MIKE PITTS/ALEXANDER KEILLER MUSEUM, AVEBURY

Pamela Jane Smith has dedicated herself to the pleasurable pursuit of interviewing older archaeologists and those who knew them. As her tapes start to become available online, she explains how she works and why it matters

GATHERING ROSES IN WINTER

Photo: Traditionally the history of archaeology has been written from correspondence, photos and manuscripts – this is a selection from the Alexander Keiller archive in Avebury museum. Now sound recordings are becoming increasingly important, where the interviewee is aware of the historical interest

In 1950, a divisive controversy burst open within the Cambridge Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology. Meyer Fortes (1906–83) had been appointed as the William Wyse professor of social anthropology. He felt that Ethel Lindgren, who had become a lecturer just before his own appointment, should be replaced by Edmund Leach (1910–89). Leach was more appropriate to the faculty's new theoretical outlook and teaching demands. This controversy split the faculty between the older, moneyed "amateurs" of the 1920s and 30s and the younger, poorer "professionals". A new intellectual era for archaeology and anthropology was ushered in and Leach became one of the leading anthropologists of his time. This change in power supported the later development of David Clarke's (1937–76) profoundly influential analytical archaeology in the 1960s.

How does one assess this 1950 academic controversy today? There are three differing oral-historical accounts, one from the then secretary for the faculty, and two from former post-graduate students. Cambridge archaeology professor Glyn Daniel's (1914–86) version of events is printed

MINA LETHBRIDGE/CAMBRIDGE MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY

In 1915 a shy **Miles Burkitt** (1890–1971), described by his former Cambridge students as kind and unconventional, became the first in Britain to offer an undergraduate degree course of lectures on prehistoric archaeology. Early in world war one, he had begun to believe that humans "moved Godward... partly owing to struggles against overwhelming odds"; evil could help a nation and a person mature. He argued that through studying the past, we gain knowledge of ourselves. Cambridge men, educated in prehistory, would be public-spirited, just, intelligent leaders and fair, peaceful administrators. The goal of studying archaeology was to develop personal character and self-reliance. Prehistory must remain in the hands of amateurs motivated by love, not money or honours. Here he is during a visit to Brno museum with his wife, Peggy, a talented draftswoman who illustrated many archaeological publications

candidly in his book, Some Small Harvest (Thames & Hudson 1986). Committee and board minutes that record discussions and decisions are saved at the Cambridge University library. Finally, there are Fortes's and Lindgren's revealing private correspondence, saved by friends, families and the faculty.

Spoken accounts can be placed alongside equally solid written evidence. I use oral-historical evidence as a small piece of a large project. Oral responses are only quoted when corroborated from other types of sources. I always attempt to establish what philosopher, Alison Wylie, terms a "network of resistances". An academic turning point at a key university may then be more fairly analysed using several lines of information to reconstruct political, academic, social and intellectual changes.

I believe that all knowledge is community based. I found, 20 years ago, that secondary, published material did not yet exist for the stories I wished to tell; unpublished sources had also not then been located. My present research into the history of archaeology in early 20th century Britain, and my previous work in the history of 20th century Canadian and First Nations archaeology have been substantially based on information discovered with the generous help of those I interviewed.

Numerous conversations with elderly archaeologists, their families, their students and their colleagues and friends have resulted in the uncovering of new material and in the creation of archives. Much of this has been placed in the Cambridge University Library Manuscripts Department. Approved tapes are stored at the Society of Antiquaries of London, and interviews and transcripts will appear on its website. The first is with the medieval archaeologist John Hurst, at cms.sal.org.uk/newsandevents/interviewofthemonth.

Reliable witnesses

When using evidence from living subjects and from archived interviews, I followed standard ethical procedures. Firstly, all people interviewed approved anything I used. For example, I first wrote to Grahame Clark in 1987 to seek permission to study his life and career. He read all my articles prior to publication. Both Clark and his wife, Lady Clark, never interfered with interpretations. Very seldom has anyone requested changes. Dorothy Garrod's family was always strongly supportive. Miles Burkitt's family was also kind and generously helpful. Less-known but equally important archaeological players such as the Cambridge Archaeology Faculty "tea-boy", Charles Denston, offered their diaries, correspondence, unpublished photo albums, unpublished personal notes and draft copies of excavation and technical reports. This material, often at first held by the families, was always extremely valuable; I always requested permission before using it.

Occasionally, to use another example, one unique and reliable witness, respected within a small social community, may augment thin written evidence. Dorothy Garrod's momentous election, on May 6 1939, as the first female professor at Cambridge or Oxford is barely mentioned in any official record. Regardless of her grand archaeological accomplishments, Garrod has remained a "shadowy figure". The scant, unrevealing minutes from elections to professorships are the only existing document. The eight, all-male electors, pillars of respectability and representatives of extreme British academic power, appear to have met in the usual way, discussed an apparently small field of candidates, reconvened the following

MILES BURKITT FAMILY

Grahame Clark (1907–95), Burkitt's most brilliant student, was a self-proclaimed man of science who believed that prehistoric archaeology must become a rationalised, professionalised discipline. He served as Cambridge Disney professor of archaeology 1952–74. Clark is today remembered as a pioneer of an ecologically oriented, functionalist approach to prehistoric archaeology. In 1932, he founded the interdisciplinary Fenland research committee which brought together up to 42 scientific specialists, to interpret archaeological, botanical, faunal, geological and geographical evidence retrieved from waterlogged sites. The committee presaged today's interdisciplinary team approach to Big Science. The Plantation and Peacock's Farm excavations (pictured, 1934) are regarded as a landmark in British archaeological method, heralding a widespread change in approach to British prehistoric archaeology

morning and quickly voted for Garrod, the first woman elected to any such position since Cambridge University had been founded in about 1260. There is no hint of controversy surrounding this important election which later led to women being finally admitted to Cambridge as degree students in 1948.

