



**Dominik Czapigo**

[Ośrodek KARTA]

**Jakub Gałęziowski**

[Uniwersytet Warszawski]

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1595-4598>

**“I was tipped off that it would be good to interview one old shoemaker” – Paul Thompson about his passion for interviewing, the power of voice and *The Voice of the Past* in conversation with Dominik Czapigo and Jakub Gałęziowski**

DOI: 10.26774/wrhm.317



Conversation with Paul Thompson – sociologist, social historian, professor emeritus at the University of Essex, one of the fathers of oral history, founder of the National Life Stories Archive at the British Library and co-founder of the journal “Oral History.” The conversation coincides with the publication of the Polish edition of his book *The Voice of the Past* (*Głos przeszłości. Wprowadzenie do historii mówionej*), which is one of the most important and still influential publications on oral history. The Polish version of the 4th edition, updated and revised by the author together with Joanna Bornat, was published in December 2021 by Centrum Archiwistyki Społecznej (The Center of Community Archives) in partnership with the KARTA Center. The conversation with Paul Thompson was conducted online of 3 November 2021.



**Dominik Czapigo:** *Dear Paul, thank you very much for agreeing to meet with us. As you know, the Polish translation of your book *The Voice of the Past*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition with Joanna Bornat, will soon be published. I am very happy that Polish readers, at last, will have a chance to read it. Why did you write this book four decades ago and for whom?*<sup>1</sup>

**Paul Thompson:** First of all, I should say that I went to Essex University in 1964.<sup>2</sup> I was born in 1935. I was young then and Essex was a new university. There was a whole group of new universities in Britain at that point and Essex decided deliberately not to have a History Department in the first stages. I think this was because Jean Blondel,<sup>3</sup> who was the Politics professor, felt he had been dominated

- 1 Footnotes to the content of the interview were prepared (apart from the second footnote) by the interviewers; these were then reviewed and supplemented by Paul Thompson.
- 2 Paul Thompson: Re-reading this interview transcript, I am struck how starting in 1964 leaves out the lasting influences which I had experienced while reading *Modern History* at Oxford at Corpus Christi College. Especially crucial was my college tutor Trevor Aston, Marxist mediaevalist, and then lead editor of *Past and Present*, who got me working on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century archives of the college buildings, and led me to read classic texts such as Fernand Braudel’s *The Mediterranean* (1923–1966), and *Civilization and Capitalism* (1955–1979). Braudel was the key writer of the French *Annales* school of history. I was especially impressed by Isaiah Berlin’s lectures on the history of European philosophy. And fascinated by how the contrastingly diffident W.G. Hoskins, who was in Oxford as a visiting professor, showed how you could see historical change through looking at landscape. His best-known book *The Making of the English Landscape* was published in 1955 while I was an undergraduate. He opened my eyes to new way of seeing history which I still practice.
- 3 Jean Blondel (born 1929) – French political scientist, in 1964 moved to University of Essex, where he founded the Department of Government.

by historians in his own work and wanted to have a free run. So, I was appointed as a social historian, but put in the Sociology Department. Gradually, being in that department for all my working life, I found myself more and more thinking like a sociologist but not forgetting that the history side was important. We had a very inspiring first head of that department, Peter Townsend<sup>4</sup> – originally, he had done a degree in Anthropology at Cambridge, but by this point was a campaigning social policy person. I mean, he always was writing with policy in mind, but he was extremely broad in what he wanted in the department, so I fitted in very easily. And then I found it very stimulating that social scientists raise lots of questions that I hadn't thought about. I've been doing that ever since.

For instance, just at the moment, I am involved in projects on the artists in Wivenhoe, which is right next to Essex University. It's an interesting town, because it's a mix, it had a local industrial tradition building ships, repairing ships and people from that era are still around. But I am particularly interested in the artists: why the artists came and why it's stayed as a centre for artists. We have done about 25 interviews with local artists, documenting the scene, but I am also trying to interpret it. And the latest thing that I've got interested in is the relationship between oral history and photography, because quite a few people are trying to combine the two. How you do that and what issues to do with evidence arise – it is very interesting. So, I see myself as a trans-disciplinary person now. I've felt really lucky to have had that opportunity.

