metal, and these evidently twisted … and consequently one couldn't open the door. One crew member, friend of mine, Ivan Mitchell, he's still got scars on his hand where he fought to get out through his cabin door which was twisted, and he did manage it through superhuman effort in the end.[26]

Topham remembers his father as an army man who never took a day off work and lived into his eighties. Topham himself had been a wartime bomb disposal expert, and had then done precision work in the oil industry. As the Sea Gem drilling rig crumples and sinks into the North Sea, in the domestic setting of his cabin, he quietly observes the disruption to what, in his life up to this point has been based on order, method, reliance on people and machines, even the relatively predictable unpredictability of unexploded bombs. The disorder brought to his life by the Sea Gem tragedy impresses itself on his memory in images of the corrupted domesticity of metal door frames, contorted so as to trap rather than to release, and in the still-remaining scars on the wrist of his friend. Inside the doors, inside the structure made huge to tap the potential of enormous wealth from beneath the sea, are trapped drowned bodies; outside, the personal disorder of survival.

Then there is Keith Johnson, a Navy-trained diver, who saw disorder too, but of a different kind. In his case it was related to his very survival in the most dangerous of working conditions. Johnson, also English, and later the owner of a world-wide diving consultancy, worked for the fledgling North Sea oil industry in the days when to be a diver was to become a rich man – or a dead one:

> I can remember the first time very well. The job we were doing, in fact, we were laying anti-scour nets around the legs of the platform. These were nets placed around the bottom of the platform legs to try and catch the sand to build up around the legs, because of the tides being very fast tides down there. They caused a lot of erosion around the legs, so these nets were meant to catch the sand from building up. We spent time laying these things and peg them down and I was doing my stint. And short dives they were because

[26] Kevin Topham interview, 18 October 2000: *LOI* archive, F10593/A.

> the tides were very strong and we could only dive in between, in between tides at slack water, so we only had twenty minutes to do the work. And I remember knocking away at the peg and then *(makes ripping noise)* there was nothing to breathe, and we didn't, at this time – because there were no safety regulations – and we didn't carry an emergency cylinder of air *(makes ripping noise)*. Nobody to talk to, I realised, navy-trained, I had nothing to breath. So I looked up and it looked a long way, but I knew I had to go for it. So I pulled off my mask and I had what they called a suit-inflation. It was a dry suit, not a wet suit. I opened up the suit inflation and just *(makes a hissing sound)* surfaced as fast as I could. I hadn't been down there long, so the bends problem wasn't a big one, although they did put me in what you call a coffin chamber – that was a one-man decompression chamber and it was like going into a coffin. I remember, as I … got towards the surface and daylight became apparent, I couldn't just – it's a funny thing, your life flashes before you because the last few feet are the longest, and you wonder if you're going to make it. And there are all sorts flashing through your mind. And … I hit the bottom of a supply boat funnily enough *(laughs)*. So that was my first experience of baling out from the bottom of the North Sea.[27]

At the most intimate moment of his life, the point when it could end, Johnson's encounter is with a regime (his company, a government) that, for its own reasons of profit and policy, place him – or encourages him to place himself – in jeopardy. In the early days of the industry, there were no safety regulations that would have required emergency breathing and other life-saving equipment. Johnson's training from elsewhere, something many of his colleagues lacked and, as a consequence, died, enables him, independently of all else, to survive. But this has been, for him, the crucial junction point between his individual self and the collective to which he has committed himself.

Helen Davidson is a Scot, the wife of an Aberdonian oil industry worker. She had always lived in Aberdeen, the most remote of the major British cities, famous before the arrival of the oil industry and the Americans for its parochial pride in its own separateness:[28]

> I would say people in Aberdeen didnae like the Americans coming in … They thought they had more money than anybody, and they could buy Aberdeen. And seemingly, now I'm only going by what I heard, they were nae very polite in shops and things like that. Thought they could order things around and, and do like that. The only contact we had with them – well I had contact with Americans in the social side of the oil, which was a big thing to start with – was this drunk American come out in his car and smashed my younger son's car. Him and his three friends were coming to play golf and he had had a row with his wife, jumped in his car and he'd been drinking and coming in the wrong

[27] Keith Johnson interview, 6 September 2000: *LOI* archive, F11334/B.

[28] On this theme, see Terry Brotherstone and Donald J. Withrington (eds.), *The City and its Worlds: Aspects of Aberdeen's History since 1792* (Glasgow, 1996), especially the essays by the two editors at pp. 3-24 ('Aberdeen Since 1794 as Place and as Community', by Withrington) and at pp. 224-38 ('Aberdeen and the Future of Labour History', by Brotherstone).

> side of the road. And his car was a write-off and everything. One of his friends was badly injured.[29]

Davidson's junction or collision point, is in the intimacy of ways of dealing with each other in the local shop (Americans 'not very polite') and in the personal (and necessary) traditional attitude to financial frugality ('they thought they had more money than anybody'). For her, there is a clash here between properly private knowledge of the status of her fellow citizens and an inappropriate public demonstration of financial status, power and irresponsibility culminating in the physical invasion of her own family's space and property.

In a similar vein is the evidence of Flora MacDonald, another Aberdonian, and an oil-industry office worker, given the task of dealing with the Americans when they arrived in her city:

> A lot of the people that came to Aberdeen had come from places like Saudi Arabia, Argentina where they were employing (if you like) the local peasants and they came here to employ what they thought were the local peasants but unfortunately Scottish people may well be peasants in their own right but they won't be treated like peasants because they're a bit more civilised. You know, we have a little more work-related civilization behind us. And there was always this attitude that there were another ten lined up outside the walls, so if you didn't like it out you go and we'll get another one in. And that was under-running all the time. In the early days of the oil business I think that was a common feeling from local people that that's the way it was.[30]

For Flora MacDonald, the quiet self-knowledge of the local Scot, the long-established acceptance of acquired or given status within the community – 'peasants' or otherwise – is theirs to own and to proclaim. It is not for incomers like the oil industry to assume or impose. To treat one expendable Scottish worker as a peasant is, by implication, to treat them all the same way, and it is to trespass on Flora's own sense of herself, of where and to whom she belongs – that is to say, it is to trespass upon, and potentially to disorder, her identity.

Dennis Krahn's experience stands in counterpoint to that of Davidson and MacDonald. He is an American – one who had a successful initiation to North East Scotland, and married an Aberdonian. He notes the relationships of different nationalities offshore:

> That life out there, you either take to it or you don't, and you know the team either like it or they don't. You get rid of the team or the team gets rid of you… So most of the people were … fine. The only … problems that I found were with the expatriates. It could be Americans, it could be Canadians. Mostly … they would come over here and they would be a little bit more vocal. They'd do a little more shouting, gesticulating than the more conservative, sedate personalities of the Scottish and the English, you know, would like to put up with. So I did see some grating of, of personalities there. But you gotta

[29] Helen Davidson interview, 29 September 2003: *LOI* archive, F15000/B.