However, the testimony of Lady Jeffreys, formerly Bertha Swirles (1903–99), greatly enhanced this scarce written evidence. By good chance, I met someone in the Cambridge University library tea-room who had come up to read archaeology and anthropology during the second world war. Months later, she suggested that I speak to her friend, Lady Jeffreys, a mathematical physicist, then in her mid 90s. At that time, I was living as a guest of Elisabeth Leedham-Green, the erudite deputy keeper of university archives at the University of Cambridge. Leedham-Green knew the wider Cambridge and British academy. She assured me that Lady Jeffreys was a highly-respected member of the tight Cambridge community, known for her clarity, good memory, astute judgement and intelligence. She would be reliable.

In fine, vivid detail, Lady Jeffreys remembered how she had met "outside elector", Manchester professor of geography HJ Fleure (1877–1969), on a train back to Manchester the morning following Garrod's election in 1939. She recounted Fleure's humour and high spirits, the sepia light drifting through the train window; Fleure's memory of the vice-chancellor's response when the electors gave their decision was, "Gentlemen, you have presented us with a problem". When I cross-checked with classicist Alison Duke, then also in her 90s, she confirmed that the wording was exactly his.

Jeffreys' memories helped greatly in the reconstruction of Garrod's academic and archaeological career. Why was she, a woman, elected? Fleure was amused, Jeffreys said. He was from Manchester, where women were already admitted to degrees and he was accustomed to the idea of women in higher academic ranks. He found no difficulty in promoting a woman as a candidate.

Additional information was gained during an interview with Mina Lethbridge, (1919–2000). Mina offered her husband's, Tom Lethbridge's (1901–71), diary. Tom had taught Anglo-Saxon archaeology at Cambridge for years and had also put in for the professorship at the request of those opposed to an outsider. Probably the "candidate from outside" was Mortimer Wheeler, whom Daniel (in Some Small Harvest) states wanted the position. Wheeler at that time was honorary director of the Institute of Archaeology in London which he and his wife, Tessa, founded in the mid 1930s. He had not formally applied but the British archaeological community was small and an informal inquiry would have been sufficient. He was "a brilliant organizer, a born excavator, a dynamic and forceful character" but, writes Daniel, was also considered a "bounder" by some members of the Cambridge Faculty. By implication one of the electors who might have voted for Wheeler was diverted by Lethbridge's candidacy. The vote was split. A highly qualified, scandal-free, established British-born woman was apparently a more pleasing alternative than any outsider. "All went well," Lethbridge wrote in his diary, "the proper man got in".

Moving intimacy

I have always found that unstructured interviews are best for collecting oral histories and uncovering written sources, but a structured interview – essentially an oral questionnaire focusing on a narrow enquiry for a specific purpose – is often a good start. My early 1994 work on the history of the Fenland research committee is an example of how this method can be applied. The committee, which occupied a mythical presence in archaeological minds, existed just beyond living memory. When I started my investigation over a decade ago, little was known as to how it was founded, its day-to-day goals and activities, who was involved, what excavations were conducted and what publications resulted. Few realised that the committee was the predecessor of the Cambridge Sub-department for Quaternary Research and that it developed the stratigraphic-geological approach for archaeology so widely used in Britain today.

In search of sources, I interviewed a sample of 34 people, including the then only surviving committee members such as Stuart Piggott. Events snowballed as each person put me in

Charles Bernard Denston (b1921) was known as "Boy Denston" when hired in 1937 as an able teenager to make tea, clean and guard the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. From a poor, money-wise family, son of a Cambridge tailor who made clothing for the undergraduates, Denston described faculty members as "toffs" whom he addressed as "Sir". "I never felt I was one of them", he wrote in his unpublished autobiography. Through helping at undergraduate lectures he absorbed the equivalent of a degree, concentrating on physical anthropology. After returning from a difficult second world war (he was a prisoner under the Japanese), he became assistant to Jack Trevor, director of the new Duckworth Laboratory of Physical Anthropology. By 1950, the Duckworth had Britain's largest collection of human skeletal material. Denston coauthored his first archaeological site report on skeletal remains in 1954, and was sole author by 1958. By retirement in 1986, he had produced 255 reports, 45 published physical anthropological studies and had been awarded an honorary MA by the University of Cambridge