Oh no, I haven't told you, how I came to write the book. So, there was a social historian, the person I admired most, I suppose, among social historians at that time – it was Eric Hobsbawm,<sup>5</sup> who was editing a series of books on the social history of Britain. He asked me to write the volume on the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and I said I didn't want to do that, but could I do the volume on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? He agreed to that. Then, I set about writing this book and I got a grant. Again, I was lucky to be there at the right moment. What was then called the Economic and Social Research Council had just been set up and they were looking for applications, so I put one in and I got what would then have been regarded as a big grant for far

4 Peter Townsend (1928–2009) – British sociologist, first Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex. He was a life-long campaigner especially for the deprived and for older people, as co-founder and 20 years chair of the Child Poverty Action Group. His clear and vivid paperback Penguin book *The Family Life of Old People* (1963) was especially widely read, and my own introduction to his work.

5 Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012) – born in Alexandria, Egypt, of Polish Jewish descent, child in Vienna and Berlin, came to London in 1933 as a refugee from the Nazis. After war service he became in 1947 a lecturer at Birkbeck College, and after having been blocked for his Communist allegiance, he eventually became Professor of History in the 1970s. I got to know his work through his many brilliant early academic articles about Britain and Latin America. His famous multi-volume series on world history began in 1962 with *The Age of Revolution*.

too large a survey of oral history, as we recorded 450 people. Of course, I had no experience of analysing this kind of material. I obviously looked at the sociological material of the time.

There wasn't really any historical material that I can think of about how in practice you would analyse an interview. And very few historians did interviews, actually. If they did, they did them as background information, and usually kept them secret. So, what I did with this material was that I realised fairly soon it was too much to use for the book, because the average length of an interview was over 3 hours, just an enormous amount of information in it on a whole range of topics to do with ordinary living as well as including things like religion, politics and so on. Basically, it was social history of everyday life. The University of Essex was just being built and they had a lot more room than they had need for. So, I managed to get an internal room, which had no windows, as an archive space. We set that up and we actually cut up the material under the themes which we'd used in the interviews; we actually cut them and then clipped them. We didn't even have a computer method at that time to do that, so that was all done by hand. And that archive was there for a long time. And we had visits from historians from all over the country and from France, Germany and North America to use it for their own books, and I realised that, if you made your raw material available in that kind of way, you greatly increased the use of it and it was good for you and good for other people. That's how *The Edwardians*<sup>6</sup> was written. I should say that when I sent the draft of the book to Eric Hobsbawm, whom I did know personally – he wasn't a friend, but I'd met him often at conferences and we'd been at a very interesting conference in Italy just before – he sort of looked at this and he said: "Well, I don't think you really ought to have all of this quotation from oral history. There's much too much of that. I'd cut out most of that and just write your conclusions." I said "No." I wasn't going to publish the book in that way and eventually he conceded. And then it came out and it was very successful and sold what was then regarded as a lot of copies. I think ultimately about 30,000. At the time that was a lot for the serious history book.

**D.C.:** *And after The Edwardians you wrote The Voice of the Past.*

**P.T.:** That's right; which was really an attempt to show to other people, how valuable oral history can be and how you could do it. It had a big practical bit in it.

6 Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society*, (1975 etc.), a social history of the British people 1900–1918, drawing on over 450 oral history interviews recorded for the project, the interviewees chosen as a national social cross-section.

That was commissioned by Keith Thomas,<sup>7</sup> who published research on religion and magic and so on, which at that time was very important. So, I really admired him a lot. He was a contemporary of mine at Oxford but that was, I thought, a bold gesture to commission the book. But then I had the same kind of problem, when he looked at it and said: “I don’t want all this list of practical stuff about how to do this work.” And I said: “Well, that’s probably the most important thing in the book.” [laugh] And eventually again, he agreed to publish it as I had asked. But it’s interesting, how innovation was blocked again and again. I found that an experience you sort of just got through and to do new things you find extraordinary kind of blocks to realising them from conservative traditions of ways of working.