[30] Flora MacDonald interview, 26 April 2001: *LOI* archive, F10566/A.

> remember, too, that maybe some of those guys were not very good man-managers. Maybe they, because of the boom times, maybe they were put into positions of responsibility before they were ready…[31]

Krahn attempts an explanation of the nature of the 'collisions' he was conscious of, by referring to the possibly premature promotion to management of the incomers in control of the locals, the foreignness of the North Sea environment to both; and to the nature of the interchanges at personal level – on the one hand through shouting and gesticulating, and on the other through a sedate, perhaps brooding quietness. Implied, in his words too, as in those of Flora Macdonald, is the fragility of the individual (private) prospect in the face of the noisy rollercoaster of the boom-time teams where the vulnerable party was the individual.

The late Bob Ballantyne, a working-class Glasgow man, was one of the 'Scottish coolies', as their early American supervisors sometimes referred to Scots workers. Later a survivor of the Piper Alpha disaster of 1988, he was an active trade unionist in an industry that was inherently hostile to unions:

> If you took out the *Morning Star* … which is a Communist-led paper, right, some of us consider it broad left now *(laughs)*, so if you took out the *Morning Star* or the *Socialist Worker* stuff and that, you know, that had to be very, very clandestine. *Marxism Today* maybe, things like that would be swapped under, swapped under a table. But you could openly, openly spread your pornography… [It] was not seen as a threat… [But left-wing literature] was exposing [the management], wasn't it? That was making you think.[32]

Sometimes, the meeting point of the industrial collective and that of the individual was one in which confrontation was avoided in order that each could survive, and yet the confrontation was potentially of great significance. Ballantyne's recollection of the acceptability of pornography but the unacceptability of left-wing literature to management demonstrates the clash of belief systems, each seen as a threat to the other. Management tacitly accepted pornography as a unifier in an almost exclusively male environment, and this went unchallenged, while the more class-conscious workers circulated left-wing literature (potentially a stimulus to conflict) in a way that maintained a clandestine sense of militant independence. In the absence of outside events to arouse open conflict, an uneasy stability was maintained.

[31] Dennis Krahn interview, 27 October 2000: *LOI* archive, F11329/A.

[32] Bob Ballantyne interview, 30 May 2001: *LOI* archive, F14153/A. And see Terry Brotherstone and Hugo Manson, 'From the Little House on the Prairie to the "King Eddie Suite"', *History Scotland*, vol. 2, no. 1 (January/ February 2002), pp. 38-45 – for quotations from the interviews with Ballantyne, Krahn, and (see below) Alexa Reid; Terry Brotherstone and Hugo Manson, 'Trouble, Oil and Troubled Waters: Surviving, and Reconstructing the 1988 Piper Alpha Tragedy', in Philippe Denis and James Worthington, *The Power of Oral History: Memory, Healing and Development* (International Oral History Association, Pietermaritzburg, 2002), vol. I, pp 118-34 – for Ballantyne's account of his experience in the Piper Alpha disaster.

Alexa Reid is a north-eastern Scot, brought up in the fishing community of Buckie on the Moray Firth, and was one of the young people to be lured by the earnings offshore where her father and brother also worked. Reid's meeting-point, her mutual understanding with the industry, and the underlying reliance of each upon the other, existed within the reassurance of carefully maintained, clockwork routines on two floors of one offshore platform:

> I never got paid extra for [overtime], or got the time back or anything. It's just something I chose to do, cos I was always scared I wouldn't get my work done. So then I had the, the rest of the company men's laundry to do. They brought it down themselves, and everybody else on the platform had to bring their own laundry down to the laundry. And there was a huge basket and it was just like this with laundry bags, absolutely overflowing. And then when all the personal stuff was washed, the clothes, you then had to start on things like the boiler suits, and these big floor mats that you see in places, they had to get done…
>
> Supervisors' shirts all had to get ironed ... and the chefs' whites all had to get like soaked in biotex … for a couple of hours and they all had to get pressed … fold all the clothes up, hang all the boiler suits up when they were ready, fold all the towels, everything … when the numbers went down to ninety I did it myself…[33]

The context within which Reid's relationship with the industry is mediated includes a hierarchy of the ironed shirts of supervisors and the un-ironed laundry of the men. Every element in the relationship depends on the repetition of particular actions, the certainty of definite continuities. For Reid, this means a job, money, some security; for the industry it means social and physical equilibrium in an inherently unstable social environment. The benefits of routines, natural to Reid since her days in the shop in her home town of Buckie, and also essential to the industry, suit both as long as she works offshore.

In the depths of the Aberdeenshire countryside, it was the laying of pipelines to transport the oil south that disturbed a gamekeeper, Johnnie Morrison. He had been born near the village of Rothienorman, and was still working close by, when he had to watch foreigners – as he perceived it speaking every language but English (though certainly not his own native Doric) – scouring the valleys and hills, of which he felt deeply possessive, and disrupting traditional watercourses. But it is against his fellow-Scots, suffering as he sees it generations of abuse without resistance, that his most bitter memories turn:

> Scots people are like this. If they're telt to dae something they'd dee it. And if they're telt to put up with that, they'll dee it. They never said boo. They never uttered a cheep … they accepted all things that were thrown at them…The Scotch people have been so brow-beaten for hundreds of years, baith by the Scotch lairds prior to that *and* when the English took over, you see, the Scotch lairds come from all over the world … claiming estates here and then you had the English coming in and the local Scotch people, they

[33] Alexa Reid interview, 6 October, 2000: *LOI* archive, F11289/B.

> maybe fought with the laird and the clan but at the end of the day they were just a serf. And that is what's the problem with Scotland. Scotch people are still just a serf! They cannae speak for themself. They hanna got the backbone.[34]

Morrison's 'junction-point' with the industry is one in which his own sense of identity is continually under threat from those with whom he feels he should be able to identify. There is a solitude expressed in his disappointment, not so much at the oil and gas companies in themselves, but at the way he sees those behind this new invasion as the latest in a series of incoming claimants to lairdship or power over 'his' lands. Dennis Krahn speaks of communication at the meeting point between individual and organisation through shouting and gesticulation. In Johnnie Morrison's case, at the point where he encounters the industry, his shouting is unheard even by those with whom he feels he belongs.

Finally in our small sample is the late Gavin Cleland, another Glasgow man, the bereaved father. His son Robert died in the Piper Alpha tragedy. Cleland never forgot the fateful phone call he received the morning after the tragedy. He reflected on his loss:

> I'm convinced that Robert was on that last boat or he was – he was one of the two men who was in the water when the boat went for them… Somebody says, there were two guys there, and they went over for them. And that's when that big last bang shot across the sea, right across their heads, and that choked them, all the gases and full of glut, because Robert's lungs was full of the glut. I think that's what choked him. And he also had burns, you know … that's how Robert might have been found in that position in the sea, in the sea bed, from the position where the boat is. And if that was right then Robert was staying there for the end directing – I'm convinced that's what happened – I've nae real proof … [But] the fact that he was on that emergency committee…[35]

Cleland's 'junction-point' lay not in a shout but in a silence, not in firm knowledge of the facts of the tragedy but in his own beliefs about what happened and his hope that his son had the best possible end. His subsequent life-long quest for justice – he never stopped campaigning publicly on every possible occasion and in all weathers for corporate manslaughter charges to be brought against Occidental Oil, Piper Alpha's owner – meant a restructuring of every day, the permanent (and ultimately doomed) setting of his private existence against a public and, as it transpired, impenetrable, oil-industry institution.