CHARLES DENSTON

FONDS SUZANNE CASSOU DE SAINT-MATHURIN/MUSEE DES ANTIQUITES NATIONALES

Before her election as the first female Oxbridge professor, **Dorothy Garrod** (1892–1968) had an illustrious excavation and expedition career as a superbly accomplished "dirt" archaeologist – one of the finest British archaeologists of the 20th century. Garrod's excavation of the Devil's Tower site in Gibraltar over a total of seven months (1925–27), was her first internationally recognised dig. With the skill she displayed throughout her career, she found the scattered fragments of one tiny skull over two excavation seasons. This photograph of Garrod holding the pieces, from her own album now in France, testifies to the personal importance of these finds – red stars surround the print. At the end of her life, an acquaintance suggested to Garrod that she had been lucky. "Pas la chance", she replied, "c'est courage et persévérance" – not luck, but courage and persistence

PAUL STAMPER

As a Cambridge undergraduate in 1950, **John Hurst** (1927–2003) investigated the medieval moated manor at Northolt. In 1952, he started working with the economic historian **Maurice Beresford** (1920–2005), who had begun preliminary investigations at Wharram Percy, North Yorks. Soon after, the deserted medieval village research group was founded to coordinate work on rural mediaeval settlement, then a new subject. It applied the revolutionary Scandinavian concept of area excavation, while charting layers of clay, charcoal, fireplaces, pavements and postholes. The grid and baulks method, championed by Mortimer Wheeler at Maiden Castle, proved inappropriate for subtle mediaeval remains. "There was certainly no way that the medieval peasant house with its flimsy foundations, could be understood by digging grids", Hurst told the author. "Really the whole process of archaeology has been changed by this method of open-area excavation". Photo shows Beresford (left) and Hurst at Wharram Percy in 1979

touch with others. In this case, the structured interview led to considerable relevant information. A mass of useful information thus emerged. My publications based on this information have become the original scholarly research upon which later work by other authors is now based.

My research on Garrod is another example of the effectiveness of structured interviews. Persistent rumours suggested that she had burnt her literary remains. In consequence, Garrod's life and brilliant career had not been thoroughly documented. After much intensive questioning of many people, in 1996, I approached the Cambridge University roll office and found L Pulvertaft-Green who studied archaeology in 1948. Pulvertaft-Green was the first to mention a counter-rumour. Grahame Clark had years ago told her that Garrod had saved correspondence and field notes and that this unpublished material was stored in France. I contacted Paul Bahn, a good friend of Suzanne Cassou de Saint-Mathurin who had excavated with Garrod in France and Lebanon and stayed with her in the Charente. A letter from Bahn written in April 1996 states "I have just returned from Paris… There is indeed considerable Garrod material… now gone to the Musée des Antiquités Nationales". When Saint-Mathurin died in 1991, boxes of Garrod's diaries, letters, field notes, photographs and manuscripts were bequeathed to the MAN along with Saint-Mathurin's papers. This material, not yet accessioned, is kept only under Saint-Mathurin's name.

The depth and literary wealth of this archive is astonishing. Only a few photographs of Garrod had been well known; now hundreds are available. Her field notes and diaries from excavations and expeditions to Kurdistan, Anatolia, Bulgaria, France and Lebanon detail exciting personal experiences. Crucial archaeological discoveries can now be better reconstructed, including the 1932 discovery at Mount Carmel, Palestine, of the neanderthal female skeleton, Tabun 1.

Garrod's archive contained numerous photographs of three Palestinian villages, taken during the 1930s when the villagers worked with her at nearby Mount Carmel, now in Israel. The villages were completely destroyed in 1948 and the families were widely dispersed. I was often told that it would be impossible to trace them. However, after I loaded images on the web, descendants have recently contacted me. Hopefully their memories may now be added to the history of archaeology in Palestine and Israel.

Unstructured oral historical interviewing, by contrast, deals with individual memories and narratives, capturing the unique tone, volume, silence, emotion and personal meaning of events. Attitudes can be rediscovered more accurately and descriptions made colourful. History becomes enriched and more complete.

Oral-historians seldom discuss what happens to them during an interview. It would be helpful if the process was documented. A moving intimacy develops, but I have not yet delineated how that works or what happens to make me feel that I am getting to know someone so well so quickly. I can only say that I do very much enjoy meeting the fine people I interview.

The recall of the people I talk to is always detailed and vivid; memories are accurate when cross-checked against other evidence. Recent memory fails with age, but ability to recall distant memories improves. Interviewing elderly people can present the least problems.

"Memories," said one of my interviewees, "are like gathering roses in winter". Human relations are important in creating archaeological knowledge. The Cambridge Archaeology Faculty was known as the most successful archaeological centre in Britain for much of the 20th century. Perhaps one of its strengths was its intimate smallness. Long-committed relationships worked together for the advancement of the subject, as well as a commitment to the tea-room as a sanctuary. The importance of tea-drinking to the development of British archaeology is another subject, but I would suggest that emotional commitment does move archaeological history.

On Oct 22 Meg Conkey, Alison Wylie, Ruth Tringham and Henrietta Moore will recollect the beginnings of post-processual archaeology in Britain and North America 1975–85, at the Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge. For information contact the author at pjs1011@cam.ac.uk