**D.C.:** *What do you think – why was it that at that time talking to people, listening to their stories was not popular among historians?*

**P.T.:** Basically because, first of all, they’re interested in the past and secondly – their idea of evidence was that oral history evidence was completely unreliable, because people’s memories were not reliable. Well, of course there are lots of problems with memory but it’s the only kind of information you can get for family relationships except for those social classes who write their letters and keep their diaries and so on.

Even today and for my own local sources, there are people who are producing really excellent books based on the letters and diaries of those who could write eloquently. Just to give you one example, there’s Andy Friend’s recent biography of John Nash<sup>8</sup> an artist who’s been active in East Anglia for many years, founder of the Colchester Art Society which uses the letters he wrote and the diaries he and his wife kept to construct a picture of their personal lives. And it’s very fascinating. It’s about a young couple in the 1930s settling down and wanting to be modern and having the idea you should have a central relationship which is long-term, but you should be allowed to have affairs on the side – both the man and woman. That was their idea. It caused them a lot of pain, actually, but they stuck to it.

**Jakub Gałęziowski:** *So, can we say that the fact that you had ended up in the Department of Sociology helped you at that time to do oral history? Otherwise, if you had ended up in the Department of History, it would have been much more difficult?*

7 Sir Keith Vivian Thomas (born 1933) – after growing up in Wales, from 1952 became an Oxford-based historian of the early modern world, and Professor of Modern History 1986–2000. I have found two of his books especially inspiring: *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Century England* (1971) and *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (1983).

8 See: A. Friend, *John Nash: The Landscape of Love and Solace*, London 2020.

**P.T.:** It was a fantastic chance. I was just looking for a job. I had applied for jobs in History departments, but I'd got interested in the idea of recording fairly early on, before really it was able to take off. Because the moment it was able to take off was when I had been awarded a big grant. But I had a year, for instance, in Nuffield College in Oxford that has both historians and sociologists. The best-known sociologist being John Goldthorpe,<sup>9</sup> who was very against qualitative sociology actually, very actively hostile. And I'd applied for a job at Durham University, which is a good university, if I'd gone there, my life would have been completely different, because I would have been pushed to do work on documents and so on.

But a group of us – people who were mainly, I think, historians; I was probably the only sociologist, well semi-sociologist by that point – started meeting. It included Raphael Samuel,<sup>10</sup> who was a leader of the New Left movement, and he was very keen on recording the memories of older workers, partly because at Ruskin College, then it was a trade union college, they had lots of mature students. And so, he started holding these little meetings when students told their oral history memories, and I went along to them. I was at Oxford at that time, and he invited me to join in. He and I worked together, and he was working with lots of people, but we did work together for several years and *The Myths We Live By*, that's a book we edited together.<sup>11</sup> I think it was the late 1980s that that was done with him. That's the last time I worked with him. He died, alas quite young. But he was a very stimulating person. His boundaries weren't limited by conservative disciplines.

So, we had a group meeting at the British Institute of Recorded Sound which was a very eccentric body at that time and it was in Exhibition Road in South Kensington, near the museums. It was run by Patrick Saul,<sup>12</sup> a man who was really more interested in music and cooking than anything else, but he got on to the idea that recording some people might also be a good idea. The transitional figure

9 John Goldthorpe (born 1935) – British sociologist, interested in social stratification and mobility; now Emeritus Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford.

10 Raphael Samuel (1934–1996) came from a left-wing London Jewish family and his mother was a musician and composer. He joined the Communist Party as a teenager, resigning in 1956. As an Oxford student he helped found *Past and Present*, becoming a leader of the New Left and running the Partisan Coffee House in Soho. The new Left was theoretically inspired by the humanist early Marx works, which were being translated into English in the 1950s. Raphael taught history at Ruskin College, then a trade union college, and from there founded the History Workshop movement and its journal. His *East End Underworld* (1981) is a rich exploration of London's criminal world through his oral history recording of Arthur Harding.