The nine witnesses above by no means represent a cross section of the 200 or so people whose interviews have been archived; and our focus on points of contradiction or intersection means that the extracts selected tend to stress moments of crisis or tension. But in terms of the interviewees' overall attitude to the industry, they would probably divide almost equally between those with generally positive and generally negative views of North Sea oil's impact socially and on their own lives. Whole life

[34] John Morrison interview, 13 December 2000: *LOI* archive, F10582/A.
[35] Gavin Cleland interview, 16 July 2002: *LOI* archive, F11633/A.

stories, as we have stressed, allow researchers to get to know the witnesses and their opinions more completely, and therefore to evaluate the significance of what is said about a particular moment or incident.

In considering the story of the industry, as of any community of activity, the issue of representation is central. Whose story is being told? Who has defined what the 'facts' on which the story is to be based are, and which facts are to be determining components in making it into 'history'? Who is interpreting these facts? Who has the right to claim ownership of that history – particularly when it becomes public history? Oral documentation can make no greater claim than any other source to providing unproblematic evidence. There is a growing literature on the way in which the interviewer, and the interviewer's relation with the interviewee, influence what is recorded and how it is heard; and on the nature of memory, notably on the importance of 'false memory'; and on related methodological issues.[36] Future work on the *LOI* archive will benefit from, and make its own contribution to this work – particularly as it provides such a wide variety of contrasting stories focused on a single subject. As we are stressing in this introductory article, however, the primary importance, the *sine qua non*, of an archive of multiple voices like *LOI*, is that it ensures that a variety of standpoints, reflective of many layers of participation in the bigger story, can compete for the attention of researchers and analysts – forcing them to consider that received top-down versions may be partial at best and even essentially wrong.

The brief extracts we have chosen and commented on do not, on their own, provide answers to the major questions about the oil industry and its place in British history. Together with their intrinsic interest, however, they, and many like them, have the potential to stimulate a new approach to the offshore story – one which recognises the significance of the experiences of some of the many people who made it happen on the ground and at sea, and which, we suggest, can even allow those experiences to lead the larger inquiry as it strives to encompass the significance of the industry and its place in recent and contemporary British society as a whole.

III

Our argument in this section is that Britain's offshore oil industry is of major importance for an understanding of contemporary UK history, but that its story currently features in the mainstream historical literature mainly as an absence. There is remarkably little about it. There has been ongoing scholarly study of North Sea oil, notably its impact on north-east Scotland, as David Newlands' and Alexandra Brehme's historiographical article, which appears below, indicates.[37] Bill Mackie's 2001 Ph.D. thesis on the subject has led to two books that provide interview-based, summary accounts of the industry at sea and on land, informed by some important research in

[36] See footnote 7 above. On 'false memory', see particularly, the work of Alessandro Portelli, notably *The Order Has Been Carried Out*.

[37] David Newlands and Alexandra Brehme, 'The Historiography of North Sea Oil', *Northern Scotland*, no. 27 (2007), pp. 81-97.

government archives.[38] Only partially referenced and lacking rigor in the use of oral evidence, they nonetheless convey something of the excitement of the story, and usefully point to the need for further work. There are other resources too, such as the Centre for Contemporary British History's extended witness seminar on experiences of the industry – a different approach to oral documentation from that of the *LOI* life-story method, but a valuable scholarly record nonetheless.[39] As the industry begins to play out its (perhaps quite protracted) endgame, historians of late twentieth-century Britain – with the coming publication of Kemp's official history, the *LOI* archive, and further government records being opened under the thirty-year rule or as a response to the Freedom of Information Act – have a good starting-point for deeper investigation into what, we want to argue, should become one of the major, and one of the most *contested*, topics on their agenda.

An influential contribution to the 'public history' part of this contestation is Andrew Marr's best-selling post-1945 narrative, published in 2007 and referred to above in our introductory section. In an accompanying BBC television series, Marr made the striking assertion that the way in which North Sea oil facilitated 'the harsh economic policy of Thatcherism' has been 'air-brushed out of our national history'. To address one reviewer's complaint that he then failed properly to explain it, it is necessary to turn to his book.[40]

In *A History of Modern Britain*, Marr devotes eight pages – out of ninety-three on the period of the Thatcher governments – to the story of North Sea oil.[41] This compares favourably with the strikingly limited attention given to the industry in most contemporary histories of Scotland and of the UK.[42] Amongst the recent crop of general histories of twentieth-century Scotland, only John Foster (also the co-author of a seminal book on offshore trade unionism and the fight for a secure safety regime) and Christopher Harvie (who published, in the mid-1990s, a pioneering, if rather personal, one-volume history of North Sea oil) pay serious attention to the subject.[43] There is

[38] Bill Mackie, 'The Impact of North Sea Oil on the North East of Scotland' (Aberdeen University, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 2001); *The Oilmen: the North Sea Tigers* (Edinburgh, 2004); *The Klondykers: the Oilmen Onshore* (Edinburgh, 2006).

[39] Gillian Staerck (ed.), *The Development of North Sea Oil and Gas* (CCBH, London, 2002).

[40] Andrea Mullaney, 'Was Thatcher Really the Punk of Politics?', *Scotsman*, 13 June 2007.

[41] Marr, 'Rainbows and Pots of Black Gold', in his *Modern Britain*, pp. 433-41.

[42] In the early 1990s, an article by Keith Aitken in Magnus Linklater's and Robin Dennistoun's *The Anatomy of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1992) acknowledged that the oil and gas sector was 'arguably the most dramatic thing to happen to the economy of (or, at least, in) Scotland over the past three decades'; but few historians have followed this lead.