11 See: R. Samuel, P. Thompson (eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, London–New York 1990.

12 Anthony Patrick Hodgins Saul (1913–1999) – a sound archivist, a creator of The British Institute of Recorded Sound (then, British Library Sound Archive).

in this was really a man called George Ewart Evans,<sup>13</sup> who was an anthropologist, very influenced by Swedish ethnology, which included doing that kind of interviewing, and I got to know George and he became a very good friend of mine. He lived quite close to us in Essex, in Suffolk. I mean he taught me really how to interview, more than anybody else; how to do a qualitative interview. That's the point: the prime thing to learn is to listen, to give people space to talk. Those crucial lessons came from him. And then, when I came to write *The Edwardians*, I incorporated that approach but also statistics. In the end, we never got 600 interviews, we got 450 actually, but with 450 interviews where each one describes religious practices you get an incredible picture of the changing religion in Britain. It's an absolutely wonderful source. There was Hugh MacLeod, for instance, who used that stuff for a whole series of books.<sup>14</sup> So, we were encouraging that. To sum up, I had a changing academic identity – I started as a historian, then I did a thesis on the working-class movement in London, which is a very boring book [*laugh*] but the original idea was to cover the whole period from the 1880s up to the recent past and to do interviews.

I did do some interviews, very few, for that book, but I did do an interview with Herbert Morrison<sup>15</sup> who had been a Home Office minister, a major figure in the labour movement and he led that development in London. And I remember with him the suppression of what he didn't want to remember was extraordinary. That really brought it home to me as we sat outside on the terrace of the Houses of Parliament and, in those days, you could sit with your hand on the balustrade and the river was below and you could throw things down. Anyway, we sat there together, and he just completely rejected what I said about him having been a member of the Social Democratic Federation – which was Marxist – in London. And there is no doubt that he was a member, absolutely no doubt. And he just completely denied it, and took out a pair of scissors from his large bag and started cutting his nails, throwing them into the river. I knew the interview was effectively finished. And that struck me.

So, when I developed the work on methodology, I tried to distinguish between elite people like that, where you have to be actually really quite punchy and challenge them. I didn't dare challenge him you see, I just let it go. I thought: "Well if I bring up what I know, he'll not want to go on," which might have been true, of course. But anyway, my style with tough people like that is you have to show yourself to be quite tough as well, which is not the general practice in oral history – you have to show yourself as a listener.

13 George Ewart Evans (1909–1988) – a schoolteacher, writer and folklorist and pioneering oral historian.

14 See for example: H. MacLeod, *Religion and Society in England 1850–1914*, London 1996.

15 Herbert Morrison (1888–1965) – leader of London Labour, Leader of London County Council 1934–1940, Home Secretary 1940–45.

I think fairly soon I realised that I found sociology more interesting. But what I didn't say just now about that thesis book was that, when I started the thesis, the idea was history. I wanted to do a sort of overview of the London working-class movement from the 1880s onwards. But as I started collecting information, I started dropping the idea of the earlier period and it went up to 1914. I wanted just to look at it in the last years between 1900 and 1914. And 1914 was not so long before. I am talking about writing a book in 1958–1961. It had ceased to be a history book; it had become a sort of mixed social history and sociology book.

So, already by that early stage I was seeing myself as a sociologist, but one of the problems was that for me the sociologists in the department continued to look on me as a historian and were only willing to discuss [*interviewers chuckle*] historical issues with me. They saw me as a source of information in that way and not about sociology. So, that was a bit problematic. But in the end, they gave me an honorary degree when I retired, so I think they accept now that you can be an oral historian and sociologist. And lots of people are in England. Lots of anthropologists do oral history too. The scene has changed completely, and I think that's one of the differences with the fourth edition of *The Voice of the Past*. It's much bigger, because I've tried to cover all those sorts of subgroups who were doing work on narrative. I mean the broader movement is in the media with narrative. And if you listen to Radio 4, for instance, a really high proportion of programmes nowadays are talking to older people, distinguished older people about their memories, how things have changed. So, it's a totally accepted way of proceeding now. A series of different but interconnected disciplines.