[43] John Foster 'The Twentieth Century, 1914-1979' in R. A. Houston and W. W. J. Knox, *The New Penguin History of Scotland: from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London, 2001); Charles Woolfson, John Foster and Matthias Beck, *Paying for the Piper: Capital and Labour in Britain's Offshore Oil Industry* (New York, 1996); Christopher Harvie, 'Scotland After the Referendum: from Referendum to Millennium', in Houston and Knox, *New Penguin*

very little in the well-promoted books by T. M. Devine and by Richard Finlay.[44] A semi-scholarly recent documentary publication, claiming to show Scottish history 'as it happened', and endorsed by Scotland's Historiographer Royal as one of the best history books of 2007, includes thirty texts illustrating matters of significance since 1975, none of which relate to North Sea oil. Tragedies such as the blowing-up over Lockerbie of PanAm flight 103 in December 1988, the Dunblane schoolchildren shootings in 1996, and, less obviously, the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, warrant inclusion but not the Piper Alpha disaster.[45]

In the broader UK context, the doyen of contemporary British historians, Peter Clarke, in the now standard Penguin history of the twentieth century has relatively little to say;[46] and in Pat Thane's often excellent *Cassell's Companion to Twentieth-Century Britain*, 'North Sea oil' gets a 114-word paragraph, a quarter of the length of the entry on the 'Trotskyist' Militant Tendency that flashed across the turbulent skies of Labour Party history in the mid-1980s.[47] Other recent accounts of contemporary British history are not very different. Marr's 'airbrushing' charge has some force therefore, not only in respect of popular history, but also as a comment on recent historical scholarship.

But Marr underplays the argument. Essentially wedded to a journalistic 'great man' (or 'great woman'), view of history, he positions the North Sea story well on in his narrative of the Thatcher years. It *follows* his accounts of the 'path to power' followed by 'Margaret Roberts – Superstar' (Marr's designation),[48] the early-1980s splits in the

History; Harvie, *Scotland: a Short History* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 209-15, and several other histories and historical essays on twentieth-century Scotland; and Harvie's *Fool's Gold: the Story North Sea Oil – How a £200 Billion Windfall Divided a Kingdom* (London, 1994).

[44] T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London, 1999; paperback ed., 2000), has a brief summary at p. 596 and two other incidental references when referring to Scottish nationalism and to the early 1980s recession; Richard Finlay's undocumented *Modern Scotland 1914-2000* (London, 2004) expresses uncertainty about the oil's impact on the rise of nationalism (p. 328), and makes a casual critique of British depletion policy (pp. 332-3, 382), but the brevity of the references hardly alerts the reader to the importance of the offshore industry in recent Scottish/British history.

[45] Rosemary Goring, *Scotland: an Autobiography – 2000 Years of Scottish History by Those Who Saw it Happen* (London, 2007), pp. 4, 384-434. T. C. Smout, contribution to 'Arts: Books of the Year', *Sunday Herald Magazine*, 25 November 2007, p. 44.

[46] P. F. Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-2000* (London, 2nd edition, 2004) recognises (p. 323) that the discovery of North Sea oil ' transformed the economic outlook for Scotland' and fuelled a 'surge' in SNP support. It was, he writes (p. 352), a 'crock of gold at the end of the rainbow' that made the 'interim expedients' of the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Denis Healey, in the 1970s, seem like a worthwhile holding operation for what was expected to be the UK's 'silver age as a manufacturing economy'. The scant treatment there is of what actually happened to the oil revenues is at p. 396.

[47] Pat Thane, *Cassell's Companion to Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 2001), pp. 264-5, 291.

[48] Marr, *Modern Britain*, p. 381; *The Path to Power* (London, 1995), was the second volume of Margaret Thatcher's memoirs to be published.

Labour Party, the Falklands war, the impact of AIDS, the 1984-85 miners' strike, the 1985-86 crisis over Westland Helicopters that threaten to force Thatcher's resignation,[49] and the 'Big Bang' reform of the City of London. Making the North Sea oil story simply an item in this (albeit important) agenda, and a prelude to the achievement of Scottish and Welsh devolution in the 1990s, blunts the force of the argument that the revenues it produced were fundamental to the *origins* of what came to be known as Thatcherism.[50]

The proposition that this was so, to say the least, requires serious consideration. Marr himself writes that North Sea oil was vital to 'the crucial years of the early Thatcherite experiment in monetarism': it 'helped bankroll Thatcherism'.[51] He argues too that, in contrast to the subsequent collective amnesia, there was at the time, considerable public consciousness and excitement about the industry: 'When the oil first arrived ashore in November 1975 at Cruden Bay in Aberdeenshire, the Queen was present with the Prime Minister, assorted other ministers, pipers, a huge tent, red carpets and crowds with Union Jacks.'[52] (Marr himself here has accidentally airbrushed the event several months earlier at the Isle of Grain). Why then is it so little discussed in the diaries and autobiographies of the Thatcher years?[53] The memoirs of the two key 1980s politicians, Thatcher herself and her first Chancellor of the Exchequer (and ultimate nemesis), Geoffrey Howe, make only minimal references it.[54]

[49] In the winter of 1985-6 a relatively minor issue concerning a Defence Ministry order for helicopters blew up in a way that exposed fundamental differences in the Thatcher cabinet, leading to the dramatic resignation of Michael Heseltine, later (in 1990) to challenge Thatcher for the leadership (and premiership), precipitating her resignation.

[50] 'Thatcherism', as opposed to Thatcher, did not arrive as a fully-fledged ideology ready to be put into practice in 1979. The neo-liberal assumptions and hostility to trade unionism were there from the beginning but the privatisation programme emerged pragmatically as the Government felt its way through a jungle of real and potential oppositions. A question to be examined is how far the opposition might have been far greater and more successful if North Sea oil revenues had not been available to finance the social security budgets that alleviated the full effect of the Thatcher cuts.

[51] Marr, *Modern Britain*, p. 434. Marr quotes Aitken in Linklater and Dennistoun, *Anatomy of Scotland*, in support of his assertion that some economists Thatcherism would have collapsed in 1981-82 without the tax revenues the industry generated.

[52] For Tony Benn's account, see Benn, *Against the Tide*, pp. 453-4 – a rather different contemporary slant on the regal presence at the inauguration of Scottish oil near Aberdeen airport.

[53] A factor surely in explaining why – as we have remarked – the first generation of contemporary histories of Scotland, and Britain, is so deficient in discussion of the role of North Sea oil.

[54] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London, 1993). There are brief references to the oil windfall in passages on the abolition of exchange controls (p. 44); on Britain's relative economic decline (p. 63); on the negative impact of oil price rises – though here there is a *footnote* reference to Britain's 'exceptional position among the major industrial powers' as a 'net oil exporter' (p. 67); on taxing North Sea profits in 1980 (p. 128); on privatising Britoil (this

Part of the explanation lies in the relative invisibility of the industry. Offshore oil is perhaps historically unique amongst such major economic enterprises in its transient nature, its capacity to arrive on site, exploit the resource, service the energy market for a period, create huge wealth for some, and move on without leaving much trace. Most of the workers involved do not live together in work-related communities. The product serves its purpose largely unseen, finding its way into internal combustion engines, or the energy market more generally, with little perceived connection to its origins or the process that developed it. And the land bases for UK North Sea oil and gas have been remote from the media-centres of London, Edinburgh and elsewhere. The industry's contradictory history has proved, whether by intention or default, relatively easy to conceal.

Nor has cultural production been such as to draw public consciousness towards the industry, its ways of working, and its broader significance. Alvarez's 1983 reporting enterprise, with its subsequent book, has not been repeated.[55] The poet indeed might have found his journalistic mission less easy to accomplish a few years later, after the one subsequent occasion when the industry *did* make a major impact on the media, the 1988 Piper Alpha tragedy. The worst industry disaster to date, it returned to the headlines over subsequent years thanks to the strike movement based primarily on safety concerns that began a year later and the publication, in 1990, of Lord Cullen's Inquiry.[56] And it made the companies much more aware of the need to be perceived as prioritising safety. Others concerned with the representation of life on the platforms and rigs have been offshore since – for example, the artists Sue Jane Taylor (a *LOI* interviewee) and Fiona Carlisle, and one of the authors of this article. But a poet-journalist with a commission from a best-selling US magazine might have found himself under greater constraint, and certainly would not have had the freedom to roam Alvarez was evidently enjoying when he encountered the fitness fanatic quoted at the head of this article.[57]

reference, on p. 678, is not even fully accurate); and the destabilising effect of North Sea oil on the pound in the early 1980s (p. 692). The tome is 914 pages long. Geoffrey Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty* (London, 1994) pays insufficient attention to North Sea oil to have attracted the attention of his indexer, though it pops up incidentally from time to time, for example on p. 141 when the new Chancellor first meets the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss abolishing exchange controls. Nigel Lawson, Secretary of State for Energy 1981-83 and Chancellor of the Exchequer 1983-89, is alone of the major players – in his *The View from No. 11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical* (London, 1992) – in discussing the issue of North Sea oil and its role in Thatcherism with any seriousness, but he downplays it.

[55] A recent report from offshore in the London *Guardian*, for example, appears to be based on something less than an overnight stay: *Guardian*, 27 October 2007. Rigorous and physically taxing safety training is now required for longer visits.

[56] Lord Cullen (W. Douglas Cullen), *The Public Inquiry into the Piper Alpha Disaster* (London, 1990).

[57] Sue Jane Taylor, *Oilwork: North Sea Diaries* (Aberdeen, 2005); and see Senay Boztas, 'Oil Firm Wanted Piper Alpha Images at Any Price', *Sunday Herald* (Glasgow), 21 August

When the industry was arriving in north-east Scotland, the radical theatre group, 7:84, produced a popular 'community play', *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, drawing attention to the oil industry as the latest of a series of historical experiences of predatory, external exploitation of the resources of northern Scotland going back to the Highland Clearances of the early nineteenth century – a theme echoed by Johnnie Morrison. It was performed throughout Scotland to cheering audiences and was later adapted as a BBC television 'Play for Today'.[58] Two fictional television series, *Oil Strike North* in the mid-1970s, and *Roughnecks* in the mid-1990s, had some popular success.[59] Andrew McLagen's 1979 film *North Sea Hijack*, according to one reviewer, took 'a potentially convincing idea' and – notwithstanding a cast including James Mason, Roger Moore and Anthony Perkins – subverted it by 'shallow treatment'.[60] Better was Bill Forsyth's *Local Hero*, which gave a whimsical account of the industry's impact in a remote community, probably drawing on (though by no means replicating) some of the experiences of Scotland's northern isles.[61] These are not the only examples, and there may be a broader history of the impact on popular culture of North Sea oil to be written. But it will be a specialist work rather than a major contribution to understanding how the industry has been perceived outside the ranks of those directly involved with it. Arguably the one artistic outcome that does have an ongoing public impact is Sue Jane Taylor's monumental sculpture in memory of the victims of the Piper Alpha tragedy, though – tucked away as it is in a suitably contemplative corner of Aberdeen's suburban Hazelhead Park – its visibility (despite its listing as one of the sights of Aberdeen) is limited.[62] And, of the major examples of journalistic or artistic outputs related to the industry, only the memorial (the best-known amongst a number in the city), and the ephemerally successful *Roughnecks*, date from later than the mid-1980s.[63]

2005; Fiona Carlisle, *Energy* (Edinburgh, 2006); images from Hugo Manson's exhibition *On Charlie* are available on the *Lives in the Oil Industry* website, see Appendix below.

[58] John McGrath, 'The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil' in his *Six-pack: Plays for Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1996).

[59] See Tom McGregor, *Roughnecks: the Official Guide to the BBC Drama Series* (London, 1995).

[60] *Time Out Film Guide* (5th edition, London, 1997), p. 575.

[61] Bill Forsyth (director), *Local Hero* (Enigma/Goldcrest, Great Britain, 1983). Tim Halford remembers Forsyth interviewing him about Occidental Oil's negotiations in Orkney and points out that the US oil boss played by Burt Lancaster in the film was called Happer, apparently a reference to Occidental chief, Armand Hammer. The reference is in the Halford interview: *LOI* archive, F11286/A. There are those in Shetland who saw distant echoes of their story too.

[62] Sue Jane Taylor's own story is told in the *LOI* archive. The memorial is visited as part of some Aberdeen city tours.

[63] Aberdeen memorials to the tragedy include – as well as the Hazelhead Park statue and garden – Tim Stead's North Sea Oil Industries Memorial Chapel in the Kirk of St. Nicholas; Jennifer-Jane Bayliss's stain-glass window at Ferryhill Church; and the Lord Provost's Book of Condolence in the Memorial Court at Aberdeen Art Gallery. Note too the career of the Scottish

Is the at least partial 'airbrushing' of North Sea oil from recent British history more than an accidental outcome of the hidden nature of the industry, and the difficulty of representing it in creative work or as popular entertainment? Marr thinks so, laying his stress on 'embarrassment' that this 'great adventure', unlike those of the UK's industrial heyday, 'was lived at the edge of British experience', funded and carried out substantially from the United States. Much of the necessary technology, in concept and production, came from abroad; and 'Scotland's specialist yards for the huge "jackets",' such as those at Nigg, Ardersier and Methil, 'lurched … between clamour and closure'. Nor had successive British governments much to be proud of. During the Heath years, in 1972, Marr reports, the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee thought that the government, in its generosity with leases for exploration, had allowed Britain to be treated like 'a gullible Sheikhdom'. Tony Benn's British National Oil Corporation, set up in 1976, took 'some grip on the developing industry … [yet] it was essentially a bystander with modest powers compared to the great oil companies.' Its production business, moreover, was privatised by the Tory government in 1982, and the successor company, Britoil, in which the government had a substantial stake, was taken over by BP six years later. In general, the 'grand hopes' of the mid-1970s that oil 'would kick-start a great renaissance in banking, engineering, shipbuilding and new service industry' proved 'very wide of the mark' – partly because British industry in the 1970s was 'at its lowest ebb' and partly because 'the oil-boosted pound' made the recession of the early 1980s worse than the most dryly committed 'Thatcherite' ministers expected.[64]

But there is a further point. Politicians' memoirs are often notoriously and self-servingly selective: as A. J. P. Taylor remarked of Francis Williams' conversations with Clement Attlee, published under the title *A Prime Minister Remembers*, 'it shows how much a prime minister can forget'.[65] Thatcher's failure to mention the Piper Alpha tragedy in her memoirs, however, is particularly extraordinary.[66] She did not attend the memorial service at Aberdeen's 'mither kirk', St. Nicholas, on 20 July 1988, but was represented there by Defence Secretary, George Younger. Energy Secretary, Cecil Parkinson, one of her closest political allies, and other government ministers were also

Catholic composer, James MacMillan, who established his international reputation with music composed in reaction to public shocks. *The Exorcism of Rio Sumpul* (1989) was inspired by an army attack on a San Salvador village, *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* (1990) by the historic burning of a Catholic 'witch'; and *Tuireadh* (1991) by the Piper Alpha tragedy, about which MacMillan had received a letter from the mother of a survivor: information from <*www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2002/Dec02/MacMillan*>: article by Tony Haywood.