**D.C.:** *Paul, do you remember your first oral history interview?*

**P.T.:** Yes, I do actually. I was always keen to get contrasts as a way of illuminating an issue and we were looking, as I said, at family behaviour and one of the areas I am interested in is child rearing and the use or not of punishment. And the only place I am aware of in the British Isles, where people are not ambivalent about that, is the Shetlands, where they believe that striking a child is wrong. That goes back actually to the fact that they were part of Scandinavia in the Middle Ages and that's where it comes from. So, anyway I went up there with my wife Thea Thompson and we recorded a set of interviews which are used in *The Edwardians*.

**D.C.:** *In the last 15 years that Jakub and I have both been involved in oral history, there has been a real technological shift. Today, we see much more interest in filming interviews. Do you think this is the right direction for developing oral history?*

**P.T.:** Well, I think that's true, actually. I think it's good to have short video clips. It's interesting, especially if you've got photographs of the person from an

earlier period, but I think it's also distracting. The idea is that memory takes you back into an earlier phase of the person's life and if you keep looking at the person as an old person, it's harder to imagine the young one. So, I think you need to have different visual images there for the person talking about being a child – you want to have a photo of their parents, you want to have them as a child and so on. When I was 80, I tried doing a life book for the party. It was quite an interesting experience, seeing what photos you got. One of the problems for the earliest period was that they only had these very staged photographs – me with my parents behind me, looking rigidly at the camera, or me and my pram as a small child, again waiting for the right moment when I start looking at the camera. And I think that the opportunities now of course are that there's an awful lot more of that kind of material around for most people, as long as they haven't got rid of it. And so, with *The Edwardians* we did some audio clips for teaching with the National Data Archive which is based at Essex National Data Archive. But that was just very selective, thematic. However for *Pioneering Social Research* we have created a YouTube series which you can hear. Well, they worked on *The Edwardians* first.

But when it came to *Pioneering Social Research*, our latest book, there we've got audio and text extracts with all the individuals. And we've uploaded audio clips onto YouTube with them all. We've done this over a long period, because I've been working on that project since about 2003 or something like that, so nearly 20 years, getting old myself while I was doing it. But it's wonderful, if you're introducing people to a discipline, to be able suddenly to listen to the voice. For instance, the oldest person I interviewed was Raymond Firth,<sup>16</sup> who worked with Malinowski, and he was rather more conservative. Nearly all his work for many years was about an island in the Pacific called Tikopia. He went there on a mission ship and when the ship went away, they didn't have any other contact with the outside world for six months, till the ship came back again. That's hard to imagine now. But he spoke very well about what it was like. The worst moment was when he thought he might be ill. He was worried that they might want to get rid of him in case they got infected themselves. He was interested in sexuality because on this island the women don't wear upper clothing at all. So, he got used to seeing rather beautiful women's breasts every day and he talked about how it changed him – he was brought up as a Scots person with rather puritanical values and it challenged his own attitudes and he got used to it after a bit, but he thought it was perhaps a much better thing than he thought when he first arrived.

That's really quite startling to play a minute or so; I think a minute is normally the maximum. I have an audio clip with Peter Townsend who talks about himself

16 Sir Raymond William Firth (1901–2002) – an ethnologist and social anthropologist from New Zealand, best known for his research on the Maori and other peoples of Oceania and Southeast Asia. Professor of Anthropology at London School of Economics.

going back to a home their research team had visited, and he got a job in the home as an attendant, a bath attendant for these old men and he talks in such a moving way about how these men were silently conforming, but it was their way of making sure that they got their rights. The humiliation of having all your underwear with numbers on it because it wasn't your own private underwear – it was a public possession; all those details like that. And he talks about their bodies – how holding them was so moving to him. It's so powerful that people will listen that long. But for most interviews half a minute is as much as you want.