[64] Marr, *Modern Britain*, p. 438.

[65] E. Francis Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers: the War and Post-war Memoirs of … Earl Attlee …* (London, 1961); A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965), p. 612.

[66] Thatcher was at least consistent when it came to the loss of life on her watch. She made no comment either, in *The Downing Street Years*, on the blowing-up of PanAm flight 103 over Lockerbie later in 1988.

present.[67] Even in a period of notable disasters this one must have imprinted itself on her memory, as it certainly did on the collective memory of Aberdeen. One preliminary conclusion from our work on the *LOI* archive is that Piper Alpha is the single event that features – from many different points of view – in the life stories of the greatest number of participants in the project.[68] Above all – as we have suggested in dealing with the Frederic Hamilton-Caroline Benn encounter – the tragedy was of the greatest human significance when it comes to assessing the history of the industry. Was the Piper Alpha tragedy the price paid for British politicians' perception – particularly that of the Thatcherite ideologues – that the oil had to be produced as rapidly as possible, in 'free market' conditions and with a safety regime that would not be too irksome for the US companies?

Certainly that is what one of the tragedy's survivors, Bob Ballantyne, thought (as we know from the *LOI* archive), and he, of course, was far from alone.[69] It is a proposition that must be much more seriously confronted in future scholarly studies of the 1980s. Lord Cullen's enquiry into the causes of the Piper Alpha is often held to be a model of

[67] Cecil Parkinson, *Right at the Centre: an Autobiography* (London, 1992), p. 282, declared that he 'would never forget the horrific Piper Alpha tragedy'; but moved quickly on to praise Lord Cullen 'who accepted my invitation to chair the public enquiry' and whose 'comprehensive range of suggestions for improving North Sea safety' would, in future, protect 'workers in the North Sea … better'.

[68] Terry Brotherstone and Hugo Manson, 'Memory Frozen by Representation: Reflections on the Piper Alpha Tragedy and the Use of the *Lives in the Oil Industry* Oral History Archive', unpublished paper presented to the European Social Science History conference in Amsterdam, 25-28 March 2006; article forthcoming.

[69] See, for example, W. G. Carson, *The Other Price of Britain's Oil: Safety and Control in the North Sea* (New Jersey, 1982); Woolfson, Foster and Beck, *Paying for the Piper*; and a series of more recent papers by Woolfson on the safety regime since Cullen. Ballantyne – with his background in the militant traditions of industrial 'Red Clydeside' was also one of the leading figures in the establishment, on the first anniversary of the Piper disaster in 1989, of a new, unofficial, oil-workers trade-union body – the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) – which launched a bitter strike campaign primarily on the safety issue. Information about OILC can be heard in many of the recordings, for example: Ronald McDonald (*LOI* archive, F10219-F10223); Jake Molloy (*LOI* archive, F10578-F10580); David Robertson (*LOI* archive, F10594-F10598, F14146-F14150); Lorna Robertson, interview with Catherine O'Byrne (*LOI* archive F14708, F14721-F14722); Neil Rothnie (*LOI* archive, F10312-F10314, F17219-F17223); and can be acquired from files of *Blowout*, a remarkably vigorous paper edited initially by Rothnie that recalled earlier, militant labour-movement traditions: on this, see Brotherstone, 'Aberdeen and the Future of Labour History'. For 'Red Clydeside', see Terry Brotherstone, 'Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?', in Robert Duncan and Arthur McIvor, *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict 1900-1950 – Essays in Memory of Harry McShane* (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 52-80, and 'Red Clydeside' in Michael Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 499-500; and, most recently, William Kenefick, *Red Scotland!: the Rise and Fall of the Radical Left, c.1872 to 1932* (Edinburgh, 2007), esp. pp. 94-102, 159-80.

its type, but it neither guaranteed future safety, nor settled the issue of the tragedy's historical significance.[70] To Marr's relatively casual hypothesis that the leading politicians of the period perhaps 'forget' North Sea oil because, in the 'heroic story of their remaking of the British economy' it was 'an embarrassingly vital support mechanism, for which they could take absolutely no credit …', it is necessary to add the yet more important 'embarrassment' that this ultra-modern, late twentieth-century industry was unable to avoid disasters reminiscent of earlier, much less technologically advanced, industrial periods, and of less developed parts of the more recently industrialising world. Thatcher's 'silence' on the offshore industry in general, and Piper Alpha in particular is a significant one; and Marr's hypothesis is not of the secondary importance he assigns to it. The role of North Sea oil and the reasons for political 'forgetfulness' about it, we argue, should be central to historical reassessments of 'the Thatcher years'.[71]

IV

In summary, this article is a brief introduction to the *Lives in the Oil Industry* archive, a taster for its rich contents. It appears, we think, at a moment when a subject previously relatively neglected in interpretative discussions about late twentieth-century British history needs to be brought centre-stage. And the significance of the oil and gas story goes far deeper than a stirring tale of adventure and excitement, of individual and collective achievement, of danger and disaster. Analysis of how the industry was developed and of how the wealth created was used will be a major contribution to rethinking the history of the post-imperial UK, and even to reassessments of the place of Thatcherism in the late twentieth-, early twenty-first-century, post-soviet world of global capital. In spreading her message of redemption though 'freedom' (by which she meant neo-liberalism), Thatcher seldom, if ever, alluded to the advantage afforded her claimed policy successes by the 'windfall' of the North Sea.[72]

We have argued that this historical discourse needs to be developed with due reference not only to necessary statistical, and other official, records and the opinions of industry leaders, politicians and journalists; but also to the stories and views of less well-known participants in the industry – and of people on whom it had an impact. The *LOI* archive has been created using a life-story approach to interviewing because, that way, the researcher can meet witnesses they usually know nothing about, evaluate their evidence, and, particularly by *listening*, be alerted to those moments at which – in the individual memory, the individual experience – echoes can be heard of grander themes or lines of interpretation not picked up from, or differently signalled in, other sources.

[70] This point is pursued in Brotherstone and Manson, 'Memory Frozen by Representation'. A journalist's study of the Piper Alpha disaster – by Stephen McGinty – is due for publication during 2008. See too Ed Punchard, with S. Higgins, *Piper Alpha: a Survivor's Story* (London, 1989).