So, we've got a whole collection of that already. I would want to do that with the artists. We've started doing it actually – doing bits of these local artists, but also filming them doing something, for example making a pot. But there's a lot of work involved in that, because you need to do a 10-minute film and then edit it down to say 30 seconds and there's a great deal of detailed work involved in it. And it's not a cheap way of doing things.

**J.G.:** *Could you tell us, what is more important for you in the recording, the voice, or the content itself, like for most qualitative sociologists, or both?*

**P.T.:** Well, as I said, audio clips use the voice to disseminate, but of course if I am writing I rely actually on the transcript and the summary and if you've got very long interviews, as we have with *The Edwardians*, it's too time-consuming to think of listening through. What I did was, I got the transcripts, then I marked up several bits to produce audio clips. But one of the troubles with the technology that we were using at that time was that you couldn't dip in and out, you couldn't take a longer bit and then cut out some bits, but only shorten it by cutting repeats. So, that was quite challenging. Camille Corti-Georgiou did the clips, she was very young at the time, and she knew how to get the most out of the technology. So, I see these enterprises as collective in their best form. One of the forms of disseminating is writing articles and books. (For that activity you need to have a transcript). At the moment, because of the policies of the Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Council, however, it's very difficult to publish a serious academic book. Publishers are not interested really, so it's a difficult scene for long books and I think it's wiser for people to go into articles, which are much more welcome, journal editors do want them, so that they can contribute to the department's record.

**J.G.:** *To continue with your priorities in oral history – are you more interested in theoretical and methodological issues in interviewing, or rather are you more focused on the stories of the people you interview?*

**P.T.:** You want to know what areas were most striking to me, don't you? Of course, there was a theoretical level which was that I came to realise that social

change wasn't just brought about by politics. So, I had this theory that one pressure was political and that came in different forms and then the other one was the choices made by ordinary people in their lives; in particular, getting married, deciding to have children, whether or not to use contraception to limit the number of children, that's absolutely crucial, and then migration. *The Edwardians* has got an end bit which sets out this new idea and I was to some extent ridiculed by other people for that, but that I still think that's basically true.

I was interested in changing behaviours, religion and family relationships – these were areas that I wanted to focus on. For example, the role of punishment or not of children – that was the reason I went to the Shetlands to go to this area where it wasn't regarded as the right thing to strike a child. So, I was tipped off that it would be good to interview one old shoemaker and what I didn't know before was that he was a radical local political person. Not in the formal sense, but an inspiration to people with his ideas. And so I found myself listening to his wonderful story, including the local myths, and that opened me to that whole sphere of interest in myth.

**J.G.:** *You talked a lot about social phenomena and memories of some events and customs, but I would like to ask about biography. Is a single biography also important for you in its whole complexity?*

**P.T.:** Well yes, undoubtedly, and I did mention the biography of John Nash, for instance, when we were talking earlier. I find that particularly interesting, because it's in the period of living memory, but it's much richer because of the documents that you can get. But there are outstanding people with incredibly detailed memories that you can find still to go back that far, and I find that fascinating. This is one of my main areas of interest really, I would say, today.

**D.C.:** *Now, I would like to ask you about some moral or ethical dilemmas. Is it a good idea to store life stories openly in archives, accessible to all, or we should limit this access? The oldest generation is not aware of what is going to happen with their own stories when they are widely accessible...*

**P.T.:** My working life has been partly making that kind of story accessible, right from the early start in Essex. Now, I think we've become much more sophisticated in realizing the dangers of that, but of course now we're in the social media world it's more difficult. What I do in my current practice with these artists in Wivenhoe – we do our recording, we get them to sign something afterwards, but we don't think that this is sufficient, so if we are doing audio clips, for instance, or publishing we'll normally show it to them, if we think it's at all possibly controversial. I've been going to them in turn showing them what we'd like to have as a clip and what we'd like to include in any publications.