[71] Marr, *Modern Britain*, p. 440.

[72] See, for example, the appendix to Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*.

The conjunction of the launch of a major oral archive with the appearance of an 'official' history provides a perhaps unique opportunity to open up afresh an important historical topic on the basis of a range of evidence that includes everything from the traditional records to systematically archived personal experiences. The former are certainly essential; but the latter, we think, are potentially of equal significance, not merely for supplying colourful detail, but in helping to define the framing and structuring of the overall narrative – so that it aids inquirers in focusing on the most important questions and drawing out the most significant meaning. The opportunity to use such an archive at the outset of a new enquiry, moreover, will provide an excellent arena in which to take forward one of the most stimulating current discussions in historical theory and methodology, oral history itself.[73]

In addition to the issues we have raised in this article – as questions for further research and disputation – we allude in conclusion to some of the many other topics about which the *LOI* archive provides important evidence. Without the oil boom, and the concentration of the industry in Scottish waters, would the constitutional changes that have been the most important reforms accomplished by 'New Labour' since the late 1990s have taken place? Scottish nationalism made its stride into mainstream British political life before the oil arrived, but 'It's Scotland's oil' was a crucial slogan in the SNP's parliamentary electoral success of the mid-1970s, which put devolution back on to the practical agenda for the first time since the partial settlement of 'the Irish question' in the early 1920s. The slogan was abandoned (something about which the former MP, the late Douglas Henderson, speaks in his *LOI* archive interview), and the SNP temporarily faded.[74] But as Scottish opposition to Thatcherism grew through the 1980s, the idea of independence, or, more particularly, devolution as a way of heading off the demand for it, moved into the realms of political reality.

The story of Shetland, to which we have only briefly referred, also needs to be re-examined and integrated fully into the history of North Sea oil (Shetland gets few references in general histories of contemporary Britain). The story is often enough told, usually through the eyes of the extraordinary local authority executive, Ian Clark, as the David-and-Goliath tale of a cocky little island standing up to the giant multi-nationals, and securing a deal that assured the island-community's welfare for generations to

[73] See footnote 7 above.

[74] The Douglas Henderson interview, conducted on 17 July 2002 in the *LOI* archive, F17278-F17279. An April 1975 confidential report to the Cabinet Office by the Scottish economist, Gavin McCrone, was made public in 2005, reviving the controversy over the impact North Sea oil and gas could have had on an 'independent' Scottish economy. Contrary to the Labour government's line at the time – that the Scottish National Party, in its 'Its Scotland's Oil' campaign was exaggerating the wealth the industry could produce for Scotland – McCrone advised that the oil-boom revenues would provide Scotland with budget surpluses so large as to be 'embarrassing'. See, for example, 'How Black Gold Was Hijacked: North Sea Oil and the Betrayal of Scotland', *The Independent* (London), 10 November 2007; and Gavin McCrone, 'North Sea Oil: a Personal View', unpublished lecture delivered as part of the *Lives in the Oil Industry* series, University of Aberdeen, 2006.

come.[75] But other more critical accounts are possible,[76] which will make for a more complete narrative. The Shetland story needs to be measured not only in the narrow context of offshore oil's socio-economic impact in the UK; but also within the broader parameters of constitutional change (the semi-independence Shetland acquired while the first push for Scottish devolution was foundering in the 1970s was remarkable), and of comparative studies looking at how the impact of an oil boom in Britain compares with what has happened elsewhere in the world, notably Norway. In Aberdeen, Alexandra Brehme, who has made use of the *LOI* archive, is at work – as others are in other ways – on investigating Shetland's changing work culture over the last two or three generations. The importance of comparative studies of the impact of oil in different national cultures is also increasingly recognised. Even British government ministers are beginning to express regret at the UK's failure to make better use of the offshore resource: Malcolm Wicks, the energy minister, told a London *Guardian* reporter in October 2007: 'If you could replay history, the idea as in Norway of building up a national [oil] fund is actually quite an attractive one.' The Shetland example is from even closer to home.[77]

The role of women, and changing workplace gender relations, in this late twentieth-century, twenty-first-century, industry is another important general theme, already under investigation, making use of the *LOI* archive, by Catherine O'Byrne. Shetland, incidentally, which has been called 'a woman's world', has its own place in this narrative.[78] As women's and gender history takes dramatic, if belated, strides on to the Scottish historiographical scene, the place of women in the industry that has such an important place in the Scottish economy, and the place of changing gender relations in the industry, are key themes.[79] The cultural impact of offshore oil, too, limited, as we

[75] Ian Clark was interviewed for *LOI*, but restrictions apply to this interview.

[76] This was suggested by the journalist, oil consultant and Shetland tour operator, Jonathan Wills in a lecture in the 2006 Oil Lives lecture series, 'The Shetland Business: the Battle for the North', delivered at the University of Aberdeen, 26 October 2006.

[77] Alexandra Brehme, 'The Challenge of Modernity to a Peripheral Island in a Sea of Oil: Reflections on Problems Arising from Using Oral History to Research the Changing Work Culture and Identity of Shetland', unpublished paper presented to the conference, *Knowledge Culture and Transition of Societies*, INST, Vienna, 8 December 2007; John-Andrew McNeish et al., *Flammable Societies* (research project in progress, Bergen, 2007–); Andy Beckett, 'Deeper, Rougher, Further – in Search of the Last North Sea Oil', *Guardian* (London), 27 October 2007.

[78] Lynn Abrams, *Myth and Materiality in a Woman's World: Shetland 1800-2000* (Manchester, 2005).

[79] For an early study, see Robert Moore and Peter Wybrow, *Women in the North Sea Industry: a Report for the Equal Opportunities Commission* (Aberdeen, University of Aberdeen Department of Sociology, 1984); and see Catherine O'Byrne, 'Women in North Sea Oil: Two Voices', in this issue of *Northern Scotland*, pp. 191-203. For developments in Scottish gender history, see, *inter alia*, Terry Brotherstone, Deborah Simonton and Oonagh Walsh (eds.), *Gendering Scottish history: an International Approach* (Glasgow, 1999 and 2000); Lynn Abrams at al. (ed.), *Gender in Scottish History since 1700* (Edinburgh, 2006); Elizabeth Ewan,

have suggested, in terms of providing historical evidence of the early decades of the industry, is another narrative awaiting construction. The *LOI* interview with Sue Jane Taylor provides a starting point for one part of the story. And the photographer, Owen Logan has used the archive as the initial inspiration for a project in the critical-realist documentary tradition, some images from which are on permanent display in the Scottish parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh.[80]

We conclude, therefore, not with the *LOI* archive as it now exists,[81] but with its potential. It *is being* used, and in a variety of ways; and it is there *to be used*. It will soon be possible to tell the story of North Sea oil much more completely, in a manner that allows many narrative voices to be heard. It is a story that has a major part to play in debates about post-imperial British history, debates in which, we think, oral documentation has a still underestimated part to play. We anticipate the *Lives in the Oil Industry* archive having a substantial role in what should be a stimulating period of historiographical controversy, and one that is of more than academic significance as Britons continue to grapple, in a much-changed world, with the meaning of their history since US Secretary of State Dean Acheson's famously provocative statement, in 1962, that their country, having lost an empire, had yet to find a role.[82]

APPENDIX: THE *LIVES IN THE OIL INDUSTRY* (*LOI*) PROJECT AND ARCHIVE

The project was initiated by The British Library National Life Story Collection and its director, Robert Perks. Along with three faculties at the University of the Aberdeen (Arts and Divinity, Social Science and Law, and Science), The British Library provided seed-corn funding. The project was carried out at the University, in the Department of

Sue Innes, Siân Reynolds (eds.) and Rose Pipes (coordinating ed.), *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women: from the Earliest Times to 2004* (Edinburgh, 2006).