**D.C.:** *But when the person is dead, who is the owner of the life story?*

**P.T.:** We don't try and solve that, actually; we just obtain permission to use... I mean copyright in this country is just such a difficult subject and it is based on case law. But I don't see it as a problem, if you got permission to use and that's what we get.

**D.C.:** *And have you ever had some legal problems while using interviews?*

**P.T.:** Yes. There is one person who's an academic and who causes quite a lot of a to-do by continually asking for changes in what's available, including her date of birth [*smile*]. And we haven't found a solution to that, actually; because it's such an important part of doing a biographical interview to know what age somebody was. So that's one and the other one is somebody who seems to want to continue a battle with her former husband who's now died and so she keeps asking us to remove the whole interview and we've removed it for a period, but then put it back again.

**D.C.:** *OK, that's a solution. Oral history is considered to be a chance to give voice to the voiceless. I wonder what we can do with the inequality which is linked with the social class you come from. Referring to the concept of Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>17</sup> we have cultural capital and social capital, and they are different for people from different classes. So even though we want to give voice to the voiceless, they are in fact not equal at the beginning. What can be done about this? If we can do anything at all.*

**P.T.:** It is a continuing problem and I agree, but I don't think there is a solution. I'd spent a long time earlier on just thinking how worthwhile is it just to record people who don't want to say anything. But the audio clips are good as a way of helping with that, because then you can have people from every social class available through the audio clip on YouTube with their short statements.

**D.C.:** *As you know, oral history in Poland has been rooted in social movements, from below, now institutionalized in the form of activities carried out by various organisations, like for example Centrum Archiwistyki Społecznej (The Center of Community Archives), whose mission is to focus on community archives and to give some power to deal with the past locally – can you observe similar initiatives in Great Britain?*

17 Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) – French sociologist, interested in sociological theory, in the sociology of education and of culture, and the sociology of aesthetics.

**P.T.:** No, it's not the same at all, definitely not. In the UK, data archives are funded both nationally and locally (through the County Record Offices) and that's been crucial in developing oral history here. We've also got a network of county archives. For example, there is an Essex sound archive, part of the Essex Record Office. So, there is this kind of cooperation going on, but it's not universal. There are of course some areas where it doesn't happen, and also things are different like in Scotland and Wales. It's a complex picture.

**D.C.:** *Your book will be published by Centrum Archiwistyki Społecznej. It will be addressed, among others, to practitioners in local community archives. Do you have any message for Polish readers?*

**P.T.:** You must read this book, because it shows how important local records can be if they're properly organised and open to new possibilities. And in the social media era it's that kind of material that's going to be the essential source for future social historians and sociologists who are interested in the past.

**D.C.:** *This is a great message! Thank you.*

**P.T.:** I'd be interested to know about various issues and projects in Poland and talk about them another time. And you might be interested in the topic of the Polish community in UK? There's a lack of oral history activity on Poles, as far as I know, on Polish people in Britain. That would be an interesting subject because, in the way that the earlier migration was actually funded by the government, the later migration is mainly building work and so that would be a very interesting contrast.

**D.C.:** *We have both had a chance to interview people from the earlier immigration to UK, the one just after the Second World War, so this could be a good point of departure for further discussions.*

**P.T.:** That would be great!

**J.G.:** *Finally, I have to ask you for a closing message on the current state of oral history in the pandemic era. Do you think this situation and new practices will change something in the long term?*

**P.T.:** A lot of English people have sort of like retreated into their holes now just even when the lockdown ends, they don't want to come out. And for me this is really difficult, because I love meeting people, I really enjoy it. And Zoom is great once you know people but it is less good for getting to know people than a real face-to-face meeting.

**D.C.:** *So, I hope we will have a chance to meet you face-to-face.*

**P.T.:** That would be fantastic!