[80] Owen Logan is (2004-08) AHRC Creative Arts Fellow in the History Department at Aberdeen University. His *LOI*-inspired work also led to an 'Oil Issue' of the journal *Variant* (2006), the Glasgow-based journal of cultural critique: see therein especially, Terry Brotherstone, 'The Upside Down Coalmine' – concerning Logan's image, reproduced on the cover, created after listening to Bob Ballantyne's story.

[81] Our hope is that the project will be ongoing and that funding will be secured for further interviews, and the updating of existing ones. In a university culture driven by the short-termism encouraged by recurrent research assessment exercises, it is not easy to get managerial recognition of the importance of creating an archive for the research needs of the future. We thank all those with the foresight to facilitate funding and/or to give their enthusiastic support for the *LOI* project, including some of our academic colleagues, private companies, public bodies, and the good citizens who responded to a major lecture series to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the first full year of production, 1975-76. We are grateful to the Principal of the University of Aberdeen, Professor C. Duncan Rice for continuous support, including financial assistance with the lecture series; and for hosting a public ceremony at the University in December 2006, at which the archive was formally handed over. The major sponsors of the *LOI* project as a whole are listed below in this Appendix.

[82] For further comment on this, see Brotherstone et al., 'Rethinking the Trajectory', pp. 4ff.

History, now part of the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, by Hugo Manson, one of the pioneers of oral documentation and archiving at the National Library of New Zealand. Working with Terry Brotherstone, Senior Lecturer in History at Aberdeen University, and *LOI* project director, Manson was instrumental in raising substantial financial support, which, with the commitment of additional University funding, made possible a six-year project.

We are grateful to a number of past and present colleagues at the University of Aberdeen who facilitated the necessary commitment of funds; and we acknowledge with appreciation the far-sighted generosity of all the sponsors. They were, in addition to the University and The British Library: Aberdeen City Council; Aberdeen Harbour Board; Aker Kavaerner; Amerada Hess; BG Exploration; Enterprise Oil (now part of Shell); Ledingham Chalmers; Schlumberger; Shell; Transocean Offshore; and TotalFinaElf. The project also received a travel grant from The American Trust for The British Library.

The object was to meet a concern that the UK North Sea oil and gas industry might be allowed to come to an end leaving no archived oral record. Twenty-five years into the industry's productive life was a good moment to ensure that the origins of the industry in particular were so documented. Who were the people behind it all? What drove the individuals and organisations in different parts of the UK to get involved with it? What level of interest and what individual energies in government and local authorities made it happen?

Through the life-story oral history approach, we set out to provide the personal material to make answers to such questions possible. We sought men and women who had worked in as many sectors of the industry as possible. These included roustabouts, caterers and drillers working offshore; office-workers in Aberdeen; industry leaders from oil companies and other allied fields; trade unionists; people involved with the legal aspects of the industry; politicians;[83] national public servants and local councillors and officials; men and women working for technical, regulatory authorities; and many others. Interviewees came from Aberdeen, Great Yarmouth, Orkney and Shetland, London, many other parts of the UK, and the USA. Some of those interviewed did not have a direct link with the industry itself, but their interaction with it was an important element in the story of its development. Manson also interviewed commentators, who helped form public and professional opinion about the impact of offshore oil and gas.[84] In the United States, he recorded interviews with some of the Americans, through whose expertise, energy and – sometimes unwelcome – ways the industry, as one might say, got off the ground and deep into the sea.

The roots of the British oil industry are in Scotland, but go too far back for there to be living twenty-first-century witnesses. James 'Paraffin' Young's nineteenth-century

[83] E.g. Bob Middleton interview: *LOI* archive, F10224-F10226; Douglas Henderson interview: *LOI* archive, F17278-F17279.

[84] E.g. Ted Strachan interview: *LOI* archive, F10650-F10652; David Roberts interview: *LOI* archive, F8715-F8717.

shale-oil industry in Scotland's central belt could be said to be the start of it all. It was however possible to find living witnesses to the immediate UK precursor to the North Sea industry through men like Lewis Dugger, in his eighties and living in New Orleans. He had been a driller, sent over for a year with a group of oil workers from Oklahoma, in a top-secret US/UK government operation during World War II. Their mission was to drill wells in the newly discovered oil field deep in Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. The high-quality oil produced by those wells, hundreds of thousands of tons of it, supplied very welcome fuel for allied fighters and bombers during World War II. The story circulates – though we have found no documentary confirmation – that Churchill called this 'the best kept secret of the war'.[85]

The *LOI* archive is designed to be an accessible resource, both in Aberdeen and London. The archived recordings are unedited, and available for researchers at the University of Aberdeen Historic Collections and Special Archives, and at The British Library. There are some 700 hours of recordings, involving about 200 people. Fuller details are available on the *LOI* website.[86] Summaries are available as search aids. In Aberdeen a digitisation project is underway; and upgraded archival facilities will be provided when a major new library project is completed. It is hoped too that this archive will play a role in a hoped-for (and being-worked-for) centre for the history of North Sea Oil and Gas industry in north-east Scotland, designed to ensure that, as oil and gas facilities are decommissioned, records and artefacts of historical interest will not – as happened too often when the coalmining industry was being closed down – simply be destroyed.[87]

[85] A number of things have been referred to as 'the best kept secret' of World War II; but we have found no evidence to confirm that Churchill said this of the Sherwood Forest operation. Yet the story illustrates a profound sense, at least in particular areas of Britain, of participation in the war effort – that this was, for many not in the services, a 'people's war'. And it demonstrates what might be called 'public secret-keeping': a whole community *knew* what was happening, but seems to have kept the knowledge amongst themselves. The response to a community play performed in 2002 showed that the story has an ongoing resonance in the area.

[86] The LOI project website is at <www.abdn.ac.uk/oillives>.

[87] Miles Oglethorpe, 'Capturing the Energy: an Archive for the Oil Industry', lecture in the Oil Lives series, University of Aberdeen, 19 October 2006. The project, which was publicly launched at the University on 8 March 2006; has a website at <http://www.capturing-the-energy.org/uk/index.php>.